

## **Midlands Region**

### **First Progress Report: Actions to June 2016**



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## Minister's Foreword



The Regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative is a key element in supporting the delivery of balanced regional development, which is a key priority of Government. The Programme for a Partnership Government sets a goal to help create 200,000 additional jobs by 2020. Importantly, 135,000 of those jobs are to be in the regions outside Dublin.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland region, covering the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath, aims to build on the unique strengths of the region to support businesses to start up, grow and generate exports.

While much emphasis is placed on multi-nationals, we remain for the most part, an economy dependent on small, family business. Across the towns and villages of our regions, employment is heavily based on the SME sector. Ensuring these SMEs have access to both supports and market opportunities is vital to ensuring consistent and real recovery across the country. No matter what part of the country you are in, developing an idea with the support of the Local Enterprise Office and growing to scale is something we want to see happening more and more in every county. The LEO network is a great asset and my firm view is that it offers great potential to support job creation and help entrepreneurs and small businesses start up and grow.

Overall what these reports demonstrate is that we are making progress on that aim. We are nowhere near our endpoint, but we are getting better and enhancing both the employment and economic potential of the Midland region.

From a low of 101,700 in 2011, employment levels have now reached 120,100 in this region in Q3 2016 – an increase of 18.1%. The QNHS shows that there is positive jobs growth across a range of sectors, including Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Industry and Construction and Health and Social Work Activities.

In tandem with strong jobs growth, the unemployment rate has reduced from a high of 19.6% in 2011 to 10.1% in Q3 2016. This represents real progress and a major milestone for the Midlands. Every job created has a real effect on men, women and children and the wider community. That is why we cannot be complacent about job creation but I am happy to see that we continue to move in the right direction

Contrary to popular belief, employment recovery is not confined to Dublin – in fact 72% of the new jobs created over the last twelve months have gone to people from outside Dublin. As was the case with all regions, the downturn in employment hit the Midlands heavily in

2008 but there is potential to improve that and grow sustainable jobs in the region, based on the sectoral strengths, skills profile and innovative capacity within this region.

Every day, world-leading companies based in the Midlands such as Grant Engineering, Kiernan Structural Steel, Steripack, Internal Results, Affidea and Nexvet Biopharma, all of which recently announced new jobs in the region, are showing that by investing in people and talent, global opportunities are possible regardless of the location. What we need to do is enhance the job-potential environment and ensure companies based in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath have access to global market opportunities. What this report demonstrates is that in regions like the Midlands, with the right environment, world-leading companies, both Irish and foreign-owned, co-exist and create a dynamic enterprise base. Our enterprise agencies are available to provide assistance to companies at all stages of their journey, whether as start-ups, companies that are scaling or exporting or companies seeking to invest in Ireland

Government does not create jobs, but is an enabler of jobs. This region has rich potential in Manufacturing, Tourism, Agri-food, Pharma and Medical Technology. We have responded to the crash, but now is the time to build resilience in the economy with a global competitive business offering.

There is no doubt but that Brexit will test our economic resilience. Many companies in the Midlands will have some exposure to the UK. Although there is still a lack of clarity as to the extent to which Brexit will impact on the businesses in the area, Enterprise Agencies are working with these companies to focus on talent, innovation, competitiveness and investing in people. This remains the best way to build resilience in a company.

Of course the Regional Action Plans themselves will not solve everything. A full recovery requires more than just jobs. These Plans will be complemented by other programmes the Government is working on at national level, including the Action Plan for Rural Development, infrastructure projects, the Action Plan for Jobs, skills strategies and the Action Plan for Housing.

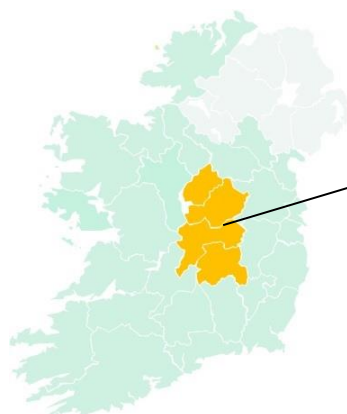
Employment recovery is a critical element of a wider social recovery. Now is not the time for complacency. Despite global uncertainty, the goal of full employment in the lifetime of this Government is within reach. This employment will be sustainable, built on the back of talent and innovation – something the Midlands, with its excellent skills and talent base and strong education and research infrastructure, has in abundance.

I would also like to pay tribute to Pat Gallagher, the Chairman, the Enterprise Champions and all members of the Implementation Committee for their ongoing commitment to the Midland Regional Action Plan, to job creation within the region and in helping to drive the

ambition of the Plan. The input which you bring to the process creates a real step-up in the level of innovation and jobs impact of this process. This is a genuine public service which will make a real impact to the Midland region.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Mary Mitchell O'Connor'.

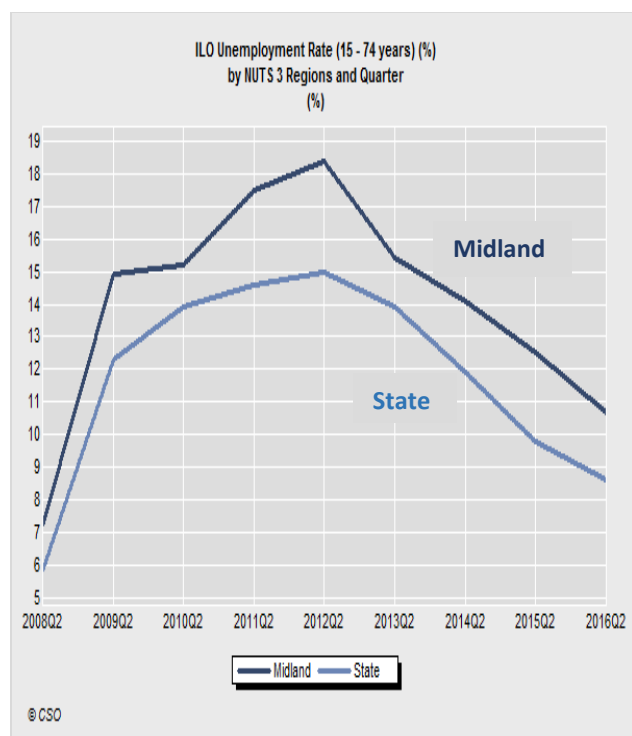
**Mary Mitchell O'Connor, TD**  
**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation**



## Employment Snapshot: Midlands Region

|   | 2015 Q1 | 2016 Q1 | 2016 Q2 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (000s)   | 114.0   | 117.4   | 116.6   |
| Unemployed Persons aged 15 years and over (000s)      | 16.2    | 15.3    | 13.9    |
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Labour Force (000s) | 130.1   | 132.7   | 130.6   |
| ILO Unemployment Rate (15 - 74 years) (%)             | 12.5%   | 11.6%   | 10.7%   |
| ILO Participation Rate (15 years and over) (%)        | 58.5%   | 58.8%   | 58.5%   |

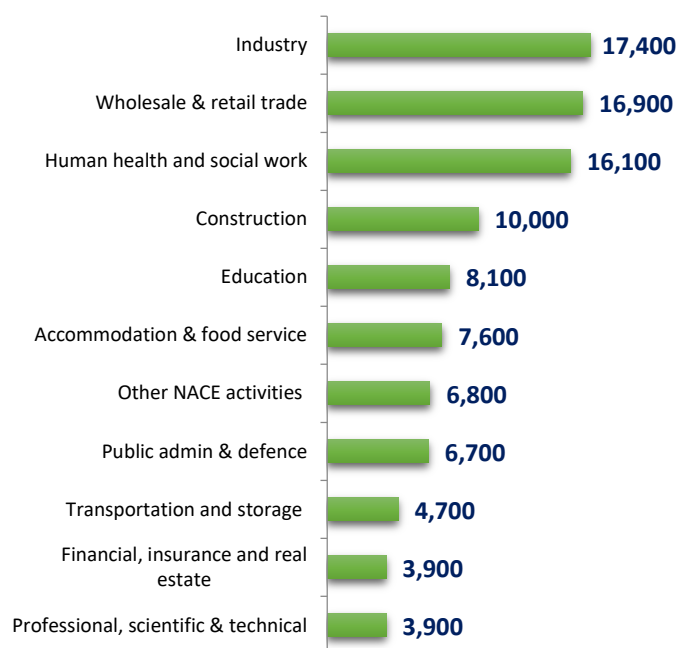
Source: CSO QNHS



### Employment/Unemployment Trends as at Q2 2016 (see above)

- The Unemployment Rate in the Midlands in Q2 2016 stood at 10.7%; this was the second highest Unemployment Rate in the country after the South East (10.8)
- Since Q1 2015, the Midlands has seen a reduction of 1.8 percentage points in its Unemployment Rate
- The number in employment has seen both positive and negative fluctuations from Q1 2015 to Q2 2016, however the overall change is positive (up 2,600)
- Labour Force and Participation Rates have likewise seen positive and negative variations but are largely unchanged since Q1 2015

### Employment by economic sector – Q2 2016 -

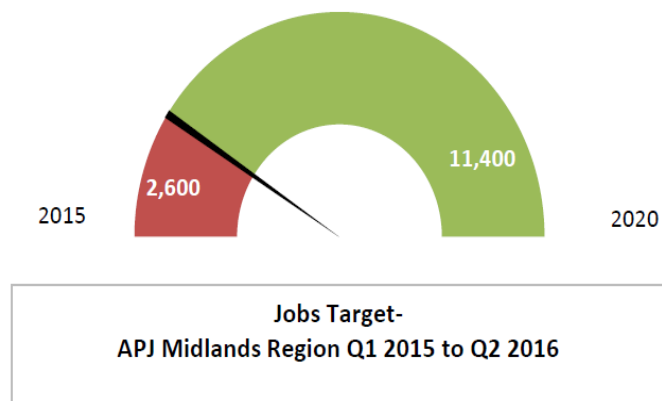
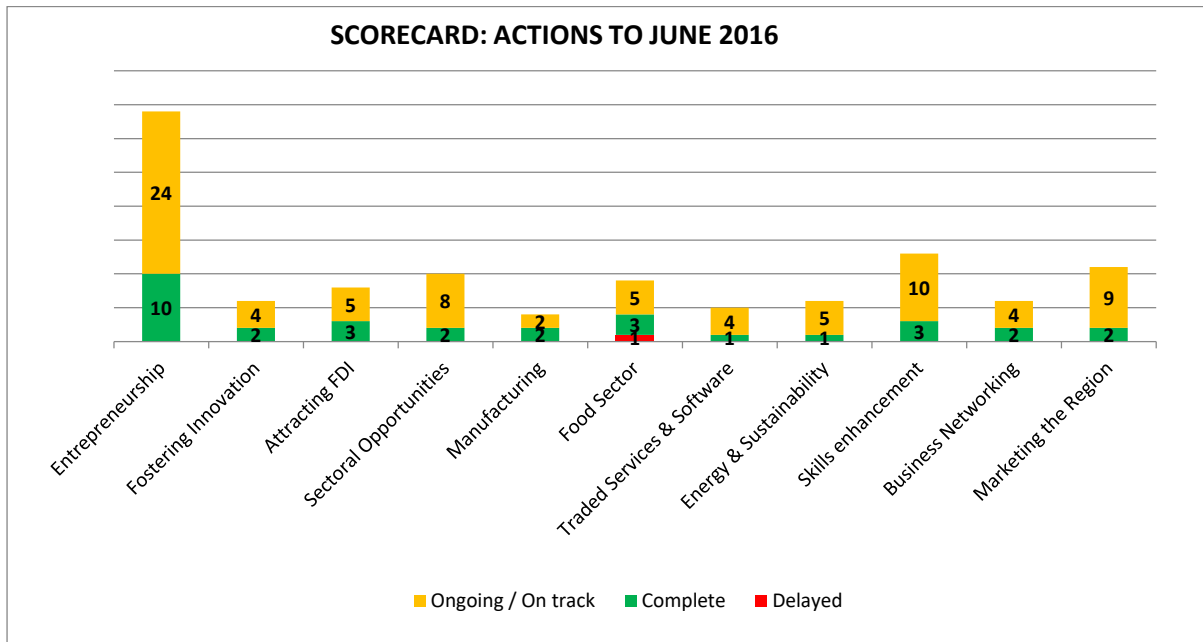
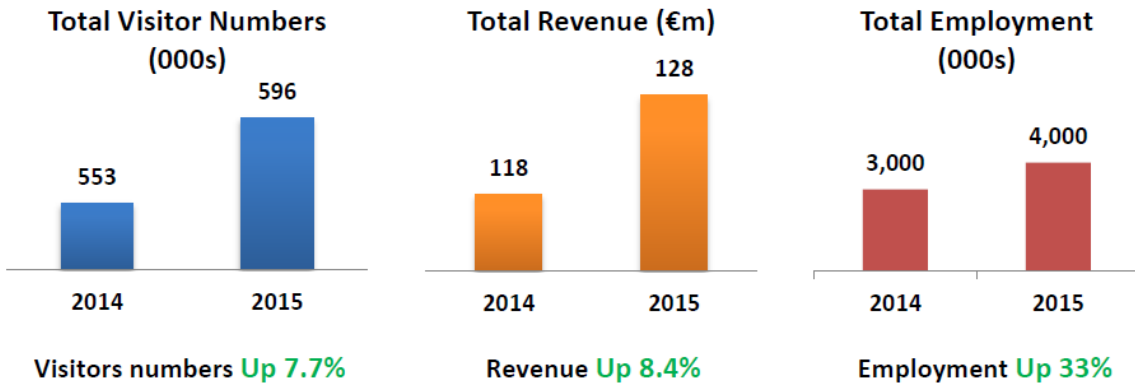


### Sectoral breakdown of Employment as at Q2 2016 (see above)

There were 116,600 people in employment in the Midlands region in Q2 2016 compared to 114,000 in Q1 2015

- **Industry** was the largest sector, employing 17,400 people with an increase of 400 since Q1 2015.
- **Wholesale and Retail Trade** was the second largest sector, employing almost 17,000 people
- **Human Health & Social Work** with 16,100 employed, had the highest increase (+1,500) of any sector in the region since Q1 2015
- The **Education** sector had the largest decrease (-400) of any sector in the region since Q1 2015.
- The **Accommodation** sector had the second highest increase (+1,400) of any sector in the region since Q1 2015, followed by the **Construction** sector (+800).

Source CSO QNHS Persons aged 15 and over by NUTS3 Regions, Statistical Indicator and Quarter



### Actions due by June 2016

By the first half of 2016, of the 112 Actions that had to be reported on for this first progress report, 31 have been delivered while 80 are on track for completion. Only 1 action that was due to be delivered by H1 2016 has been delayed (Action 76).



## Key Highlights

The targeting of at least 25 additional FDI investment projects in the region over the next 5 years and the building of a new Advance Technology facility in Athlone by IDA Ireland to further attract foreign investment (**Action 44**)



Marketing of the Midlands as a dynamic region, centrally located in the heart of Ireland, with unparalleled national interconnectivity (**Action 45**)



The establishment of a Skills Forum to connect education providers with employers and industry on an on-going basis to collaborate in building the skills of the region (**Action 90**)



The development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus which will provide a dynamic industry-focused R&D environment on high end manufacturing and industrial design, with co-location of industry and academic researchers (**Action 67**)



The following are the details of the Actions that were prioritised since the launch of the Plan:

- IDA Ireland continues to target investment projects in the Midland Region. Last June, Minister Mitchell O'Connor officially opened Nexvet Biopharma's new development and manufacturing facility in Tullamore. The veterinary biologics company secured the facility in September 2015 and will create up to 30 new highly-specialised technical (**Action 44**).
- The IDA Midlands Regional has developed tailored marketing material which is helping to increase the knowledge of the overseas executives and supports the introduction of the Midland region as a potential location for investment at an earlier stage (**Action 45**).
- A new Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement Unit has been created in the Department of Education and Skills to support the implementation of the National Skills Strategy 2025 (NSS) in a manner that links Further Education, Higher Education and skills issues involving the wider department. The Midland Steering Group comprising of Athlone Institute of Technology, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Boards and First Polymer Skillnet prepared the terms of reference for the embryonic Skills Forum (**Action 90**).
- Athlone Institute of Technology are engaged in ongoing dialogue with regional and national partners/stakeholders and continue to progress the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus R&D with the Higher Education Authority (**Action 67**).

## COMMENTARY

This is the first Progress Report from the Implementation Committee established by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to oversee and monitor implementation of the measures contained in the Midland Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The report outlines progress made on measures due for completion up to and including the first half of 2016, as well as progress made on measures that are ongoing during the 2015-2017 period of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland Region was launched on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the first of 8 Regional Action Plans to be published, all of which will help deliver a key priority for Government – to deliver local jobs and ensure every region achieves its economic potential. The core objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 14,000 jobs across the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois by 2020 through the delivery of 119 collaborative actions focusing on increasing the number of entrepreneurs/ start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, with further actions targeted at sectors of potential competitive advantage such as manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. Increasing the number of people in employment by 14,000 by 2020 will represent a 13% growth in the numbers employed in the region in 2014. This represents an important step towards the Government's ambition of creating 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The plans are monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. The Midlands Implementation Committee is chaired by Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council.

In 2007, when the economy last enjoyed full employment, the Midlands Region had an unemployment rate of 3.7% - the lowest of all regions. However there was a very significant dependence on employment in the construction sector which employed over 20,000 people at that time. During the recession some 15,000 Construction jobs were lost and this contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate in the region which, by Q3 2011, stood at 19.6%.

There has been a substantial improvement in the Midlands region since the commencement of the National Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with an additional 11,800 in employment in Q2 2016 compared to Q1 2012.

Progress in job creation and addressing unemployment has continued strongly since 2012. The unemployment rate in the region currently stands at 10.7% compared to the national

rate of 8.6%<sup>1</sup>. The numbers in employment increased in all 8 regions in the year to Q2 2016, with employment in the Midlands up 0.5%.

The recent announcement that Center Parcs UK were granted planning permission for a €230m holiday village in Longford is a welcome boost for the whole region. The project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for a holiday village park in Longford. In addition, 750 people are expected to be employed during the construction phase, which will see more than 400 holiday lodges being built in a forest near Ballymahon.

In delivering on these actions, the following developments are particularly noteworthy:

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF ENTERPRISE IRELAND FUNDING FOR REGIONAL PROJECTS**

€50 million is being made available to the 8 regions out to 2020 through three competitive calls administered by Enterprise Ireland. These calls are being targeted at innovative and collaborative approaches to support job creation across the regions. In this context, on June 1st 2016, an initial allocation of €5m in competitive funding for local and regional initiatives was announced; the LEO Competitive Fund and the Community Enterprise Initiative. Among the 48 projects allocated funding as at Q2 2016 are:

- the Midlands Engineering Cluster Programme, which will create new synergy between engineering enterprises, educational institutions, and government agencies in the region;
- the Graduate Internship for Entrepreneurship Programme to transfer new skills and approaches to graduates in the Midlands, North East/ North West and the West and
- the Midlands 'One to Two' Growth Initiative, which will assist solo entrepreneurs in the region in attaining employer status.
- Laois LEO: dedicated advisory panel with LEOs from the South East Region.
- Longford LEO, submitted in partnership with Roscommon, Leitrim and Cavan LEOs:
  - Supports for the Creative Sector to support greater job creation and greater sustainability
- the enhancement of the Junction Business Innovation Centre in Tullamore to create more enterprise space and connect design with prototype batch manufacturing, through recruitment of a Business Development Manager;
- the development of employment generation opportunities in Ferbane and West Offaly in the Food Sector;
- Smart incubation facilities at Westmeath Enterprise Hub for new tech sectors.

Further funding calls will be announced in early 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> CSO Quarterly National Household Survey Q2 2016 data

### **Local Enterprise Offices**

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath play an important role in job creation. They are an excellent example of a collaborative partnership between the LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, local authorities and their parent Departments in delivering supports and signposting to start ups, microenterprise and small businesses nationwide. Through the efforts of the Midlands LEOs, a total of 817 jobs (gross) were created in the Midlands in 2015.

### **Regional Skills Forum**

The Midlands Regional Skills Forum, which includes Athlone Institute of Technology, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards and Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Boards, has been established to connect education providers with employers to build the skills of the region. The Forum also includes Longford Chamber, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Ibec, Department of Social Protection and the Construction Industry Federation as members. The Forum is currently developing a strategy to accommodate enterprise on the Forum. The Midlands Regional Skills Manager was appointed in H1 2016 and is a member of the Midlands Implementation Committee.

In addition to the work of the Regional Skills Forum, in engaging with enterprise, Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) has tasked the Manager of the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology with responsibility for driving AIT's engagement with enterprise and co-ordinating AIT related actions and deliverables under the Midlands APJ.

### **I-LOFAR Birr, Co Offaly**

In January 2016, The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise together with the Minister for Research, Innovation and Skills, announced funding of €1.4m through Science Foundation Ireland towards the building of a **Low Frequency Array (LOFAR)** telescope in Birr Castle. **LOFAR** is a €150 million network of radio telescopes that is being deployed across Europe and is revolutionising understanding of the Universe and driving innovations in information and communications technologies.

### **Midlands Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC)**

In February 2016, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Richard Bruton TD, announced funding for the expansion of the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC) at Athlone Institute of Technology. The 1,135 square metre expansion is supported by an investment of €3 million by Enterprise Ireland with the balance of funding from AIT. Enterprise Ireland also supported the establishment of the MIRC in 2004.

Working in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, the MIRC provides incubation facilities for innovative and knowledge-based enterprise, an enterprise programme for entrepreneurs and start-ups (the New Frontiers Programme), and makes available the resources and

expertise of AIT to support client companies and enterprise in the region. The MIRC has supported over 151 knowledge-based start-ups to date.

Expanded MIRC facilities will be key to achieving targets in the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs to increase the number of entrepreneurs/start-ups in the region by 25% in the coming years, improve the 5-year survival rate by 25% and improve scaling performance of companies by 25%.

### **Grant Engineering**

In February, 2016 Grant Engineering, which is one of the largest manufacturers and suppliers of domestic oil-fired boilers in the country, announced plans to create 50 new jobs as part of a new €7 million expansion at its manufacturing facility in Birr, Co Offaly. The expansion includes a new innovation centre, a customer services unit and a training school and is supported by Enterprise Ireland.

### **Steripack**

In April 2016, US packaging giant Bemis bought out Irish group Steripack's medical business which is based in Clara, Co Offaly. Steripack, which employs about 200 people, makes sterile packaging for the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. It has factories in Ireland, Poland, the United States and Malaysia. Bemis confirmed that it was not buying Steripack's contract manufacturing division, which the Irish group will continue to own and operate independently from Clara.

### **Kiernan Structural Steel**

In May 2016, Kiernan Structural Steel Ltd. announced the creation of 50 new jobs at its manufacturing facility in Longford. KSSL is the leading Irish structural steel manufacturing firm and employ 150 people split between their Longford plant and their construction sites. The announcement is part of a new investment programme of more than €3.5million, supported by Enterprise Ireland. 19 of the new jobs are in direct manufacturing roles. The balance of the jobs are as a direct result of increased onsite activity and include quantity surveyors, draughtsmanship and installation. This new investment is in response to increased demand from clients for the facility to apply high quality fire proofing intumescent paints particularly for multi-national clients.

### **Nexvet Biopharma**

In June 2016, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, TD, officially opened Nexvet Biopharma's new development and manufacturing facility in Tullamore, Co Offaly which has begun clinical and commercial-scale production of Nexvet's advanced development candidates, a significant milestone towards preparations for commercialization. The veterinary biologics company secured the facility in September 2015. It was announced at that time that up to 30 new highly-specialised technical roles would be created there. The project is supported by IDA Ireland. BioNua Limited, a wholly

owned subsidiary of Nexvet Biopharma, runs business operations at the 20,000 sq. ft. premises, and has undertaken extensive refurbishment transforming it into a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to the emerging area of therapeutic veterinary biologics.

### **Internal Results**

In May 2016, Internal Results, a UK based company, with its Irish base in Portlaoise, was bought out by Madison Logic, a fast growing global company. The acquisition brings together two powerful entities to create a streamlined organisation capable of executing global media and marketing campaigns. Based in the UK and Ireland, Internal Results creates sales leads for technology companies seeking business to business sales. The company currently employs over 50 staff in Portlaoise IDA business park. This investment by Madison Logic is expected to bring more opportunities and employment to Portlaoise.

### **National Enterprise Awards**

The National Enterprise Awards took place on June 9th with the Midlands securing the overall National Award and a Regional Award.

National and Overall Winner was awarded to Applied Concepts Limited, supported by LEO Offaly. Applied Concepts Limited manufactures a range of abrasive blasting machines, safety equipment and accessories at its Kinnitty factory in Offaly. The company has distributors in Belgium, Finland and Estonia.

Regional Winner was awarded to Scantech Geoscience supported by LEO Westmeath. Scantech Geoscience Ltd is a specialist ground penetrating radar (GPR) and underground utility surveying company providing GPR surveys for the civil, structural and geotechnical engineering sectors in Ireland and the UK.

Twiznight Ltd. as the county winner, represented Laois at the National Enterprise Awards. Twiznight is a digital media technology provider, which enables brands to engage with fans on twitter and reach a huge audience through real-time, interactive Twitter quizzes. With a completely redeveloped white labelled product launched March 2016, it allows any brand, sports club or TV station to run their own tailored quiz, anywhere in the world.

ARK Energy represented Longford at the National Enterprise Awards. ARK Energy offers cloud-based services for the energy industry. ARK's first SaaS component, ARKive, collects and warehouses energy market data, providing clients with flexible access.

### **National Broadband Plan (Progress to June 2016)**

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming.

The procurement process formally commenced in December 2015 with the publication of the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March 2016. These responses have been evaluated by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources from a technical, financial and legal compliance perspective. A number of companies have qualified to proceed to the next stage of the procurement process, in which qualified bidders will be invited to formally dialogue with the Department, based on detailed schedules drawn up by the Department.

#### **BREXIT (POSITION TO JUNE 2016)**

The UK decision will not take effect for some time and that the precise implications of the referendum result will now depend on the period of negotiation ahead, involving the UK and our EU partners. Government has a clear plan in place to respond to the referendum outcome and has a Contingency Framework which maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks, months and years, including the future changing trading relationship between the UK and Ireland, and the protection of jobs here, both of which are of course interlinked.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is fully engaged in the risk analysis and contingency planning work that is being undertaken at cross-Government level, led by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The Government, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the enterprise agencies are fully committed to supporting business in this period of heightened uncertainty; however, this is being done against the background of a strong economy and a highly competitive enterprise sector.

There have been multiple contacts already between IDA and Enterprise Ireland and their respective senior business clients. Enterprise Ireland, has already set up a helpline and email address to provide assistance to its clients, and will implement a range of plans to assist Irish exporters. In addition, EI will fine-tune existing support tools to address new UK market conditions. The IDA will continue to market Ireland across the globe as the number one location for foreign direct investment.

#### **Measures not delivered as planned by June 2016:**

However, as stated above, 1 of the actions due for delivery by June 2016 has not been delivered on schedule.

Action 76 – this action is dependent upon the signing of contracts to implement the new Rural Development Programme.



## DRIVING ENTREPRENEURSHIP & GROWING BUSINESS

### INCREASING THE NUMBER OF START-UPS

#### Action 1

Enterprise Ireland will increase enterprise formation in the Midlands through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops, the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme, Competitive Feasibility Fund and Competitive Start Fund.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative

Regional enterprise development and start-up formation is supported by a range of players at a regional level, such as the Local Enterprise Offices, the Local Authorities, the Higher Education Sector and Enterprise Ireland. To contribute to supporting start-up creation nationally, Enterprise Ireland provides a range of supports which are available regionally.

**Enterprise Start Workshops:** These workshops target people who have an idea for an innovative and ambitious start-up business that has the potential for exporting and growth in International Markets. The objective of the workshops is to explore key business areas of focus, such as customer, market and funding needs. Enterprise Ireland ran two Enterprise Start Workshops in the Midlands Region in 2015 with total of 20 participants. Two enterprise start programmes are planned for H2 (the second half of) 2016.

**New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme:** New Frontiers is Enterprise Ireland's national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage startups. It is a three-phased programme, based in 14 campus incubation centres across the country. In the Midlands Region, New Frontiers is delivered by the Athlone Institute of Technology, in partnership with Maynooth University. EI has agreed a 5 year programme for New Frontiers with AIT/MU starting later H2 2016. Funding for increasing the size of the MIRC incubator on AIT campus has also been agreed. Nationally, each year, New Frontiers funds approximately 150 companies. In 2015, 37 people participated in Phase 1 (6 weeks part-time); 14 projects progressed to Phase 2 (6 months full time). In 2016 Enterprise Ireland's Board approved the funding of a revised New Frontiers programme for the period 2016-2020, with this approval in place, AIT has been issued with a funding contract to deliver the programme in the Midland Region.

**Competitive Feasibility Fund:** See Action 7 below for further detail.

**Competitive Start Fund:** The purpose of the Competitive Start Fund is to accelerate the growth of start-up companies that have the capability to succeed in global markets through the provision of €50,000 seed capital per company against a €5k matched funding. In 2016 Enterprise Ireland provided Competitive Start Funding to 4 companies from the Midlands New Frontiers programme. A Competitive Feasibility Fund (CFF) programme for Midlands /Mideast was completed in Q1 and a CFF for AgriTech is planned for H2 2016. A Regional Competitive Start Fund (CSF) (all Ireland) was also held; a pitch day for shortlisted candidates was held on 16th May in Athlone.



**Action 2**

Each of the Local Enterprise Offices in the Midlands region will aim to increase employment in its baseline through increased start-ups and the scaling of existing clients. Annual Business Plans, setting out clear targets and objectives to support start-ups and enterprises in their region. Key aggregate targets for the Midland LEOs for 2015 were:

- €1.437 million will be available in grant assistance and enterprise development supports
- 40 Start Your Own Business courses will be run, for over 500 participants
- 4 Export Awareness Initiatives to be delivered to approx. 50 participants
- Over 60 clients will be assigned Start-up mentors
- 164 clients will be assigned Business Development mentors
- Over 800 women will participate on core LEO training programmes (Start Your Own Business, Accelerate, Hi Start, Export Awareness, Lean, Mentoring)
- 65 schools to participate in Student Enterprise programme

These targets will be further developed in 2016 and 2017.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Local Enterprise Office Midland Region Annual Employment Survey Results for 2015:

| LEO NAME           | 2015 No of LEO Clients | 2015 Client All Jobs Total (FT & PT)* | 2015 Gross All Job Gains (FT & PT) | 2015 Net All Job Gains (FT & PT) |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Laois              | 90                     | 451                                   | 156                                | 114                              |
| Longford           | 238                    | 985                                   | 208                                | 86                               |
| Offaly             | 202                    | 887                                   | 144                                | 80                               |
| Westmeath          | 255                    | 1,299                                 | 309                                | 178                              |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>785</b>             | <b>3,622</b>                          | <b>817</b>                         | <b>458</b>                       |

In 2015, the following were provided / delivered by the Midland LEOs:

- €1.438million provided in grant assistance and enterprise supports
- 37 Start Your Own Business Courses delivered to 577 participants
- 100 participants in Export Awareness Initiative
- 174 clients were assigned Start-up Mentors
- 176 clients assigned Business Development Mentors
- 1,425 women participated in core LEO training programmes
- 30 schools participated in Student Enterprise programme

**CASE STUDY:**

*Innovation Awards for Two Midland Schools at National Student Enterprise Awards supported by their Local Enterprise Office in Offaly:*

- *Caballis Equine Ltd from Colaiste Choilm, Tullamore won the Innovation Award at the National Finals (April 20<sup>th</sup>) in the Senior category. The student-run company has produced an innovative horse feeder which optimises horse health and wellbeing.*
- *In the Intermediate Category, Offaly again won the Innovation Award with the business Farm Friendly Feeder from Gallen Community School, Ferbane. They have developed a unique cattle feeder.*

**Action 3**

The four Local Authorities in the Midland region will implement Business Incentive Schemes (BIS) which will provide grants to encourage early stage businesses to locate in vacant commercial or industrial units within designated areas.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

In H2 2015, all Midland Local Authorities introduced business incentive schemes to support economic development in the Region.

Laois County Council introduced a Business Incentive Scheme (BIS) into the towns of Abbeylaxey, Portlaoise, Rathdowney, Mountmellick and Portarlinton to encourage the use of vacant commercial premises within a designated area of these towns over a three year period. To be eligible for the scheme, the premises must be vacant for more than six months. The rate demand must be paid in full for the premises prior to December 31<sup>st</sup> each year. Once the premises is deemed eligible for the scheme, a refund will be processed which will give 75% reduction in rates in year 1, 50% reduction in year 2 and 25% reduction in year 3.

In Longford the BIS is designed to encourage occupancy of commercial and industrial units that have been vacant for a period of nine months or more. It offers a rebate on rates paid in year 1 of occupancy of 75%, 50% in year 2 and 25% in year 3.

Offaly introduced an Open for Business Scheme in H1 2015 to Encourage the Use of Vacant Commercial Premises that provides a grant on commercial rates for up to three years for businesses re-occupying properties that have been vacant and on the open market for sale or lease for one year immediately prior to the occupation by the applicant. The grant will be available for three years from the first day the property becomes occupied as long as the first day falls between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2017, subject to the property remaining continuously occupied for twelve months. The Grant will be paid after the payment of the annual commercial rate demand for that year for the property in question as follows: Year 1, Grant equivalent to 75% of rate demand for subject year: Year 2 Grant equivalent to 50% of rate demand for subject year, Year 3 Grant equivalent to 25% of rate demand for subject year. Commercial premises which qualify for the scheme will not be eligible to avail of this scheme again for a period of 4 (Four) Years

Westmeath County Council operate a three year grant scheme to incentivise the reuse of vacant premises. The property must be vacant continuously since 1st April 2015. The Grant is paid within 4 weeks of the full payment of the annual commercial rate demand. The grant payable will not exceed 40% of commercial rates paid in year 1; 30% of commercial rates paid in year 2; and 20% of commercial rates paid in year 3.

In the current reporting period, 35 businesses benefitted from the BISs (Laois (1) Longford (14) Offaly (12) Westmeath (8)).

**Action 4**

Enterprise Ireland will work with the LEOs to develop new ways of delivering capacity improvement.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Enterprise Ireland will work closely with the LEOs and the New Frontiers programme to assist startups that do not make it through to the Phase 2 part of New Frontiers. Enterprise Ireland is also engaging with LEOs to effect transfers of clients that are in the EI portfolio but for whom it would be more relevant to be clients of the LEO. An information meeting is happening in the region at end of June between EI and the LEOs to start that process. Clients should be transferred by year end.

**Action 6**

Enterprise Ireland will promote the €5 million Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme launched in May 2015 in the Midlands Region; assess applications; and approve grant funding as appropriate for new projects for job creation in the Region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Incubation space for start-ups and entrepreneurs in the Midland region is a key piece of the start-up ecosystem. In mid-2015 Enterprise Ireland launched the Community Enterprise Initiative. The scheme focussed on three elements - Collaboration Initiatives; Renovation Projects; and support for Business Development Managers. Via a national competitive call process, this initiative aims to provide supports for Community Enterprise Centres and other enterprise centres, such as those in the Midlands, to collaborate to utilise and promote their infrastructure to assist in driving start-ups and entrepreneurship in the region. The Minister for DJEI announced the results of this call in June. Three Applicants were successful in the Midlands.

- the Junction Business Innovation Centre in Tullamore;
- Ferbane Business Park for the development of employment generation opportunities in Ferbane and West Offaly in the Food Sector;
- Smart incubation facilities at Westmeath Enterprise Hub for new tech sectors.

**Action 7**

Enterprise Ireland will run a separate Competitive Feasibility Fund for the Midlands Region in 2015 to assist new start-up companies/entrepreneurs in the region. Approximately 10 innovation-led projects will be approved under this Fund.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Enterprise Ireland offers feasibility funding for business start-ups in various sectors and geographic regions. The objective of the Competitive Feasibility Fund for the Midland Region was to assist new start-up companies or entrepreneurs, to investigate the viability of a new growth-orientated business proposition which has the potential to become a High Growth Potential Start-up in counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. A joint

programme was run between the Midlands and the Mid-East regions in H1 2016. Seven projects were awarded Competitive Feasibility Funding of which 4 were from the Midlands. Individual projects can attract up to a max of €25,000 each depending on the plan submitted. This is 50% of the cost of the feasibility study.

#### Action 8

Offaly Co. Council will support and develop The Junction Innovation Centre in Tullamore to facilitate the creation of new enterprises and promote the use of industrial design and innovative thinking.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

Offaly County Council has developed The Junction at Axis Business Park, Tullamore, County Offaly. The ground floor is occupied by Design Hub, a collaborative of 7 individuals involved in product development, social media, branding and graphic design.

Future Ticketing, located on the first floor, an online ticket sales company, has grown steadily from 2 employees to 5 employees. Clients include Punchestown Races and Tullamore Show. The business is also expanding into the UK and Europe.

In addition, The Junction has 3 hot desks in use by start up businesses. There are plans to increase the number of hot desks to 12.

#### Action 9

Enterprise Ireland will support the participation of 12 entrepreneurs in the Midlands on Phase 2 of the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme.

Enterprise Ireland will implement the findings from the review of the Programme in order to maximise the positive impacts of the programme on entrepreneurship in the region, working closely with AIT (in partnership with NUIM) in the provision of the Programme.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Approximately 35 participants will be involved in New Frontiers Phase 1 which is about to start, Phase 2 will commence in Q4 2016 with 14 participants. The meeting with AIT is now to happen late June early July and the purpose of this meeting is to ensure more targeted focus on the outcome of the programme, for example High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs).

#### Action 10

Enterprise Ireland will run a "Start-up Open Days & Clinics" in the Midlands for newly registered Start-ups in Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services from the region, with a view to prospecting for future start-ups and communicating and raising awareness of supports available to potential entrepreneurs in the Midlands.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the Midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

#### **Action 11**

InterTradeIreland will run its Seedcorn competition on a regional basis in 2015, with the Leinster & Connaught final (incorporating the Midlands region) taking place in Athlone.

**Update:** Complete

#### **Narrative:**

The Seedcorn competition is aimed at early and new start up companies that have a new equity fund requirement and has a total cash prize of €280,000. The Regional Final took place in Athlone on 5 November 2015.

#### **Action 12**

Enterprise Ireland, working with other enterprise partners in the region, will increase its start-ups from the enterprise infrastructure in the region (e.g. incubators).

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

A key focus of Enterprise Ireland is to increase the number of High Potential Start-Ups (HPSU) and candidates to the Competitive Feasibility Fund (CSF) in the region through working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Discussions with AIT and EI on focussing the New Frontiers programme more on the HPSU agenda has been planned for later in June, in advance of the start of the programme in H2 2016. In addition, funding has been provided in doubling the size of incubation space in AIT.

#### **Action 13**

Enterprise Ireland will run four “Innovating Start-ups” events in the Midlands to develop the pipeline of innovative start-ups in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Four events are currently being planned, one in each county in the region, in Longford Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore.

#### Action 14

Enterprise Ireland will run two facilitated Lean Start-up workshop for at least 16 start-ups in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Lean is a particular approach to entrepreneurial development. Participants are taken through the business model canvas as a key tool to help them develop their business plan. One programme with 10 people was held in 2015 and a further two programmes for 10 people each are starting in Sept/Oct 2016.

This programme will be re-evaluated early 2017

#### Action 15

The four Local Development Companies in the region will provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and deliver a range of programmes to support entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The Local Development Companies will also work with the LEOs, with a view to progressing clients to the LEO services.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The four midland companies are currently delivering the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and are supporting people into new business startups and self employment. They refer individuals on Start you Own Business (SYOB) with the LEOs and for grant aid where applicable e.g in Laois the Local Development Company has organised taster self employment seminars where long term unemployed individuals can explore if starting up their own business would suit them. They then progress to the LEOs SYOB as appropriate.

#### Action 16

Run a pilot competitive entrepreneurial development programme targeting rural women, in support of the recommendations of the CEDRA report

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine delivered the Female Entrepreneur Development Programme for aspiring rural female entrepreneurs in H2 2015 - H1 2016. Almost 25% of participants were from the Midland Region.

## Support Existing Companies To Grow & Improve Performance

### Action 17

Promote existing schemes to provide access to finance to start-ups and existing companies.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

A range of channels are used on a continuous basis to make entrepreneurs and existing companies aware of the range of supports available to provide access to finance. These include 1-1 consultations with executives of Enterprise Ireland (regionally & nationally based), briefing seminars, provision of relevant literature, attendance at exhibitions & conferences to promote the supports to new audiences, promotion through social media (regionally & nationally) and via eZines.

### Action 18

Enterprise Ireland will work with client companies from the region, including high potential start-ups, to increase participation on programmes and accelerate their capacity to scale up and succeed in international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

A key focus of Enterprise Ireland is to support the establishment of high potential start-up companies and to scale up indigenous industry to compete in international markets. In 2015 financial support was provided to 5 high potential start-up companies in the Midland Region. In addition, investments of €50,000 each were provided to 2 early stage potential high growth projects via the Competitive Start Fund programme in the region. Selected companies from the Region participated on a range of programmes including the Access Silicon Valley Programme, the IPO Ready Programme, the Accelerate Programme, on Trade Missions overseas, the Global Sourcing Programme and the Public Procurement programme.

### Action 19

InterTradeIreland will host 6 workshops under its “Funding for Growth” initiative in the region to promote all traditional and non-traditional sources of finance to local businesses. ITI will also deliver equity awareness events including equity advisory clinics where companies can meet with an equity expert, business planning workshops and venture capital case studies.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Seedcorn Investor Readiness Competition offers a cash prize of €280,000, and helps companies get investor ready and introduces them to valuable networks. In H1 2016, InterTradeIreland delivered a Seedcorn Workshop in Athlone Institute of Technology.

An Investment Pitch Masterclass is scheduled for Q4 in Athlone (12/10), Co. Westmeath.

#### Action 20

InterTradelreland will promote its Acumen and Elevate programmes in the region. ITI will target 5 Acumen approvals in the Midlands, providing financial assistance to local companies to investigate and pursue export opportunities in Northern Ireland.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

In H2 2015, 6 companies from the Midland Region have been approved for Acumen support.

InterTradelreland continues to engage with the Local Enterprise Offices in the region to promote the Acumen and Elevate Programmes in H1 2016.

#### Action 21

Through its Trade Accelerator Voucher scheme InterTradelreland will help companies to identify and break down barriers to trade leading to new export opportunities in Northern Ireland. The Trade Accelerator Voucher can help businesses get advice from participating expert providers in Northern Ireland and Ireland, and can be redeemed against the cost of practical advice and expertise on specific issues.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

InterTradelreland continues to engage with the Local Enterprise Offices in the region to promote the scheme in H1 2016 to help companies get advice, to help them trade across the island and develop a better understanding of the cross-border market opportunities and solutions.

#### Action 22

The Midland LEOs will run the new ACCELERATE step-up programme, which is aimed at helping local small businesses to develop their management capabilities, improve their sustainability and accelerate their growth prospects.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

LEO Offaly & LEO Westmeath commenced a joint Management Development Programme in H1 2016 (commenced March 2016). This combined programme will facilitate networking and information sharing between the 20 participating enterprises from the Midland Region.

Longford & Westmeath LEOs will run a joint Management Development Programme in H2 2016, and Laois LEO will commence a programme in H2 2016.

#### Action 23

InterTradelreland will deliver 3 Public Tendering workshops for SMEs over the period 2015-2016 and provide relevant training for local small businesses.



InterTradelreland will also promote public tendering opportunities to SMEs in the region, including cross border public sector opportunities, consortia building for larger contracts and below threshold contracts.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

In the current reporting period, two workshops and seminars have been held in the Midland Region to work with SMEs in the Midland region to support them in preparing for public procurement. InterTradelreland has also engaged with the Local Enterprise Offices to promote Public Tendering opportunities.

**Action 24**

The LEOs will deliver procurement seminars and workshops to assist business people tendering for larger contracts.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

LEO Offaly (26 clients), LEO Longford (20 clients) and LEO Westmeath (24 clients) delivered procurement workshops in current reporting period with some 70 participants. Laois LEO have scheduled workshops for H2 2016.

## Ensuring the Availability Of Work Space For Entrepreneurs

**Action 25**

The Local Authorities in the Midland region will manage enterprise space and lands in the main towns to facilitate and encourage economic development, whether by start-up companies, expansion of existing businesses or inward investment.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Local authorities and LEOs work with start-ups, expanding businesses on site acquisition, economic and cluster development of businesses in towns and villages.

A Business Support Unit has been established in Laois County Council which is coordinating the enterprise function in conjunction with Laois LEO. Part of the Team development plan is to manage the public enterprise space and provide supports to interested businesses wishing to expend or seek new premises.

There are two Enterprise centres in Laois, one in Portlaoise and one in Portarlington, both are managed by limited companies. They are at 80% occupancy for their units and over 90% for their office space. Laois County Council has over 20 hectares of commercial land in its ownership in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Abbeyleix and smaller parcels around the County. Laois County Council are currently in discussions with perspective purchasers for lands in

Portlaoise and Portarlington.

Longford County Council is the majority shareholder in the Community Enterprise Centre Space in Longford Town, with 12,000 sq.ft of industrial space and 6,000 sq.ft of office space. The centre is 90% occupied with 4 industrial tenants and three support agencies. Longford County Council own approx. 30-40 acres of land that is zoned for industrial purposes.

Offaly County Council is in the process of disposing of 5.3 acres of industrial lands at Syngefield, Birr to Romaquip Ltd., (manufacturer and supplier of winter road maintenance equipment) who are expanding their business. The County Council is also in the process of disposing of 1.096 acres at Ballycumber, Ferbane. Nine industrial sites in Ferbane Business Park are currently for sale.

A unit at Axis Business Park, Tullamore is currently leased to a company named Prism Industrial Controls Ltd (which provides Ethylene Oxide Sterilization for the medical devices industry) for a period of 12 months.

Offaly County Council owns approx. 63.5 acres in Raheen, Clara and Clonminch, Ballard which are leased on an annual basis. In addition, Offaly County Council owns 27.1 acres of industrial lands at Syngefield, Birr and an industrial site at Leamonaghan.

Westmeath County Council has units in the following locations: Blyry Industrial Estate (Athlone), Castlepollard, Lynn Industrial Estate (Mullingar) and Newbrook Industrial Estate (Mullingar). Overall business units are at 53% occupancy throughout the county. The Local Authority also manages a portfolio of industrial lands (c. 8.4 hectares) at various locations throughout the county. Westmeath County Council are in the process of disposing their commercial space and plan to reinvest in enterprise space with the proceeds.

#### Action 26

The Local Authorities will assist businesses in the identification of suitable premises/sites through the development of a Property Database of Industrial and Commercial properties available for sale or let.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Offaly LEO and Westmeath LEO developed and manage the county commercial property database with updates provided on a quarterly and monthly basis respectively. Laois and Longford County Councils property databases are due for completion in H2 2016, with updates provided at regular intervals.

Longford County Council recently identified a number of land-banks and properties suitable for the IDA Ireland portfolio and submitted them to the regional IDA office.

#### Action 27

Westmeath Co. Council and Westmeath LEO will develop and roll-out an awareness campaign to highlight the regional E-Working Centre in Mullingar.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

The following channels were used to publicise the E-Working Centre in Mullingar: LEO Newsletters; Social Media Campaigns; billboards, Newspaper Advertisements; Press Releases; Flyers, Posters, Parish Newsletters, targeted emails to businesses, Elected Members, T.Ds, Community Groups, Chambers of Commerce, other Local Authorities and State Agencies.

Facilities at the e-working centre in Mullingar include desk, chair and access to broadband, meeting room and associated hospitality facilities. Currently the centre has an occupancy rate of 66%.

## Other Initiatives to Promote & Encourage Entrepreneurship

### Action 28

The Local Authorities in the Midland region will each develop and publish a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) to support economic development and local community development in their administrative regions.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

There are two elements to the Local Economic and Community Plan, and economic element and a community element, both elements are to be conducted in tandem.

The purpose of the LECP is to identify and implement actions to strengthen and develop the economic and community dimensions of each local authority area over the following six year period and in a manner that both reflects and supports the implementation of the existing Regional Planning Guidelines and proposed regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

The integrated elements of the LECP, consist of:

- A statement of the relevant background including a high-level overview of the existing Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, including implementation of specific objectives and actions for local economic and community development,
- A high-level overview of the local authority's Development Plan, including its core strategy, and matters for economic development and local and community development to be progressed by the LECP taking account of the statutory objectives and policies of such plans, and
- A high-level review of previous strategies and plans.

Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities adopted LECPs in H2 2015, with Laois and Longford adopting LECPs in H1 2016.

### Action 29

Provide support and assistance to pop up shops and markets in the principal towns of the region, enabling artists and craft makers to showcase and sell products.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Laois: The recently established Business Support Unit of Laois County Council is working with Portlaoise Market Traders with a view to the development of a number of market events in H2 2016.

Longford County Council and Longford LEO supported a number of events in H2 2015 and H1 2016 enabling local food and craft producers to market their products. These included Christmas Market, Longford Summer Festival Craft Village and the 1916 celebrations family day.

Offaly County Council and Offaly LEO supported Made in Offaly Pop Up Shop in 2015 (25 makers) and provided financial support towards Tullamore Show (30 food and craft

exhibitors).

Westmeath County Council contributed to the funding of the Christmas Festival in Mullingar (60 market stalls); the street fair hosted during the Heart of Ireland Festival, Athlone River & Food Festival hosted in H2 2015 at which a number of craft and food stalls exhibited. In addition, Westmeath County Council has actively support markets throughout the county as part of local festival programme.

### Action 30

Pilot “Out-of-Hours” access for people to utilise the library services outside of normal opening hours.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Open Libraries are libraries that allow self service access to library members outside of normal opening hours. Offaly County Council initiated this in Banagher and Tullamore Libraries in 2015, which enables members to access the libraries on a self service basis from 8am - 10pm 7 days a week.

1,309 people have signed up to use the service in Offaly. In H1 2016 Out of Hours visits to libraries were: Banagher 4,973, and Tullamore Library 7,737.

### Action 31

Longford and Offaly Library services will pilot the provision of business supports and job seeking supports through collaboration between the Library and the Local Enterprise Office.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Business space has been created in the libraries which are supported by the Offaly and Longford LEOs.

The libraries have produced a bibliography of reading material for enterprise development and training in H1 2016.

LEO Offaly facilitates outreach clinics in both Birr and Banagher libraries. In H1 2016, as part of the collaboration between library services and LEO Offaly a Digital Marketing Course was delivered in Tullamore Library with 11 participants. During Local Enterprise Week, 3 collaborative events were held with Offaly Library Services.

### Action 32

Pilot a Part-time Entrepreneurship initiative, which would involve support for those who wish to develop an enterprise on a part-time basis, outside their normal working hours.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

This will be piloted by LEO Offaly on behalf of Midland LEOs in H2 2016 and outcomes shared.

### Action 33

The ETBs will deliver inputs on entrepreneurship to all participants on relevant Further Education and Training programmes and promote self-employment within the Adult Guidance Service.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Embedded in the ETB curriculum are relevant entrepreneurial business skills programmes, which engage the learners in the functional aspects of business planning and management including Entrepreneurial skills, E-business, Financial planning, Employment law, Leadership skills, Project management, Economics, Marketing strategies, Work experience, Customer Service and IT Skills. The Entrepreneurship component at QQI Level 5 is delivered as part of the business programmes on offer in some of Laois Offaly ETB's (LOETB) PLC Colleges, and the new Management course 07450 QQI Level 6 offered by Longford Westmeath ETB (LWETB).

The Youth Entrepreneurship Start Project, commenced in H1 2016, aims to promote and develop youth enterprise awareness and education for 12-18+ year olds in County Offaly. It is a collaborative project under the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), led by LOETB and Offaly County Council. The project primarily focuses on the delivery of the Foroige NFTE (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship) training programme, to target disadvantaged youth groups in Offaly, with the support of the local business community. To date, this programme has targeted a total of 39 young people, 21 of which are participants of LOETB Youthreach centres.

LWETB have introduced an Executive Networking programme into 2016 schedule; the aim of the programme is to support redundant executives, managers, professionals and senior technicians in identifying new strategies and developing new skills to meet the changing demands of the labour market and re-engage quickly with the market place in either a full or part time capacity, make a change in career direction or commence a business start-up.

### Action 34

Examine the potential to run a Business Expo in the Midlands, highlighting available enterprise supports and information on business regulation.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The Mullingar Chamber hosted the National Industry Summit 4.0 - Competitiveness through Tech Innovation in Mullingar in April 2016. This exhibition and conference addressed the latest Industry 4.0 trends and technologies.

**Action 35**

Under the Teagasc Option programmes support farm family diversification in the Midland Region, including support measures to diversify into artisan foods, rural tourism, alternative land use and other entrepreneurial activities.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Teagasc Options for Farm Families Programme is designed to:

- Provide new thinking
- Generate new ideas
- Generate additional income on and off farm

Teagasc Options Courses (20 hours duration) are run over 5 consecutive weeks (usually in 4 hourly sessions) in rotation across the region on an annual basis. The programme consists of a series of workshops covering a wide range of topics such as: Equine, Bioenergy, Forestry, Organics etc. Teagasc specialists are in attendance to answer questions. Visits to farms with successfully diversified farm enterprises are a vital aspect of the programme. Participants will also have the opportunity to network with local development and training agencies.

Options courses are scheduled for Offaly in H2 2016, and Westmeath H2 2019.

## FOSTERING INNOVATION

### Action 36

Enterprise Ireland will publish a call for proposals to increase the capacity in the Technology Gateways network to deliver more applied research and innovation projects for industry.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

A regional call was issued in Q3 2015 for Technology Gateways and the following three centres were funded:

- Design + Gateway IT Carlow: Applied Design - [www.designgateway.ie](http://www.designgateway.ie)
- MET Gateway GMIT: Medical & Engineering Technologies - [www.metgateway.ie](http://www.metgateway.ie)
- PEM Gateway IT Sligo: Precision Engineering & Manufacturing - [www.pemgateway.ie](http://www.pemgateway.ie)

There are now 15 Gateways in 11 Institutes of Technologies in the Technology Gateway Network. Each Gateway is an open access portal for companies of all sizes and their objective is to deliver near to market solutions for Irish industry. The COMAND Gateway based in AIT is part of the Technology Gateway Network.

A Technology Gateway was not funded in the Midlands. However, the technology gateways across Ireland are open to engagement from companies in the midlands through collaborative research programmes.

### Action 37

Enterprise Ireland will hold a national competitive call for proposals for the extension of Campus Incubation facilities.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) was approved an extension in H1 2016 to increase its incubation facilities. These will support early-stage FDI companies, international entrepreneurs and second-stage indigenous companies with high growth potential.

### Action 38

IDA Ireland will continue to roll out its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Research, Development & Innovation Programme is a financial incentive provided to encourage companies to undertake in-house R&D projects and collaborative projects with third-level institutes and industrial partners.

IDA Ireland continues to support and provide its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.



**Action 39**

InterTrade Ireland will provide access to its Challenge programme, giving SMEs the opportunity to learn how to develop a culture of innovation through the use of a sustainable and repeatable innovation process.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Challenge is aimed at MDs and CEOs of SMEs, allowing business owners to transform their company's prospects in just nine months by learning and applying the most effective methods of generating, marketing and launching new products and services.

Challenge remains open to all eligible companies (SMEs ideally with between 10 and 250 employees; currently exporting or considering exporting; serious about growth through innovation; financially viable) in the Midland Region as promoted through engagement with the LEOs of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath

**Action 41**

AIT will increase awareness of – and access to – AIT's R&D/knowledge resources among enterprise and industry in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

AIT has undertaken the following measures to increase awareness of its R&D facilities:

- Showcased AIT R&D capabilities at Connect event at Maynooth University on 5-Apr-16;
- Participated in National Industry 4.0 Summit on 28-Apr-16;
- Participated in the Ibec regional event 4-May-16;
- Participated in Technology Gateway Network Industry Showcase 10-May-16;
- Upgrading of Applied Polymer Technologies Ireland, Materials Research Institute and Centre for Industrial Services and Design websites;
- Circulated Newsletter;
- Established Twitter account for APT Jun-15 and continued Twitter activity by Software Research Institute.

**Action 42**

AIT will increase awareness of MetricIreland to help more companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the HE sector.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Established in 2011 by 5 Irish HEIs (NUI Galway, University of Limerick, Galway-Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Athlone IT) MetricIreland is a Medical Technologies Research & Innovation Consortium. MetricIreland helps companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the HE sector. This consortium has the advantage of offering MedTech enterprises efficient and effective access to the HE sector via a single contact point

AIT is represented on the Working and Steering Groups of MetricIreland. The Materials Research Institute (MRI including the Centre for Industrial Services and Design (**CISD**)) promotes MetricIreland through its extensive client engagement within the MedTech sector.

## ATTRACTING AND EMBEDDING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

### Action 43

IDA Ireland will appoint a dedicated Regional Business Development Manager for the Midland region, based in Athlone.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

In June 2015, IDA Ireland appointed a Regional Business Development Manager for the Midland Region, based in Athlone, who previously held a number of positions in the organisation in both Ireland and North America. The Regional Business Development Manager will lead the team dedicated to growing the IDA portfolio in the Midland Region.

### Action 44

IDA Ireland will target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland region over the period 2015-2019.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

IDA Ireland continues to target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland Region over the period 2015-2019.

An example of a recent investment is the establishment of Nexvet Biopharma, a veterinary biologics company, in Tullamore which was officially opened by Minister Mitchell-O'Connor in June 2016. BioNua Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Nexvet Biopharma, runs business operations at the 20,000 sq. ft. premises which will create 30 jobs, and has undertaken extensive refurbishment transforming it into a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to the emerging area of therapeutic veterinary biologics. This investment will increase the attractiveness of the Midlands region for biopharma.

### Action 45

IDA will develop a marketing proposition around an existing cluster in Global Business Services in the Midlands. This is supported by an IT/technology capability in the region.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The marketing propositions for both services and manufacturing activities are created to support the sales process for IDA staff based overseas. The marketing material, which was created by the IDA Midlands Regional team, has helped to increase the knowledge of the overseas executives and supports the introduction of the region as a potential location for investment at an earlier stage.

### Action 46

IDA will source clients for its Advance manufacturing facility in IDA Garrycastle Business & Technology Park, Athlone.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

IDA Ireland are actively marketing the building for the Advance Technology Building in Athlone, County Westmeath.

**Action 48**

Relevant IDA Executives based overseas will visit the Midland region and relevant companies to enhance their knowledge of the region to market it to potential investors.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Seven programs have been hosted for IDA Executives in the Midland Region to increase their knowledge of the region to further support the marketing of the region.

The programs provided overseas and operations staff the opportunity to meet with a number of existing clients in the Midlands region. In total 64 staff members took part. This allowed them to familiarise themselves first hand with key references in the region to support them as they market the Midlands region for investment.

**Action 49**

IDA will drive its Transformation programme with its established base of client companies, through increased client interaction.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Transformation Program supports the evolution of companies to help them imbed in the region ensuring their longevity. This is often supported with a training grant to upskill staff and/or a LEAN program to increase efficiency. IDA is continuing to engage with clients and drive its transformation programme.

**Action 50**

Develop a Regional ConnectIreland Plan that is integrated with the Local Authorities' enterprise development and job-creation activities. Formalise the name of a nominated officer from each county in the region for the roll-out of the Plan.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

In H2 2015, ConnectIreland worked individually with each of the Local Authorities of Laois, Offaly, Longford & Westmeath to create a diaspora focused business message through the development of Community Action Plans.

- In partnership with Laois County Council, ConnectIreland worked to produce a pro-business video, promoting FDI and business into Laois. This video included a call to action for the Laois diaspora to encourage investment into Laois and featured pieces to camera by Paypal's Louise Phelan and the MD of Laois based company Internal Results.
- Longford produced a video and a brochure targeted at Longford's diaspora doing

business abroad.

- Offaly produced a video focusing on what the county has to offer those looking at the energy sector.
- Westmeath's video promoted the county as a venue for international businesses looking to expand into Ireland.

The next step for will be to develop the Regional ConnectIreland Plan in cooperation with the Planning Policy and Research Officer for the Midland Region. This is scheduled to take place in H2 2016.

#### **Action 52**

Liaise with AIT with a view to holding partnership events to create a network that will allow greater communication between the institution and its alumni.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

ConnectIreland have been in touch with AIT alumni office and will work to develop a strategy in the coming months.

**BUILDING SECTORAL OPPORTUNITIES****TOURISM****Action 53**

Develop and market Ireland's Ancient East, which will help in scaling up the asset base and achieve international "stand-out" for the region based on its comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Key activities undertaken in H1 2016:

- Launch of irelandsancienteast.com (May 2016),
- commencement of domestic campaign,
- series of workshops to tourism trade to leverage the new Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) brand.
- International marketing campaign ongoing by Tourism Ireland.
- New IAE assets in development in the Midlands include Hill of Uisneach (grant investment €65,000), Athlone Castle (grant investment €76,524), Birr Heritage Trail (grant investment €84,000), Laois Heritage Trails (grant investment €84,804).
- 

**Action 54**

Promote the Lakelands as part of Discover Ireland home holiday campaign.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Focus of 2016 Lakelands Domestic Campaign:

- Support peak season in the hub of Athlone
- Increase awareness of product offering beyond cruising, expanding heritage message and things to do,
- Develop message through media to showcase offer to domestic audience.
- Key activities include:
- Media Partnership with Today FM (Anton Savage),
- Media Partnership with Independent.ie – including double page advertorial, online homepage take over and retargeting opportunities across the site
- Online activities via discoverireland.ie.

**Action 55**

As part of the Ireland's Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways tourism offerings, work with clusters of tourism businesses, mostly in the accommodation and food sector, to improve their ability to generate international sales and food experience for visitors.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Dwell in Ireland's Ancient East - Cross-Selling Programme targeted at trade (accommodation, food and attractions): regional workshops held in Westmeath (3.3.16, 11

participants) and Laois (20.4.16, 13 participants). 'Dwell' is a self replicating programme, participants have undertaken to train a further 308 personnel in their businesses or communities.

Programmes in Increasing Food and Beverage Sales and Customer Care provided in the Midlands in the last 12 months (55 participants). Direct supports and advice are continually provided to trade on an ongoing basis.

#### Action 56

Develop Destination Athlone to make Athlone one of the top five centres for short breaks in Ireland, and bring a higher number of visitors to the region as a whole.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Destination Athlone team (comprising of Athlone Institute of Technology, Chamber of Commerce, Fáilte Ireland, Tidy Towns, Waterways Ireland, and Westmeath County Council), are actively working on a joint marketing programme. Current activities include the development of a database of images and video materials.

Destination Athlone Marketing Group has just launched their Summer 2016 campaign costed at €50,000, this involves print media (insert in Saturday Irish Independent of 18/06/2016), National and local media and competitions

#### Action 57

Support a suite of festivals that complement Ireland's Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways offerings.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Festivals in the Midlands supported by Failte Ireland under the Regional Festivals and Participative Events Programme 2016 include: Lakelands International Food Fest (grant assistance €2,500), Irish Game & Country Fair (grant assistance €7,000), Athlone River & Food Festival (grant assistance €2,000) and the Uisneach Bealtaine celebrations (grant assistance €3,000).

In addition to festivals supported by Failte Ireland, the local authorities support a number of festivals throughout the region through the IPB Community Tourism Diaspora Grants Initiative and the Community & Voluntary Grants scheme, Festivals & Events Grants Schemes e.g. Clonmacnoise Summer School, TriAthlone, County Fleadh, and a range of local village festivals.

#### Action 59

The Local Authorities will maintain and manage local tourism attractions on an on-going basis.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Local Authorities assist in the promotion, development and management of local tourism attractions on an ongoing basis:

The Donaghmore Warehouse & Museum and the Heritage Centre in Timahoe in Laois are leased to Local Community Groups by the County Council. Both have received funding for conservation works and receive ongoing financial support and promotion by Fáilte Ireland.

Longford County Council supports the work of County Longford Tourism Committee to develop and promote tourism in the county through the provision of funding to the committee to employ a tourism officer.

In H2 2015, Offaly Tourism Forum, an initiative of Offaly County Council, launched [www.VisitOffaly.ie](http://www.VisitOffaly.ie) website with associated social media platforms to create greater awareness of the tourism assets of the county.

Westmeath County Council & Athlone Art Heritage Ltd. manage three significant attractions within the Midland Region, namely Belvedere House & Gardens (Visitor Numbers for 2015: 126,503; Visitor Numbers for Q1 2016: 19,649), Athlone Castle (Visitor Numbers for H2 2015: 15,068 Visitor Number for Q1 2016: 2,982) and the Luan Gallery (Visitor Numbers for H2 2015: 6499; Visitor Numbers Q1 2016: 3,548).

**Action 60**

Invest €4 million in the Midlands region in 2015 as part of the development of the Dublin-Galway cycle route, for the section between Mullingar and Athlone.

**Update: Complete****Narrative:**

The world class 'Old Rail Trail' greenway of over 40kms between the towns of Athlone and Mullingar opened in H2 2015. This is a purpose built off-road shared pedestrian and cycleway trail, consisting of a three metre macadam cycle track along a disused railway track.

**Action 61**

Offaly and Laois Local Authorities will continue to work with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte to develop an off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains on part of the Coillte landbank.

**Update: Ongoing****Narrative:**

The Planning Application for a 72.8km mountain bike trail in the Slieve Bloom Mountains was lodged with Laois and Offaly planning authorities in H1 2016. The project includes provision for bike hire, wash facilities, and parking (40.6km within County Laois and 32.2km in County Offaly, linked by an on road section along the R440 in the townland of Baunreagh, County Laois and Glenregan, County Offaly).



### Action 62

Coillte will commence a feasibility study shortly looking at the wider potential for cycle trails in the region as part of the joint venture process with Bord na Móna

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

A feasibility Study was completed and published in H2 2015. The objective is to develop a high quality accessible cycle trail network which will be a flagship tourism and recreation project.

Project development will provide opportunities for local businesses to service the trails and cater for the needs of domestic and overseas visitors using the network thereby creating a significant increase in economic activity with consequent economic, social, health and well-being benefits.

The Masterplan for the delivery of the project was agreed by the partners, Coillte, Bord na Mona and Offaly County Council, and proposals in relation to implementation structures and financing are currently being developed.

### Action 63

Progress the development and promotion of Greenway and Blueways to capitalise on the centrality of the Midlands, linking the River Shannon, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and River Barrow.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Local Authorities are actively involved with a range of partners in development of greenways and blueways throughout the Midland Region, to capitalise on the centrality of the Midland Region.

It is anticipated that a planning application in respect of the Barrow Blueway will be lodged with Laois County Council in June 2016.

Longford County Council is a member of the Upper Erne Shannon Future Economy project and with other Local Authorities, Bord na Mona and the ESB, is developing a range of products and promotional materials to promote water based and near water based tourism under the Blueway brand. It is also supportive of the County Tourism Committee in its efforts to develop a series of themed cycling trails throughout the County. Completion of these trails is expected in H2 2016.

In H2 2015, a 1km of trail along the Royal Canal between the Westmeath border and the village of Abbeyshrule was completed. In H1 2016, a further stretch of 3-4kms is being developed between Abbeyshrule and Ballymahon.

In H2 2015 Offaly County Council launched 'Connecting People - Connecting Places', A Strategy for Walking and Cycling in Offaly, which sets out a vision for County Offaly to

connect to, embrace and build on the opportunities for cycling and walking in the Midland Region.

H2 2015 saw the Old Rail Trail completed from the existing Royal Canal Greenway in Mullingar to the town of Athlone. Enhanced directional and information signage relating to the completed greenways in the county was installed in H1 2016. The Council is currently preparing a Tourism Strategy for the county and this item will be progressed further in the implementation of that strategy in H2 2016.

**MANUFACTURING****Action 64**

Enterprise Ireland will target manufacturing companies in the Midlands region to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 65**

IDA Ireland will develop a marketing proposition on High Value Manufacturing, built around the cluster in the region.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Marketing material has been created and distributed to operations and overseas staff highlighting the manufacturing references & skills in the region. This material better positions the region for consideration for high value manufacturing opportunities.

**Action 67**

Progress the development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus (MMTC) - which will focus on Advanced/Discrete/Additive Manufacturing technologies, Industrial/Product Design and 'Smart Factories.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

AIT are engaged in ongoing dialogue with regional and national partners/stakeholders. A submission was made to Enterprise Ireland in H2 2015. In H1 2016, AIT continue to progress the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus R&D and are engaging with the HEA.

MMTC Model/Objectives:

- The MMTC will focus on applied research directed at medium term industry needs as

well as shorter term technology development and technical services for industrial clients. The MMTC will work jointly with industry partners to get technologies into the manufacturing floor and drive technologies to market.

- The MMTC will be coherent with an element of the planned national Advanced Manufacturing Centre (arising from Action 63 of the national Action Plan for Jobs 2014) – working in partnership with and guided/driven by the needs of industry.
- The MMTC will increase access to Advanced Manufacturing technologies facilitating the development of Advanced Manufacturing talent and workforce development.
- The MMTC will have a national outreach/access programme.
- The MMTC will focus on the needs of the manufacturing sector for technology and knowledge and a range of technology and knowledge-related services – supporting more vigorous growth of a spectrum of Irish-owned manufacturing companies, and locally led development with MNCs' Irish operations.
- Making it in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020 points out: The lack of facilities that firms can avail of to trial and test new products and manufacturing processes has...been highlighted as a specific issue, particularly in the context of the capital intensity of the sector; and that the need for capital investment as a barrier to manufacturing start-ups could be minimised if access to State funded equipment was enabled and/or 'sand pit' trial and test facilities were made available. The MMTC will provide such facilities for trial/test and demonstration of new technologies by large and small companies and start-ups and will be a neutral sandpit for industry driven collaboration.
- The MMTC will provide the facility envisaged under Strategic Action 6.2 of Making it in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020:  
6.2 Assess the feasibility of establishing a facility that provides access to entrepreneurs and early stage start-ups to equipment and expertise to facilitate proto-type development of new products/solutions. Consideration should be given to the possibility of private sector provision, and/or equipment being donated by vendors as part of the solution
- Making it in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020 points out that: Many of the newer opportunities will arise at the 'blurring' of existing sectors and/or as a result of disruptive technologies. Through their in-depth understanding of sectors, strong relationships with client companies and in-market intelligence, the enterprise development agencies are well positioned to identify opportunities and obstacles to growth at an early stage. Enterprise Ireland and IDA are key partners in the MMTC. Science Foundation Ireland will also be a key agency partner.
- The MMTC is coherent with Priority L of the Research Prioritisation Steering Group: Manufacturing Competitiveness.
- AIT has extensive experience and an outstanding track record in linking its applied research and innovation to the needs of indigenous and multi-national industry and start-ups - building competitive advantage in companies by developing and matching AIT's research and innovation strengths to business needs in order to address emerging opportunities and market developments.
- The MMTC will be industry-focused with a strong enterprise mission, will have significant activity/capacity in the applied research space, will offer contract services to industry and aims to secure significant income from companies. The MMTC's industry focus will ensure that its technology outputs are efficiently converted into commercial products, processes and services.

**Action 68**

Enterprise Ireland and AIT will host an Innovation workshop with a particular focus on Manufacturing firms (including Med-Tech) in the second half of 2015.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

AIT and Enterprise Ireland hosted an industry Innovation workshop at AIT on 28-Oct-15 with speakers from Mergon, Fanuc, JL Goor, First Polymer Training and others discussing future trends for the Manufacturing sector and companies such as Meusburger and JL Goor exhibiting on the day.

The Innovation workshop was hosted by AIT's Applied Polymer Technologies Gateway. The event consisted of a forum where industry leaders and subject matter experts (manufacturers, suppliers, OEMs and SMEs) discussed topics relevant to companies as well as several networking sessions and masterclasses on new innovations and technologies. The event was attended by in excess of 80 industry participants.

In terms of outcomes, several opportunities for supply chain integration were identified between OEMs and smaller SMEs and several important learnings were taken from the keynote and technical talks. Feedback was very positive, industry interest in the event is high and as a result it will be run again in 2016. Planning is underway to host an Innovation workshop in September of this year.

**FOOD SECTOR****Action 69**

Enterprise Ireland will target, with its new company engagement model, food companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 70**

To ensure a good quality pipeline of food entrepreneurs, Enterprise Ireland will run a pre Food Works clinic in the region in 2015 and in 2016.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Workshops were run in four regions in 2015 and it planned to schedule an event in the Midlands region in Q4 2016. These workshops are early stage interventions from proposed new food companies and from that initial engagement selected companies progress to a more involved development approach in the foodworks programme. The ultimate aim is to assist significant food start-ups.

**Action 71**

The Local Authorities and LEOs will work with the Fáilte Ireland Food Champion to roll out a series of workshops to assist food producers in the development of their Food Story to contribute to the overall marketing of food producers whilst strengthening the visitor experience.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with the Regional Food Champion and **MidlandsIreland.ie** delivered 'Ireland's Food Story Workshop' targeting Longford and Westmeath Food Producers and service providers. This was the second such workshop in the region, as in H1 2016 this workshop was delivered in Offaly. Both workshops had 17 participants.

Food Story workshops were developed in response to the greater emphasis our international visitors place on food as part of their overall holiday experience, the three hour workshop provided practical tips and advice to tourism operators on how to write a food story for businesses and how that can deliver additional revenue.

**Workshop Content:**

- Food and the Tourism Experience – how and why it's important to your business.
- Examples of food experiences that your target market wants.
- Marketing tips to create, promote and deliver your own food story.
- Examples of how other businesses have used local food to gain stand out and drive revenue.
- Ireland's Content Pool – how to access the free collection of images, video and copy to use in your marketing material.

Last December, consultancy firm Bane Mullarkey was asked to follow-up with all participants from all 2015 workshops, to understand and measure the impact and arising actions. Their key conclusions were as follows:

- Very high satisfaction ratings with the ten key metrics assessed by evaluation sheets
- Aspects that attendees liked most included:
  - Opportunity to network and meet others
  - Finding out about Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland resources
  - Thinking differently
  - Listening to others and hearing examples of those who do it well
  - New ideas
- The top three actions that attendees set themselves to do were:
  - Write their own food story
  - Work with local suppliers
  - Use Fáilte Ireland + Tourism Ireland resources

#### Action 72

Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia will facilitate collaboration/co-opetition on new product development and promote synergistic opportunities between large and small food companies in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Food Division of EI has been working with Bord Bia in progressing this Action.

#### Action 73

Review the demand for food infrastructure, such as test food kitchens, to identify potential gaps based on defined industry needs, including that of micro food enterprises.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

LEO Offaly is promoting and delivering the Food Academy programme in Ferbane Food Campus. It is working closely with entrepreneurs and the Food Campus to establish demand and meet client requirements. It is also developing linkages with larger food companies such as Glenisk, Rosderra Meats and Milne Foods.

#### Action 74

The LEOs will target an increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Food Academy programme is a two month programme for those looking to develop and grow a small-scale food or drink production business. The Food Academy Programme is a collaboration between Bord Bia, Local Enterprise Offices and SuperValu (Musgraves).

The Midland LEOs currently promote the Food Academy programme through information evenings, advertisements in regional media, and digital media channels including ezines, twitter, facebook. When feasible the Food Academy programmes are based in shared kitchens facilities within the Midland Region, namely The Kitchens, Mountmellick, County Laois and Ferbane Food Campus, Ferbane, County Offaly.

Laois & Offaly LEOs delivered the Food Academy Programme jointly in H1 2016 with 12 participants, 6 from Laois and 6 from Offaly.

Longford: Start Your Own Food Business is scheduled for H2 2016 with a view to identifying clients for Food Academy to be run in association with Leitrim LEO.

Westmeath had 6 participants in the Food Academy programme in H2 2015.



**Action 75**

The Midland Local Authorities will run a Food Event of scale to support artisan food producers of the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

During the reporting period the Local Authorities under the MidlandsIreland.ie brand assisted food producers within the region to develop their marketing portfolio through the provision of CEDRA Agri Tourism funds to undertake food styling, photography, and profiles for their products. Approx. 100 producers participated in this project.

The Midland Local Authorities under the **MidlandsIreland.ie** brand and in partnership with the LEOs of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath are currently developing the **MidlandsIreland.ie** Regional Food Producers Directory 2016. It is anticipated that this will be launched in H2 2016. The directory will be circulated to retailers and service providers in the Midland Region, along with food buyers from multiples and select independent retailers nationwide.

**Action 76**

Assist in the development of the agri food and agri tech sectors within the region in line with Harvest 2020 objectives and the Rural Development Programme.

**Update:** Delayed

**Narrative:**

The action is dependent upon the signing of contracts to implement the new Rural Development Programme.

**Action 77**

AIT will host an annual event which will showcase regional artisan foods.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

AIT hosted a "Savour the Flavour" event on 21-Apr-15 to showcase the very best of artisan producers in the Midlands and to raise awareness of the artisan producers to students and industry. On 21-Apr-16, students from AIT's Culinary Arts degree programme showcased their new food products.

Guests of the "Savour the Flavour" event included: Prof Ciarán Ó Catháin, President of AIT; Anthony Gray, President of the Restaurant Association of Ireland (Guest Speaker); Shane Raftery, Food Tourism Failte Ireland (Guest Speaker); Brendan Allen, Castlemine Farm (Guest Speaker); and Yvonne Carthy, Food Champion Failte Ireland.

The event was attended by artisan producers, hoteliers, restaurateurs, and academic staff from AIT's Department of Hospitality, Tourism & Leisure. Over 20 companies attended, feedback was very positive, and it is planned to run (and grow) a similar annual event.

## INTERNATIONALLY TRADED SERVICES AND SOFTWARE

**Action 78**

Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist Internationally Traded Services and Software companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 79**

Enterprise Ireland will run an Internet Marketing Awareness Workshop targeted at Midland based businesses, including understanding of EI supports available.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

This is part of a series of workshops held around the country. Discussions are currently taking place to organise a workshop specifically for the Midland region in Q2 2016.

**Action 80**

Enterprise Ireland will continue to work on an individual basis with the companies in the Mobile Telecommunications cluster to support employment growth and development of their export market plans.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing

Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

#### **Action 81**

Enterprise Ireland will continue to promote AIT overseas as part of the Education in Ireland brand.

**Update:** Complete

#### **Narrative:**

EI are partners in Educate in Ireland initiative. Enterprise Ireland promotes all third level colleges in Ireland as potential locations for students from overseas countries to come and study in Ireland. AIT has had significant success in this area, particularly with students from the Middle East and China and also growing engagement from South America

#### **Action 82**

Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist relevant construction companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

## ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

**Action 84**

The Midland Energy Agency will co-ordinate a Regional Energy Forum to provide information on forms of renewable energy.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

The Midlands Regional Energy Forum: Energy Saving & Renewable Energy Opportunities took place in H2 2015 (15-10-2015).

The Forum outlined the various energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, and project finance options. The Forum was delivered in collaboration by **MidlandsIreland.ie**, the Midland Energy Agency, SEAI, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, the IFA, Irish Hotels Federation, and Macra na Feirme. The forum had approx 100 participants.

**Action 85**

Promote and assist the delivery costs savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for businesses and public sector organisations in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The SEAI supports for business and the public sector have been developed. SEAI is exploring the potential for further engagement with new models for delivery of the programme for business through the Local Authorities.

**Action 86**

Work to develop and promote Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Significant progress has been made on the Sustainable Energy Communities work, with interest expressed to the Sustainability Energy Authority Ireland from all Midland Counties, and two progressing to application. Work required to determine a suitable regional management structure is planned for H2 2016.

**Action 87**

As part of the alignment of Further Education and Training provision with local and future skills needs in the region, ETBs will identify skills gaps and develop tailored training solutions to enable the region to maximise economic benefits from the emerging Green Economy.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) is currently exploring the feasibility of a Wind Turbine Maintenance Programme or / Industrial Automation at Mount Lucas and shorter courses in Sustainable Energy / Air tightness and other elements of Green Energy. In 2015/16, LOETB introduced two new Engineering PLC programmes at Level 5 - 1 in Portlaoise, 1 in Tullamore, and 1 new Applied Science programme at Level 5 in Tullamore. A second Applied Science programme will commence in 2016/17, in Portlaoise. Short-term introductory courses are being offered to attract applicants to these courses.

Longford Westmeath ETB through Athlone Training Centre, in collaboration with Fasttrack to IT and industry, are exploring the possibility of delivering a Wind Turbine Maintenance course. This is a direct response to recent reports which highlighted that 60% of wind turbines may be behind on their maintenance schedules, and there is a notable shortage of essential staff in the industry at present. The course will therefore meet needs within the industry while providing graduates with an excellent opportunity. The course reflects the needs of industry and ensures that successful graduates of the course are equipped with the skills to compete effectively within the labour market in the sector.

**Action 88**

Develop Bioenergy Ireland to supply biomass for a range of customers, including power plants, CHP plants, etc.

Update: **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Bord na Mona commissioned a report on this project which is currently being considered in consultation with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Coillte and NewERA.

**Action 89**

Research the growing of suitable biomass on Bord na Mona peatland for potential use in Anaerobic Digestion plants for energy generation.

Update: **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Bord na Mona has identified potential sites in its land bank for the establishment of trials for biomass crops and is working with Teagasc to determine the best methodology for proceeding with this activity.

## Skills Enhancement And Labour Market Activation

### IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND SKILLS PROVIDERS

#### Action 90

Establish a Steering Group, comprising all public education and training providers in the region, together with employers and other public bodies with an enterprise remit, to oversee the process of establishing a Skills Forum in the region. The Steering Group will prepare a draft Project Plan scoping out the initial steps required to establish the Forum.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

A new *Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement Unit* has been created in the Department of Education and Skills to support the implementation of the National Skills Strategy 2025 (NSS) in a manner that links Further Education, Higher Education and skills issues involving the wider department.

The Unit will provide support to, the soon to be established National Skills Council (NSC) and the already established network of Regional Skills Fora and will give a dedicated focus to enterprise engagement and will enhance a coordinated response to identifying and addressing skills needs across the education and training sector.

As part of the new national skills architecture provided for in the National Skills Strategy, the Department of Education and Skills has established a network of 9 Regional Skills Fora in line with the NUTS III boundaries to foster greater engagement between the education and training system, employers and other enterprise stakeholders in building the skills of each region.

The fora provide a vehicle for close co-operation at regional level between education and training providers and enterprise, between the different education and training providers themselves and a local link with the implementation of other strategies such as the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and Pathways to Work.

An education and training group comprising of Further and Higher Education Institutions make up a Steering Group that will then be expanded to include other stakeholders who will make up each of the 9 Regional Skills Fora (RSF).

The Midland Steering Group comprising of Athlone Institute of Technology, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Boards and First Polymer Skillnet prepared the terms of reference for the embryonic Skills Forum.

The key objectives of the Midlands Regional Skills Forum:

- Provide a cohesive education led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together in building the skills needs of the region
- Help employers better understand and access the full range of services available across the education and training system
- Enhance links between education and training providers in planning and delivering programmes, reduce duplication and inform national funding decisions
- Facilitate the involvement of enterprise stakeholders in a collaborative framework with education and training partners in the identification, development and delivery of skills development responses
- Actively promote the activities and achievements of the Regional Skills Forum

**Action 91**

Following on the work of the Steering Group, establish a Skills Forum in the Midlands region which will connect education providers with employers and industry stakeholders on an on-going basis to collaborate in building the skills of the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Skills Forum, comprising of Athlone Institute of Technology, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Boards and First Polymer Skillnet, held four meetings in H1 2016.

The Regional Skills Manager was appointed in H1 2016. The Regional Skills Manager has undertaken initial briefing meetings with training service providers operating throughout the region as well as businesses and business representative groupings e.g Ibec and Chambers.

The Regional Skills Forum now includes Longford Chamber, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Ibec, Department of Social Protection and the Construction Industry Federation as members. The Forum is currently developing a strategy to accommodate enterprise on the Forum.

A Regional Skills Website, [www.regionalskills.ie](http://www.regionalskills.ie) was launched in May 2016 as a communication tool for employers and education and training providers. By using the data from the SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, the website provides access to a detailed profile for each of the 9 Regions drawn from all relevant skills research and datasets including live register data to provide the basis for informed dialogue on skills needs.

**Action 92**

AIT will task an office holder with responsibility for driving AIT's engagement with enterprise and coordinating AIT-related Actions and deliverables under this Action Plan for Jobs for the Midlands.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

AIT has tasked the Manager of the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at AIT with responsibility for driving AIT's engagement with enterprise and coordinating AIT-related Actions and deliverables under this Action Plan for Jobs.

In July 2015, AIT submitted an Application to an Enterprise Ireland Call for the Extension of Business Incubation Facilities in the Institutes of Technology. This was followed by a Panel visit to AIT in October 2015. In February 2016, the Board of Enterprise Ireland awarded the Institute €3.0m funding for the 1,135m<sup>2</sup> expansion of MIRC facilities.

AIT's New Frontiers Programme, delivered in the Midlands-Mid-East region in partnership with Maynooth University, continues to support high potential knowledge-based start-ups in the region. On foot of an Application submitted by AIT in December 2015, Enterprise

Ireland in February 2016 awarded AIT funding to deliver the Programme over the period 2016-2020, increasing the Programme's annual contracted participant cohort from 12 to 14.

#### Action 94

The ETBs will develop local course design processes to reflect direct employer involvement in ITN, curriculum development, pilot and evaluation to meet the needs of employers, learners, jobseekers and priority cohorts so that processes are available and are embedded into and adhere to the relevant Awarding Body quality system.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Laois Offaly ETB has initiated a partnership with Department of Social Protection (DSP), Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and its members, and City and Guilds to develop training programmes for semi-skilled roles in the construction sector to meet emerging needs within the construction industry i.e. to ensure the availability of indigenous skills to take up jobs of semi-skilled trades. The outcome is a National Pilot Traineeship in Construction (Formwork).

Longford Westmeath ETB Training Services will continue to introduce new courses that are designed to meet identified employer demand, providing Market Led, Traineeship and Specialist Skills Training to 75% of all the clients in 2016 with a strong link to local needs and working closely with IDA Ireland.



## DELIVERING COURSES TO ADDRESS IDENTIFIED SKILLS NEEDS

### Action 95

The Education & Training Boards (ETBs) will increase provision in the STEM subject areas.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. In 2015/16, LOETB introduced three new PLC courses at Level 5 were in Tullamore. Further Education and Training- Applied Science, Engineering Technology and Computer Systems and Networks, while Engineering Technology and Software Development were introduced in Portlaoise College.

Longford Westmeath ETB Training Services has developed strong links with Industry over the past years and Athlone TC recently participated in the Midlands Life Science & Engineering Trade Expo. LWETB will link with Solas and the national Engineering Career Traineeship which will support companies in the Medical Device Design with the ATC newly developed online course.

### Action 96

The ETBs will deliver short term courses in security, retail, hospitality, and generic employment skills to target vacancies in the local economy.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Laois Offaly ETB, in consultation with the Department of Social Protection, is providing short training courses in Retail Sales, Welding, Delivery Driving, and Employment Skills - programmes that are meeting the needs of Long Term Unemployed people and providing them with transferable employment skills in areas where local job opportunities are deemed likely to occur.

Longford Westmeath ETB continues to fund the National Learning Networks through the Specialist Training Provider Programme (STP). Through engagement with STP's a wide range of flexible training programmes are offered. These range from IT, Horticulture, Retail, Business and employability skills. Through these courses a number of support services are offered to people with disabilities. It is through these supports and flexible training people can achieve certification to allow them to seek employment or continue on to further education. Blended learning facilities are also provided to enable students particularly with mobility and transport issues to study from home.

### Action 97

Promote the Graduate Business Growth Initiative through EI's regional office in the Midlands. The programme supports the placement of graduates with SME companies.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Launched by Enterprise Ireland in 2015, The Graduate Business Growth initiative supports

Enterprise Ireland SME client companies to hire up to two graduates per year. The Scheme has been promoted to Regional companies through one-to-one engagements with clients and through social media in 2015.

#### **Action 98**

Skillnets will continue to fund groups of companies with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees, as well as free training to job-seekers.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Skillnets continues to fund the development of workforce skills in the Midlands Region by funding training of business owners, employees and jobseekers through its training networks

In 2015 (H1-H2), Skillnets funded sixty-three training networks. Of these, fifty-eight networks provided training to businesses in the Midlands Region, including the four networks based in the region: First Polymer Skillnet; Taste4Success Skillnet; MBE Skillnet (Midlands, Border, East); and Space Industry Skillnet. Training delivered in the Midland Region was across all sectors including retail, hospitality, agribusiness, IT and manufacturing technology. In total, 2,018 employees and business owners from 765 businesses in the region participated in training with a Skillnets training network in 2015.

Over 85% of companies supported by Skillnets were SMEs or sole traders. Training was highly diverse ranging from one day workshops on topics such as Retail Information Systems, Electrical Maintenance and Performance Management, to short certified programmes on topics such as Lean, Lead Auditor and Process Validation, to longer certified Diploma and Degree programmes in subject areas such as Polymer Processing, Entrepreneurship and Organic Farming. 78% of all training days delivered through Skillnets networks in 2015 were accredited through NFQ or industry certification.

In 2015, 49 business owners and managers from 31 businesses in the region participated in programmes and workshops delivered by ManagementWorks - the Skillnets initiative that focuses on developing management capability within SMEs, including programmes in Lean Business and Business Growth.

Skillnet networks also provide training for jobseekers. This includes training alongside employed trainees under the Training Networks Programme (TNP) and jobseeker-specific training with work placements under the Job Seeker Support Programme (JSSP). Over 300 jobseekers received industry-led training with a work placement through Skillnets networks in 2015 in the Midlands Region. An example is the Injection Moulding and Manufacturing Skills programme delivered by First Polymer Skillnet in Athlone.

In H1 2016, Skillnets continues to provide training to enterprise, their employees and free training to jobseekers within the Midland Region. Over 100 companies and sole traders within the Midlands Region have participated in training with 29 of the 63 Skillnets networks in Q1 2016. The training undertaken in Q1 2016 was across a range of sectors including retail, agribusiness, ICT, hospitality and manufacturing technology. Provisional

data from Q1 2016 indicates a similar level of engagement by networks with businesses in the region in 2016 as in 2015.

#### Action 99

Atlantic Corridor will run its 'Science with Inspirational Mentors' (SWIM) programme in partnership with SFI and the Amber Centre in Trinity College Dublin to increase participation in STEM education and careers in the Midlands region, with a focus on the Life Sciences sector.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The objective of this project was to create linkages with local industry representatives in the Life Sciences sector and to develop a database of local champions in business and education who can be continually engaged in the promotion of STEM across the Midlands through a suite of engagement measures with second level schools.

In 2015, 1,000 students, 35 mentors, and 38 teachers took part in SWIM.

## IMPROVING PARTICIPATION IN WORK & TRAINING

### Action 100

Engage with Department of Education, IoTs and Universities to determine the feasibility of establishing Third Level outreach facilities.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Offaly County Council (LEO) worked with AIT, Tullamore Rotary Club and Offaly Local Development Company to bring the Springboard Certificate of Entrepreneurship Course to Tullamore. This course commenced in H1 2016 (Jan) with 16 participants.

### Action 101

The Midlands Local Authorities will increase the number of 22-month work placements under the Gateway scheme from 159 to 245, to assist participants gain or update experience of the workplace, to learn new skills and return to the routine of work.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Current numbers on the gateway programme in the region stands at 155 participants (Laois 33, Offaly 55, Westmeath 61 and 6 in Longford – plan to extend this number to 33 in the coming months).

The Local Authorities are keen to advance more Gateway programmes, however, the future of the scheme is under review at national level following representation by the trade unions.

### Action 102

IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will continue to collaborate with the Dept. of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

IDA works closely with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in marketing DSP programs such as JobsPlus & JobPath to IDA client companies. Furthermore, the efforts of IDA are supported by DSP and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for specific projects, where appropriate. This can result in DSP identifying potential employees for a client company and/or the ETB providing tailored training solutions.

**BUILDING BUSINESS NETWORKS****Action 103**

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will facilitate the establishment of an industry-led CEO Forum in the Midlands to connect Irish and foreign owned companies in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Industry CEOs identified, during the stakeholder events held during the development of this Plan, the value of CEOs from both multinational and indigenous companies meeting on a regular basis among themselves. This forum will ideally be only an industry CEO forum so EI and IDA are planning to address this action in H2 2016. Ideally, EI are looking for a number of CEOs who will take ownership of this forum. The agencies can provide support to enable this to get started. This ongoing item is linked through Enterprise Champion sub-groups.

**Action 104**

Regular meetings of local public enterprise partners will be held at regional level to discuss innovative approaches to collaboration to harness the enterprise potential of the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

An active strategic brainstorming group has met a number of times to discuss collaboration with regards to operational plans. Engagement with all LEO's and Local Authorities on the Local and Community Economic Plan process has happened and will continue in the future. From these meetings a number of projects are currently in gestation. These include an initiative supporting part-time entrepreneurship, the LOFAR radio telescope in Birr Castle and an initiative around food hubs. These projects are likely to happen in 2017.

**Action 105**

The Midland Local Authorities will establish an Economic Forum comprising leaders of indigenous and foreign owned businesses and in other key sectors working in partnership with Local Authorities and other relevant organisations to provide a strategic perspective for economic development and help drive economic activity at county and regional level.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

It is proposed that the APJ Midland Regional Implementation Committee will fulfil this role.

**Action 106**

As part of their Global Sourcing initiative, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will work together to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. The agencies will ensure that their clients in the region, where appropriate, are engaged in this initiative.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

As per the APJ 2015, there is a national target to increase multinational corporations (MNC) global sourcing by EI client companies. IDA Ireland is working closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between multinational and indigenous companies. This is reflected by the Global Sourcing Trade Mission hosted in Athlone on May 18th and by the continued use of Enterprise Ireland client companies on company site visits. The Athlone Trade Mission, which was led by Minister Mitchell-O'Connor, was attended by 93 companies and IDA client companies and hosted a total of 54 one-to-one meetings with EI clients which will hopefully lead to sourcing contracts being won in due course.

Multinationals who participated and conducted one-to-one meetings with EI clients at the Global Sourcing Event included; Abbott Diagnostics, Ericsson, AXA Assistance, Jazz Pharmaceuticals, Alexion, NPD Group, Teleflex, Kelpac, Renew Health, Transitions Optical, Logstrup.

**Action 107**

Introduce relevant Enterprise Ireland clients to potential FDI investors to highlight possible collaborations for those investors if locating in Ireland.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

IDA continues to facilitate introductions with relevant EI clients to highlight possible opportunities to collaborate, where appropriate.

**Action 108**

The Midlands Gateway Chamber will celebrate and recognise the contribution of indigenous and multinational companies to the economy of the Midland Region through its annual Best in Business Awards.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

The annual Best in Business Awards Ceremony took place on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2016, providing regional businesses with an excellent networking opportunity, with over 260 people in attendance. Award categories and winners:

Best Midlands Multi-National Business Award Category -Teleflex Medical Athlone

Best Midlands Web Presence - Glenisk

Best Midlands Employer Award - Integra Life Sciences,

Best Midlands Emerging Business Award - Cul Hero's

Best Midlands Retail Business Award – Galvin's for Men

Best Midlands Corporate & Social Responsibility Award - Greene Farm Foods.

Midlands Outstanding Business Award - Grant Engineering

Best Customer Service Award - Colm Quinn Car Sales

The Best Sports, Cultural and Heritage Business Award –Lough Boora Discovery Park.

Midlands Business Person of the Year Award - Mr. Kieran Keenaghan, Banagher Concrete

Mr Tom Parlon, Director General of the Construction Industry Federation received The Midlands Ambassador of the Year Award 2016/2017.

## MARKETING THE REGION AS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO WORK AND LIVE

### MARKETING THE REGION

#### Action 109

Appoint a dedicated official at middle management level to co-ordinate the efforts of the four Local Authorities in providing a cohesive regional focus to the Authorities' activities under the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs, acting as an exemplar to other regions.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The Local Authorities of the Midland Region have tasked the Planning Policy & Research Officer with the role of providing a co-ordinated and cohesive regional focus and response to activities under the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs – Midland Region. The Planning Policy & Research Officer acts as secretariat to the Implementation Committee.

#### Action 110

Strengthen the marketing of **MidlandsIreland.ie**, and continue to support the MidlandsIreland.ie website to promote the region across the straplines of Tourism, Enterprise, Living and Learning, in the interests of regional economic development. An annual work plan will be implemented across these different straplines.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Planning Policy & Research Officer prepares and delivers an agreed annual work programme for the **MidlandsIreland.ie** brand across the straplines of the brand.

#### Action 111

While maintaining a whole-of-region approach to enterprise support and job creation, the Local Authorities will develop a suite of branding initiatives to attract and locate businesses to the Midlands. These include, for example:

- Guide to Doing Business in Laois.
- Invest in Mullingar.
- Westmeath Business Promotion Fund.
- Doing Business in Offaly Guide.
- Marketing Strategy for lands in Council ownership in Longford.
- Strategy to enhance tourism and other enterprise potential in Offaly.
- Destination Athlone

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Laois is promoting the county under Connect2Laois. Longford County Council has recently agreed to commence the process of developing a new brand for the county. Offaly Tourism Group launched 'Offaly – Ireland's Hidden Gem' and associated social media channels in H2 2015. Westmeath are considering branding as part of the new Tourism Strategy.



**Action 112**

Attract at least one additional major employer to the region in the short-term through a collaborative approach on the part of industry

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

In 2009, Tullamore signed a Sister Cities Declaration with the City of Chandler, Arizona, USA. Chandler is a fast growing, dynamic economic hub and the Sister Cities programme provides an enabling platform on which to build relationships for education, arts and tourism and to encourage links for businesses who wish to share best practice, technologies and develop possible partnerships.

In H1 2016, the Midland Gateway Chamber held meetings with the Vice Mayor of Chandler and representatives of Chandler Chamber of Commerce to discuss how to strengthen economic linkages between the regions, with agreement reached that products from Midland based businesses wishing to establish trade links will be displayed at chamber events in Chandler.

**Action 113**

Work with Film Offaly to promote Offaly as a destination for film production, with benefits to local professional, people and businesses.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

In the past 12 months, FilmOffaly has been promoting a pop up film studio in Tullamore. Of particular interest is Ashford Film Studios who have noted this in their books as an overflow space or to accommodate requests they cannot. In October 2015, FilmOffaly received €22,500 from the Rural Economy Development Zones pilot project to market Offaly as a destination for film production.

Meetings were held with the IDA Ireland with a view to further supporting the film studio concept.

In H2 2015, RTE filmed a new pilot drama *Quinn & O'Grady* in Ballyboy and Kinnitty which is hoped to return for a full series.

**Action 114**

The Midlands Local Authorities will commence a regeneration programme to enhance the streetscape in the main towns and villages.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Laois County Council is in the process of commissioning a vision statement for Portlaoise Town which will include a public realm strategy and policies and manuals in relation to the improvement of the general streetscape. Shopfront grants have been advertised on a

county wide level to help improve the streetscape of the towns and villages throughout Laois.

Longford: A Regeneration Officer was appointed in 2015 as part of a newly formed Longford Regeneration Unit, which aims to coordinate the physical, social and economic rejuvenation of Longford Town and County. A fully resourced Regeneration Team has now been put in place with planning and engineering expertise and administrative support. As part of the Regeneration project, research and preparatory work has been ongoing to identify avenues to bring forward the rejuvenation of the Connolly Barracks site and area.

Offaly County Council is pursuing a project to rejuvenate and redevelop the public realm of the retail core of Tullamore town. The project was awarded 50% funding through the Urban Development Strand of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme. Tendering for design consultants is currently underway and in accordance with the ERDF procedure the project must be completed by the end of 2018.

In H2 2105- H1 2016, major enhancement works were undertaken in Emmett Square and Wilmer Road in Birr.

Westmeath County Council has secured a grant of €1.5m for the towns of Athlone and Mullingar and is augmenting this with a local contribution of a further €3m giving a total fund of €3m per town. In both cases, consultants are being procured to advise on the traffic and urban design elements of each proposal and the preparation of planning documentation. Thereafter, construction and implementation will follow and both projects must be completed by the end of 2018.

#### **Action 115**

Explore funding options to pilot Rural Economic Development Zones, as recommended in the CEDRA report.

**Update:** Complete

#### **Narrative:**

Each Local Authority within the Midland region submitted at least one application under the REDZ call in H2 2015. The following provides a summary of project:

INSPIRE Rathdowney, Laois will recruit 20 participants from the Rathdowney area and assist them through dedicated facilitations to explore and create new business opportunities for the Rathdowney area.

In Longford, the funding allocated to Connolly Barracks as part of the REDZ scheme has acted as a catalyst for the development of a regeneration unit within LCC and gathered public momentum behind it through a sense of progress and a recognition of the need for a transformative project in this areas of the town. The REDZ funding resulted in the stabilisation of Connolly Barracks and in doing so supported enterprises from the construction, architectural conservation, waste recovery and utility Industries. The stabilisation of the structure, enabled the hosting of the Christmas Market within the town

centre and will facilitate future events at this central town location.

Offaly County Council secured funded for four projects:

- Social Enterprise Project – eight rural communities working on social enterprise plans.
- Film Offaly – development of promotional materials.
- Ferbane Business & Technology Park – provision of additional industrial kitchen and enterprise space in Ferbane Food Campus.
- Youth Entrepreneurship – Underway, trainer/facilitator working with a number of youth groups.

Westmeath County Council made a successful application for the development of an additional five e-working centres (Castlepollard, Delvin, Rochfortbridge, Kinnegad and Killucan. Castlepollard); provision of dedicated training for tourism service providers, and supports for the development of multi activity trails and experiences.

#### **Action 116**

Work with local businesses in the Gateway and principal towns to apply for the Purple Flag<sup>2</sup>, enhancing the region's reputation as a place to work, live or visit.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Mullingar: has successfully retained Purple Flag Status for 2016.

Longford Chamber of Commerce has recently agreed to take the lead in this process – timelines yet to be agreed. Athlone, Portlaoise and Tullamore have considered applying for Purple Flag status and have deferred application of same.

#### **Action 117**

The Midland Local Authorities will continue to develop comprehensive programmes for Culture Night and Heritage Week across the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Local Authorities within the Midland Region are committed to both Heritage Week and Culture Night. In 2015, 110 events took place across the region on Culture Night and 134 scheduled events took place during Heritage week. It should be noted that a number of additional unscheduled pop-up events took place all across the region.

A similar number of events are planned for 2016.

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<sup>2</sup> The Purple Flag is a designation that is given to a town that reaches a certain standard of service and security in the realm of evening and night time activities and has recently been awarded to Mullingar.

#### Action 118

Construct new Library in Portlaoise. This €3.2m development in the Main Street area of Portlaoise, will be a very significant regeneration of a vacant property

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Under the Library Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021, €1.65M was allocated to the development of a new library on Main Street, Portlaoise. Tendering for the design team is underway, with closing date of 1st June 2016.

#### Action 119

Refurbish Portarlinton, Edgesworthtown and Moate Libraries.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Portarlinton Library: Since the 1960's Portarlinton courthouse and library were co-located. The Courts service vacated the building in 2012 and this presented an opportunity for Laois County Council to extend the library and refurbish the space. The new library officially opened in February 2016, offers a state of the art facility for the whole community. The total cost of the project c. €780,000, Grant AID from DECLG €248,000

The Edgeworthstown Library project will shortly be advertised on e-tender website with appointment of contractors in H2 2016, commencement of works in 2017 and completion of works in H1 2018.

Moate Library: The old courthouse building on Moate's Main Street presented an opportunity for Westmeath County Council. The €500,000 refurbishment includes library facilities, meeting rooms, and a civic plaza to the front of the building. The refurbished facility opened in H1 2016.

