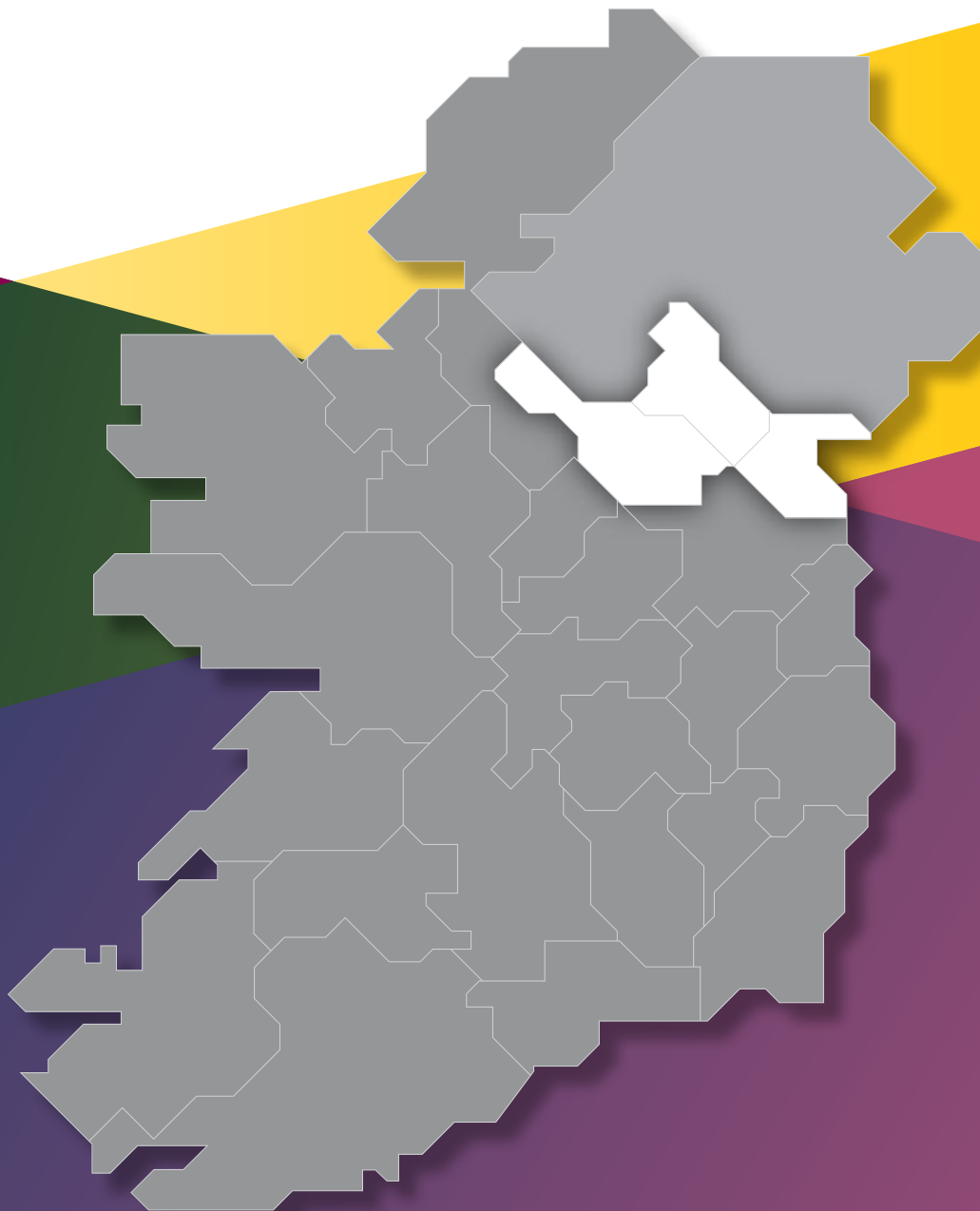




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

NORTH-EAST

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Report



An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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Minister's Foreword

I welcome this publication of the final Progress Report on implementation of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. I am pleased to see that the North-East Steering Committee working with regional stakeholders has advanced all of the actions set out in the Regional Enterprise Plan and continue to drive ongoing actions.

Our Programme for Government has balanced regional growth at its core and seeks to pursue a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland. This is seen in the strategies of the enterprise agencies; the valuable work of the local enterprise offices at county level; as well as through competitive funding and other strategic investments to reinforce regional enterprise ecosystems, including the regional enterprise development fund; regional technology clustering; investment in RD&I infrastructures; and the IDA Ireland regional property programme.

There is added value to be created however if we all work together locally to understand challenges; recognise new opportunities; and make the most of our complementary skills and resources. The Regional Enterprise Plans initiative, first launched in early 2019, takes a 'bottom-up' approach and brings together regional stakeholders to focus on addressing both vulnerabilities and opportunities critical to enterprise growth and job creation in each of regions, including the North-East.

I want to thank all the members of the North-East Regional Steering Committee for all of your work in 2020 and since the commencement of the Regional Enterprise Plan and for your input to this Progress Report. I want to commend in particular the work of the Chair Richard Hanlon, Chief Commercial Officer, Aon Cyber Solutions and welcome Caroline Brady, recently appointed Programme Manager for the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan.

It is timely now, as we work to assist businesses all over the country to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to consider also what will help grow and sustain businesses over the longer term as they negotiate the transformative effects of digitalisation, and address both opportunities and challenges in a low carbon economy.

The creation of a new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the North-East has already commenced and will play a very important role in recognising and realising the potential that exists in this region. I very much look forward to further engagement with the North-East Regional Steering Committee over the coming months as the new North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 takes shape.



Damen English

Message from the Chairperson

This final Progress Report provides a detailed summary of accomplishments under the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020, based on our five Strategic Objectives being reported under our economic developmental themes of talent leverage, workforce development, SME resilience, sectoral clustering and tourism visitor engagement.

Despite the unprecedented and daunting economic challenges faced during the 2020 pandemic period, this report demonstrates, within our Regional Enterprise Plan, significant progress on our ongoing efforts to facilitate realisation of the region's economic potential raising both the level and quality of employment across the region.

Despite the difficulties experienced by many businesses across the North-East, the report details the progress made in positively influencing enterprise and job creation in the region. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the work of our enterprise agencies in supporting businesses through these challenging times including, during the plan period, over €10.2m has been secured for the North-East under the *Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)* with an additional €8.5M secured under the *Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF)*.

The Plan had ambitious goals as we sought to leverage the full extent of talent in the region, implement a holistic approach to workforce development, strengthen SME resilience, drive a higher level of economic success in the region by building on niche strengths and strengthen the attractiveness of the region as a tourism destination.

Additionally, as a border region, we face particular challenges from the economic uncertainty created by Brexit. For that reason, the Implementation Committee placed additional emphasis on employment sustainability and resilience undertaking collaborative efforts with the various stakeholders, both practical and strategic, helping enterprises across the region not only in meeting those challenges but also in seeking opportunities for our region.

I would also like to thank our Programme Manager, Caroline Brady for her work in coordinating this final Progress Report, the Steering Committee and our various working groups for their dedicated efforts in spite of a challenging environment.

Our Regional Enterprise Plan emphasis on sustainability and resilience has helped make significant progress as we work to further realise the region's economic potential and make the North-East region a great place to both work and live.



Richard Hanlon,
Chief Commercial Officer,
Aon Cyber Solutions

1. North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Update

NORTH-EAST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Leverage the full extent of talent residing in the North-East to drive new enterprise investment and growth.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Implement a holistic approach to workforce development, matching workers' skills to enterprise needs and further developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of those currently employed.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Strengthen and support SMEs resilience to achieve development and growth in the face of external challenges.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Drive a higher level of economic success by building on niche strengths and fostering clustering among enterprises.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Strengthen the attractiveness of the North-East as a destination to visit.

Overall high-level outcomes for the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

This is the final Progress Report of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 which closes out this iteration of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan. For the Steering Committee to present a final assessment on the level of implementation achieved during the 2019-2020 period, actions have been classified into four categories.

Complete: The Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed within the scope and lifetime of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020.

Action commenced but requires further work:

The Committee has deemed that while these actions were not completed in full, work had commenced, and significant progress has been made. This work will continue, as many projects are of a delivery period which exceed the plan duration. The Committee will consider if these actions could be included as part of future strategic objectives in the new *North-East Regional Enterprise Plan through to 2024*.

Action not commenced: The Committee has deemed that these actions were either not initiated, or insufficient progress was made within the scope and lifetime of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. However, this does not preclude these actions from being reconsidered as part of future strategic objectives in the new North-East Regional Enterprise Plan.

Table 1: Progress on Actions during 2020 and Final Status

| North-East Regional Enterprise Plan | |
|--|----|
| Total Actions | 24 |
| Complete | 14 |
| Action commenced but requires further work | 10 |
| Action not commenced | 0 |

Each of the previous Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017/8 set out two core outcomes for achievement in each region by the end of 2020 and these continued to be monitored under the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020:

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

Table 2: Utilising data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS), the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the North-East region during the period Q1 2015 up to Q4 2020 are as follows:

| Region | Numbers Employed | | | Actual Increase in Employment | Unemployment Rate | |
|------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| | Q1 2015 | Q4 2020 | Growth Rate Q1 2015 – Q4 2020 | | Q1 2015 | Q4 2020 |
| North-East | 169,500 | 178,900 | 5.5% | 9,400 | 8.6% | 4.2% |
| State | 2,014,400 | 2,295,200 | 13.9% | 280,800 | 10.5% | 7.1% |

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q4 2020

Since launch of Regional Action Plan for Jobs in 2015, 9,400 more people are in employment between Q1 2015 and to Q4 2020. This is an increase of 5.5 percent which is below the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 target while the unemployment rate also fell from 8.6 percent to 4.2 percent over the same period, in the region.

The figures in Table 2 exclude people who were receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) at the end of 2020. As of the 31st December 2020, a total of 18,318 people were in receipt of the PUP (see Table 3 for a county and regional breakdown).

Table 3: Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at the end of 2020

| County | Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (Number) |
|------------|--|
| Cavan | 9,369 |
| Louth | 4,708 |
| Monaghan | 4,241 |
| North-East | 18,318 |

Source: CSO, Labour Market Live Register
<https://data.cso.ie/table/LRW03>

2020 Highlights



Under the Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) seven projects from the North-East region were awarded funding totaling €8.5m.



Throughout 2020 the Regional Skills Forum (RSF) worked in collaboration with various schools and departments in DkIT and the private sector to support 41 Springboard course applications. This collaboration helped in the successful application for 13 Springboard & Human Capital Initiative (HCI) courses from Level 6 to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), providing 227 places for students.



A number of cluster projects in the North-East Region progressed including: a review and restructure of the M1 Payments Corridor was completed and relaunched in September 2020 under a new brand, *The Fintech Corridor* (TFC). The regional E-Commerce Cluster whose aim is to increase the capacity and capability of our regional ecommerce businesses has 45 out of the 60 businesses recruited. 2020 saw the establishment of the *Focused Engineering Network* DAC a brand and a governance board was also established. Some 80 companies were visited and a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system established with 228 contacts fully catalogued.



Fáilte Ireland hosted a virtual Meitheal (online tour operator event) in July 2020. A total of 28 appointments were taken 16 international and 12 Irish incoming, demonstrating a strong interest from Irish operators.



Ongoing collaboration and engagement between RSF, DkIT, Cavan/Monaghan Education and Training Board (ETB) and Louth/Meath ETB have resulted in the successful development and provision of a number of industry specific upskilling and reskilling programmes in the following sectors: food, manufacturing, digital, supply chain as well as the promotion of all types of apprenticeships.



Under the Border Brexit Stimulus Fund, a suite of targeted development programmes were developed and are currently being rolled out by the LEOs in the border region. One such programme, *The North-East Export Development Programme* will facilitate small businesses across Cavan, Monaghan and Louth to prepare an export readiness plan for 2021 with the support of the LEOs and Enterprise Ireland.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Leverage the full extent of talent residing in the North-East to drive new enterprise investment and growth

**Action 1:**

Using the methodology from the Louth County Council AIRO study on commuting, along with the Dundalk IT catchment study, extend and expand the study to cover the whole of the North-East.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Local authorities, DkIT, IDA Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Demographic studies were completed in 2019 across the three local authorities which identified workforce, skills and commuter patterns in the North-East region. It is proposed that the findings from these demographic studies be collated and the three local authorities along with their LEO's would collaborate with DkIT in the preparation of a regional study. While the individual studies have been completed (phase 1), the project has not yet moved to phase two completion as was proposed for Q2 2020 owing to the constraints posed by COVID-19.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

- As part of its strategic planning process for 2020-23, DkIT commissioned the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to provide a socio-demographic data report and mapping tool, taking in its catchment in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This report will be compiled using the data from the demographic study findings from the three local authorities and their LEO's.
- The education and skills agenda will continue to be of critical importance to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Ireland as it continues to be the case that the availability of talent is a key differentiator for locations to win high quality FDI.
- Maintaining strong relationships across all key stakeholders will be critical to maximising IDA's capacity to support their client skills and training needs.

| |
|--|
| Action 2: |
| IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to use the results of the study as part of their marketing and promotional material for both domestic and foreign investment. |
| Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members: |
| IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland |
| Timeframe for delivery: |
| Q2 2020 |
| Final Status: |
| Complete |
| Outline of work undertaken during 2020: |
| <p>IDA Ireland continues to market and position the North-East region to potential investors from across the globe, particularly in the areas of manufacturing and local business services and it is utilising the available demographic studies in its engagement with prospective investors.</p> <p>IDA Ireland has also been promoting the region as a location for second site solutions, high value manufacturing, fintech and remote working. IDA Ireland will continue to work closely with Enterprise Ireland and its indigenous base of companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the region.</p> |
| Final outcome achieved: |
| Work is ongoing in terms of marketing and promoting the North-East Region for domestic investment and FDI. |

Action 3:

Strengthen the value proposition of the North-East for new enterprise investment by examining the potential of greenfield and brownfield sites in the region that can be made client ready in order to secure a second-site win.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

IDA Ireland has worked with stakeholders including local authorities, the three Local Enterprise Offices, commercial property owners and property agents to influence the requirements for regional property solutions for marketing purposes.

IDA Ireland will continue to proactively engage with various stakeholders including development/construction firms and international investors to influence on the requirements for regional property solutions for marketing to future investment opportunities and outlining the successes of IDA Ireland and others in successfully marketing regional commercial properties of scale in recent years.

IDA Ireland will continue to progress and review locations and availability of commercial property with a focus on the region and will continue to invest in and market its business and technology parks and strategic greenfield sites in the region.

Final outcome achieved:

- Completed the delivery of a 3,049 sq./m (c. 32,819 sq./ft) office facility on the IDA Ireland Finnabair Business and Technology Park, Dundalk, Co. Louth.
- Construction of c. 1,460 sq./m (c. 15,795 sq./ft) of technology and office space has commenced on the IDA Ireland Monaghan Business and Technology Park.
- Construction of a c. 3,160 sq./m (c. 34,000 sq./ft) of technology and office space has commenced on the IDA Ireland Science and Technology Park in Dundalk, Co. Louth.
- Planning Permission has been granted to Enterprising Monaghan in 2020 for M:Tek 4 (30,000 sq. ft) – currently awaiting the appropriate funding opportunity to advance this project.
- Construction commenced on The Ridge, Castleblayney Enterprise Centre – new €3.5m 13,500 sq. ft development.

Action 4:

Consider opportunities to better position and promote the North-East to enhance and highlight the attractiveness of the region to live and work in.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

Place-making is a key component of Ireland's current and future value proposition for winning Foreign Direct Investment. Talent is key to attracting Foreign Direct Investment and creating attractive places is key to attracting talent. Good place-making is good planning policy and good enterprise policy.

In 2020, Enterprise Ireland has provided infrastructural funding, through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and the Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) totalling €13.5m to 11 projects in the North-East, to support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development at a regional level, enhancing the attractiveness of the region as place to work.

In 2020 Monaghan County Council engaged the services of Grant Thornton to prepare an economic appraisal for the county which was completed March 2020. This report will be used to promote the attractiveness of Monaghan as a place to live and invest.

Final outcome achieved:

- The role of place-making in helping to enhance Ireland's attractiveness to investors was highlighted at an event in March 2020. Hosted by IDA Ireland in partnership with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the event was held as the second phase of that Department's Urban Regeneration and Development Fund was being rolled out. Under the call, local authorities are invited to submit proposals for transformational place-making and urban development projects that will enhance the attractiveness and liveability of Ireland's cities and large towns and support compact urban growth, one of the key strategic objectives of Project Ireland 2040.
- Combined Enterprise Ireland funding (REDF and BEDF) of €13.5m will contribute significantly to enterprise development in the North-East region.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Implement a holistic approach to workforce development, matching workers' skills to enterprise needs and further developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of those currently employed

**Action 1:**

As part of the Skills for Growth initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises in the North-East identify their skills needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity.

Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills needs.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Education Training Board, Department of Social Protection

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

- As part of the *Skills for Growth* initiative the Regional Skills Forum continued to assist local enterprises in the North-East identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools. Ensuring that the region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skill needs have been identified, the Regional Skills Fora continue to link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need.
- Enterprise Ireland worked in collaboration with the *Skills to Advance* team in Solas, the Education and Training Boards in the North-East and North West, and the IDA, on the development of a Supervisory Management Training Programme for companies in the Region.
- Enterprise Ireland is currently running the Phase Two *Spotlight on Skills* programme online and it is being rolled out nationwide from January 2021. In November 2020 a Spotlight on Skills critical skills workshop targeted companies in the North-East (12 client companies from the North-East registered to participate) This programme was successfully piloted in the North-East (with 11 companies and 35 participants) and has been rolled out nationwide.
- IDA continues to proactively engage with and support all regional educational and skills stakeholders to ensure any FDI skills gaps are addressed and supported. IDA Ireland support includes the following;
 - » Linking existing FDI clients in the region with the manager of the Regional Skills Forum and DkIT on any skills needs/deficits.
 - » Bringing visiting FDI itineraries to meet with local educational stakeholders to understand skills availability in the region which also helps to inform educational stakeholders of developing/or new skill requirements.
 - » IDA Ireland participating in educational stakeholder's course development meetings
 - » IDA Ireland facilitated Louth Meath Education and Training Board's (ETB) development of the Advance Manufacturing and Technology Training Centre in Dundalk under the BEDF.
- The upskilling, retraining and reskilling provided by Springboard, Skillnet Ireland, the Human Capital Initiative (HCI), Solas and the Education and Training Boards are very important in helping to close mismatches between skills availability and the specific needs of FDI clients.

Final outcome achieved:

Despite the significant difficulties with COVID-19, the Regional Skills Forum manager has engaged with over 100 companies in the North-East Region and carried out skills audits with over 25 companies. The Regional Skills Forum Manager continues to engage with Enterprise Ireland companies through the Spotlight on Skills process.

Action 2:

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

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum, Education and Training Board

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

The Explore programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the region. The impact of COVID-19 has been detrimental to the running of the Explore programme in 2020.

Final outcome achieved:

One programme was run successfully in Cavan and Monaghan in partnership with Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board, with 14 participants completing the programme from three companies.

Action 3:

Support education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+ 2019 in collaboration with local enterprise in order to increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling within the region.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum (RSF), Higher Education Institutes'

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

Throughout 2020 the RSF worked in collaboration with various schools and departments in DkIT and the private sector to support 41 Springboard course applications in 2020. The support provided to DkIT helped in the successful application for 13 Springboard and HCI courses from Level 6 to Level 9 on the NFQ, providing 227 places for students.

Final outcome achieved:

During 2020 there were 16 Springboard part-time courses running with 13 newly awarded funding (Levels 6 through 9) at Dundalk Institute of Technology. Details of the courses include the following:

- Certificate in Culinary Skills
- Certificate in Fundamentals of Food Production Management
- Certificate in Health and Safety for the Manufacturing Industry
- Certificate in Programming
- Certificate in Supply Chain Management
- Certificate in User Experience (UX) Design
- Diploma in Biopharmaceutical Manufacturing
- Diploma in Food and Agri-business
- Diploma in Food Supply Chain Operations
- Higher Diploma in Science in 3D Computer Animation
- Higher Diploma in Science in Computing (Part-time / 2 years)
- Higher Diploma in Science in Networking and System Administration (Part-time / 2 years)
- Post Graduate Diploma in Technical Direction for Computer Animation Production
- 10 Human Capital Initiative courses awarded (these are all full-time postgrad L9 courses)

| |
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| Action 4: |
| Support all actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required. |
| Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members: |
| Regional Skills Forum |
| Timeframe for delivery: |
| 2020 |
| Final Status: |
| Complete |
| Outline of work undertaken during 2020: |
| The Regional Skills Forum manager continued to engage with and had numerous meetings with education and training providers across the region, namely Louth Meath Education and Training Board, Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Regional Skills and Training Centre, Drogheda Institute of Further Education, M1 Skillnet and Dundalk Chamber Skillnet. |
| Final outcome achieved: |
| Support provided for Regional Enterprise Plan actions as required. |

Action 5:

Communicate to employers the services available through Regional Skills Forum to assist with resolution of emerging skills needs.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

- The Regional Skills Forum Manager has engaged with over 100 companies to date in 2020.
- Strong use of social media tools such as Twitter, LinkedIn and the Regional Skills website are now very active and continue to spread awareness of the Regional Skills Forum and various supports available to employers.
- The Regional Skills Forum also introduced an e-zine newsletter to promote the workings and create more interest in the activities of the Regional Skills Forum.
- Regional Skills Forum has engaged with companies referred by Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and others.
- Regional Skills Forum has attended various employer-related events, webinars and skills events online.
- The Regional Skills Forum continues to identify emerging skills needs and shortages in our region. This intelligence along with national intelligence and various sector reports are shared with various education and training providers to create skills delivery responses, create courses, and increase graduate capacity.

Final outcome achieved:

RSF manager successfully communicated Regional Skills Forum services to employers across the region.

Action 6:

Support the Regional Skills Forum in establishing formal engagement between DkIT, the Education and Training Boards and specific industries (precision engineering, fintech, and bioeconomy) in the region and developing apprenticeships, with particular regard to planning for new and emerging skills sets over the longer term.

Working Group Members:

DkIT, Education and Training Boards

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020

- DkIT in its School of Business and Humanities have invested in and appointed a dedicated head of section of part-time and bespoke training whose role is to support the development of industry-facing programmes.
- As part of its Corporate Partnership Programme (CPP) DkIT have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with a number of progressive companies that included development and delivery of upskilling for ABP Food Group and linked food sector companies with two part-time courses:
 - » Certificate in Health and Safety (Manufacturing Industry) and
 - » Certificate in Fundamentals of Food Production delivered offsite and online for the cohort of companies.
- A MoU with *Creative Spark* led to a certificate in *Digital Design and Fabrication Development* in line with its development of its industry focused FabLab that has been validated in 2020 to run in January 2021 co-delivered at DkIT and Creative Spark.
- A supply chain management one Year part-time course at Level 7 was developed with industry input including ABP and Cargotech and awarded funding through the Springboard + programme to run in January 2021.
- Roll out of course provision for specific DkIT Corporate Partnership Programme included dedicated courses in Lean 6 sigma with Cargotech and Lean Six Sigma with Paypal which were disrupted by COVID-19 and reengaged in September 2020 moving online.
- DkIT Corporate Partnership Programme memberships were extended to include clusters and industry networks with MoUs developed (postponed due to COVID-19) with the North-East Engineering Network and the Fintech Corridor Initiative (formerly M1PC).
- Ongoing collaboration with DkIT and the PLC college within Cavan -Monaghan ETB – Monaghan institute offer outreach course in Level 8 Business Degree.
- The Regional Skills Forum has also participated in developing traineeships (e.g. Leadership and Management Programme) for the North-East region and promoted all types of apprenticeships, including new national apprenticeships and traditional craft apprenticeships in 2020.
- MoUs have been drafted and agreed between DkIT and the North-East Engineering Network and the Fintech Corridor initiative. Given the current constraints presented by COVID-19, the official signing of the MoU's will take place as soon as can be facilitated.

Final outcome achieved:

- Ongoing collaboration and engagement between RSF, DkIT, Cavan Monaghan ETB and Louth Meath ETB have resulted in the successful development and provision of a number of industry specific upskilling and reskilling programmes in the following sectors: food, manufacturing, digital, supply chain as well as the promotion of all types of apprenticeships, including new national apprenticeships and traditional craft apprenticeships in 2020.
- A number of MOU's have been signed or are at an advanced stage between DkIT and various sectors including food, manufacturing, digital, engineering and fintech, these further support the development of new collaborations including skills development between DkIT, the RSF and the relevant stakeholders.

Action 7:

The education providers in the region, include the ETBs and Dundalk Institute of Technology, will explore development of a model where collaborative opportunities are initiated to address skills gaps with both short-term pre-employment and existing employee upskilling training interventions.

Working Group Members:

DkIT, Education and Training Board

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

- In conjunction with Solas, the North-East Regional Skills Forum collaborated with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and local ETB's to successfully delivery a pilot leadership and management programme in the North-East.
- Cavan/Monaghan ETB have delivered three programmes of the level 4 ILM Certificate in Leadership and Management course of which 35 employees from 14 employers have participated.
- In 2020, the North-East Regional Skills Forum collaborated with the Cavan/Monaghan Education and Training Board to run a successful Explore programme, aimed at upskilling those in employment who require improved digital skills.
- *Skills to Advance* by the Education and Training Boards continues to provide three access routes to all levels of further education and training provision for employees and employers, as follows:
 - Route 1:** Direct employee access – where employees can access further education and training in Education and Training Boards directly by enrolling for relevant development options.
 - Route 2:** Access via enterprise engagement – where employees access further education and training through their employer partnering with an Education and Training Board.
 - Route 3:** Regional initiatives – where employees participate in further education and training as a result of a particular identified regional skills development initiative.
- The Springboard+ multi annual funding call for industry focused programmes has now been opened-up to learners, irrespective of their employment status (it was previously focused on the unemployed) giving substantially subsidised training and upskilling options for employers.

Following intensive consultation with industry, DkIT have developed a range of Springboard+ funded upskilling courses for industry that then subject to demand become full fee paying unsubsidised courses through the DkIT part-time such as including ata analytics, digital marketing, applied electrical engineering, augmented and virtual reality, food production management etc

Final outcome achieved:

The North-East Regional Skills Forum in collaboration with DkIT, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and local ETB's have, and will continue to work together to identify, develop and implement a broad range of programmes designed to meet employer needs through reskilling and upskilling the workforce in the North-East region.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Strengthen and support SMEs resilience to achieve development and growth in the face of external challenges

**Action 1:**

Deliver a new Plato Programme across the North-East region which will support SMEs through mentoring and networking.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work achieved in 2020:

The Plato EBR (East Border Region) programme is a business development programme providing opportunities for networking and management development to SME's throughout the East Border Region. There are eight funders involved in this truly collaborative cross-border and regional initiative. Four councils in Northern Ireland and four councils in the Republic of Ireland: Monaghan - Louth - Meath - Cavan - Newry Mourne and Down District - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough - Mid-Ulster district - Fermanagh and Omagh district.

Final Outcome:

There are eight clusters active in all council areas North and South, each cluster composed of approximately 12 companies. A group of small participant companies are led by two individuals/ senior executives from larger parent companies in the region.

- Two clusters completed, further six to complete, the programme shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic (with the exception of September meetings held physically).
- The Programme Managers have been requested to extend cluster participation given the lack of networking forums for small businesses especially during pandemic.
- If appropriate, Plato training programmes were offered virtually during 2020.

Action 2:

Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices will encourage and support participation at national and international trade-shows.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

LEOs and Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

This action has been severely impacted during 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic with trade shows cancelled or postponed. Trade shows taking place virtually don't require the same level of support intervention, but companies continue to be encouraged to participate.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) will continue, as part of their service and support offering, to promote awareness of all supports available to small businesses to explore international markets, particularly in light of Brexit and COVID-19 business recovery.

One of key LEO supports for small businesses seeking to explore export markets is the Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters grant (TAME) which allows for some financial support towards attending international trade shows. Due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, there has been flexibility given to approved applicants who had to adapt and attend virtual tradeshow and buyer meetings.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Under the *Border Brexit Stimulus Fund*, a suite of targeted development programmes is being rolled out by the LEOs in the border region. The North-East Export Development Programme is due to commence in December 2020 and will facilitate small businesses across Cavan, Monaghan and Louth to prepare an export readiness plan for 2021 with the support of the LEOs and Enterprise Ireland.

Action 3:

Increase the number of agri-food companies that are supported by the LEAN Six Sigma Green Belt programme at DKIT.

Working Group Members:

LEO's, DKIT

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

The focus for 2020 was on further roll-out of the Enterprise Ireland *LEAN for Micro* programme on a collaborative basis between the LEOs and DkIT. The Lean Six Sigma programme was hosted in DkIT in 2019 (semester two) with full participation but disrupted by COVID-19 and moved for online delivery recommencing semester one 2020 (starting end September).

Final Outcome achieved:

In 2020 there was no demand for outreach delivery in the region such as previous iterations which ran in Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre (CITC) and directly for individual agri-food companies such as Lakeland Dairies and Manor Farm. CITC moved to facilitating DkIT outreach for the delivering its Certificate in Data Analytics for Business instead of Lean with a full cohort of students and was facilitated online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Action 4:

Develop a volunteer mentor programme in the North-East modelled on the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Microsoft-LEO partnership in the Dublin area.

Working Group Members:

LEO's, Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to Q4 2021

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Following a lengthy engagement process, in 2019, with a multinational company regarding the initiative, the company, in the end, was not able to facilitate. The initiative was put on hold to be revisited in Q4 2021.

Enterprise Ireland's mentor network, supporting on this action item, is re-designing the CSR volunteer mentor programme model and the proposed North-East programme will benefit from this re-design, with an expected launch date of a new programme in January 2021.

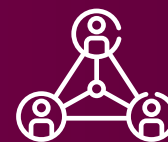
Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

- During the COVID-19 pandemic it has not been possible to progress the search for a new volunteer mentor company.
- Securing this mentor company will be critical to the success of the initiative but will be challenging in this COVID-19 environment and with the Brexit timeline moving ever closer.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Drive a higher level of economic success by building on niche strengths and fostering clustering among enterprises

**Action 1:**

Support the establishment of the Focused Engineering Network and engage with its stakeholders to boost this niche industry in the North-East.

Working Group Members:

Focussed Engineering Network DAC

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

- Establishment of Focused Engineering Network (FEN) DAC as a legal entity and brand.
- Raising awareness within the engineering community of FEN and its objectives.
- 80 companies visited (COVID-19 restrictions limited travel).
- Establishment of a governance board.
- Establishment of industry based working groups.
- CRM system established with 228 contacts fully catalogued.
- 14 local sourcing projects underway with three completed, to date the links have generated approximately €20k of work retained in the region. Negotiations are still very active with others in the region of €1.5m.
- Links created with other LEO and engineering clusters within Ireland, through various means the network has created links and awareness with LEO in Donegal, Westmeath, West Cork, and Carlow.
- Cooperation and assistance provided to other government agencies, mainly in the form of continuous contact with Enterprise Ireland, Intertrade Ireland and IDA Ireland.
- Encouraging industry projects and cooperation with third level education, feedback from the industry has led to various negotiations regarding CAD upskilling, this has been with ETB's, industry providers and DkIT. To date, DkIT have instigated two design and fabrication qualifications. The network has also been involved with the creation of the new Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCE) in Dundalk with the lead stakeholder as Louth Meath ETB.

Final outcome achieved:

- The Focused Engineering Network is fully operational with a network manager in place. Some 228 contacts for the network have been identified as well as a range of local sourcing projects underway. There is ongoing collaboration with third level education in terms of trying to identify and meet the needs of the industry. Links with similar clusters are also being actively developed.

Action 2:

'Leverage the opport'unities presented by the recent funding of the Bioconnect Innovation Centre to advance the bio-economy industry.

Working Group Members:

Bioconnect Innovation Centre CLG

Timeframe for delivery:

Considerable progress has been made to date in respect of this three-year (initial) funded programme and it is expected that the facility will be completed by March 2022.

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Throughout 2020 work continued in promoting the development of the Bioconnect Innovation Centre which when complete will help position Monaghan and the North-East region as a centre of excellence for biotechnology research in the agri-food sector. This project will support the performance of cutting-edge biotechnology research by companies through the provision of office, laboratory, and biotechnology focused research capabilities for all stages of business development. While considerable progress has been achieved, COVID-19 has delayed some elements of the project including engagement with firms throughout the region.

In March 2020 a new CEO was appointed and will be responsible for building both membership and profile of this new €5m facility in Monaghan.

Planning permission has been granted for the facility and a call for tenders has been issued with a closing date of 18 Dec 2020.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action

Further work is required in a number of areas including the following:

- Expansion of network in the region.
- Recruitment of researchers for the centre and the development of key areas of expertise in line with member's needs.

Action 3:

Explore the establishment of similar network in financial services, payments and agri-food to support the sharing of ideas and peer to peer learning within the region. Seek to extend and connect these networks with aligned activities outside of the region and on a North-South basis.

Working Group Members:

LEO's, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, InterTrade Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

DkIT has been successfully funded under *Enterprise Ireland's Regional Technology Clustering Fund* to employ an education and outreach manager to establish a connected health and wellbeing industry cluster in the North-East, and to provide education and training, with related supports for full and part-time students, on industry cluster development and management programmes.

Financial services and payments cluster:

- Complete review, restructure and rename of the M1 Payments Corridor, Steering and Executive Sub Committee groups and role requirements has been completed (recruitment of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland members).
- A complete rebrand of M1PC identity and strategy to reflect a cross-border and regional focus. Brand survey feedback and SWOT analysis, brand identity and digital marketing: website and content review, logo, tagline and social media design completed - The Fintech Corridor brand identity completed, agreed and developed.
- Recruitment of members to the Brand Ambassador and Advisory Board (recruitment to a 50/50 basis of Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland members).
- Monthly AB and quarterly BA meetings confirmed and completed in 2020.
- North/South rotating chair (for review pre-March 2021).
- Next steps and milestones reviewed and agreed (COVID-19 changes).

Regional E-Commerce Cluster:

- Monaghan LEO as lead partner secured €56,000 funding from Enterprise Ireland competitive funds to create a Regional E-Commerce cluster. The aim of the initiative is to increase the capacity and capability of our regional ecommerce businesses..
- A digital champion has been appointed to oversee the initiative and the programme outputs. In this regard the E-Commerce cluster targeted a minimum of 60 businesses from the region which includes Monaghan, Cavan, Louth and Meath.
- The cluster brings together online retailers to share experience, best practice, access online expertise and support members to develop and grow their online business domestically and internationally.

The Fintech Corridor (TFC) was launched on 30th September 2020 and since then TFC has gained 21 new members. TFC is supported by a programme manager who was appointed in Q1 2020. Since then there has been continual growth of the network from progress with one to-one meetings leading to corridor expansion: secured support/partnering from the following: Ulster University, Tech Nation, Payhere, FPAI, BPI-Uniteck (*Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland*), DWEN, Signium, Vertical Structure, NI Cyber, Oberkorn, Glandore, Regional Skills North-East, Fintech NI, AWS, Sonica, Lightyear, Fondy, AIB and Stripe.

The Regional eCommerce Cluster is progressing well with 45 out of the 60 businesses recruited. It is providing education and practical support that includes website review, one-on-one mentoring, advice and training to make a success of the online aspect of their business and to make sure that they will get a return for the investment of having an eCommerce website.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Connected health and wellbeing industry cluster North-East requires further work with an expected completion date of 2023.

DkIT are to recruit an Education and Outreach Manager to initiate cluster development in the connected health and wellbeing area.

Work on the development of an agri-food network was due to commence in 2020. Due to the restrictions posed by COVID-19 this action was not progressed.

Action 4:

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

Working Group Members:

Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, LEO's

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to 2021

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

The Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Global Sourcing event was to take place in the North-East in May 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Rescheduling of the Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Global Sourcing event when COVID-19 situation allows.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Strengthen the attractiveness of the North-East as a destination to visit

**Action 1:**

Support the areas of the Visitor Experience Development Plans that deliver on the Priority Development Projects identified through stakeholder collaboration and industry workshops in the North-East.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, OPW

Timeframe for delivery:

Ongoing 2020-2025

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Project plans were kept in place where government restrictions allowed. A lot of work pivoted to supporting and helping businesses as an immediate action and in essence reacting to the crisis which included a number of business support interventions and marketing support for domestic activity as and when government restrictions allowed.

Secured support for seven businesses as part of COVID-19 support interventions.

- Westcourt Hotel (Rooms by Westcourt) – Finance Business Clinic
- Scholars Townhouse Hotel – Finance Business Clinic
- D Hotel – Finance Business Clinic
- Boyne Valley Walking Trails (Drogheda Camino) - Mentoring for development of online ticketing on updated website/marketing.
- Carlingford Adventure Centre – Human Resources for Business Resilience and Finance Business Clinic
- Carlingford Lough Ferry – Business Re-Financing Mentoring
- Glyde Inn, Annagasson – Finance Business Clinic

Generic business supports promoted to all industry details of which are available at <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/>

Work continuing on the implementation of the destination experience development plan for the wider Boyne Valley region (2020-2025). A number of priority projects in the respective county areas (Louth, Meath, South Monaghan, East Cavan and East Westmeath) commenced at the outset but were heavily impinged upon by the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020.

Louth:

- Comprehensive review of Boyne Valley Drive underway with full support from the local authorities, OPW and key industry at all entry hubs, including Drogheda as the gateway to the Boyne Valley.
- Gateway industry clusters identified incorporating Carlingford and Drogheda
- Industry task force set up in Carlingford to devise a vision and mini masterplan for Carlingford and the wider Cooley Peninsula
- Accommodation needs analysis (pre COVID-19) completed for the Boyne Valley (Counties Meath and Louth). Investment support packs created for Boyne Valley local authorities.
- Boyne Greenway and navigation study commenced led by Meath County Council (incorporating Co. Louth)
- Carlingford Oyster Company - New tourism interpretative centre business planning and development support to tell the story of the Carlingford Oyster.
- Developing food tourism experiences in the Boyne Valley
- Louth Seafood Trail – Supporting Louth County Council to further develop this initiative and invest in its participating food producers and suppliers linked to the above.
- Boyne Valley walking trails (Drogheda Camino) - A framework is being developed for the delivery of walking events in the Boyne Valley.
- Support is being provided for 12 key business accounts across the county.
- Louth has featured in the familiarisation itineraries of 19 international buyers and 14 international media.
- COVID-19 Safety Charter – 105 Businesses received training.
- Business adaptation fund – 77 businesses applied for funding.

Monaghan:

- Gateway industry cluster has been identified in south Monaghan.
- Award winning Patrick Kavanagh Centre in Inniskeen re-opened in July 2020, following a €1m restoration.
- Four new saleable experiences have been completed at the Patrick Kavanagh Centre.
- Support provided to 15 key business account across the county.
- Monaghan has featured in the familiarisation itineraries of 12 international buyers and eight international media outlets.
- COVID-19 Safety Charter – 58 businesses provided with training.
- Business adaptation fund – 30 businesses applied for funding.

Cavan:

- Assistance provided to six of Ireland's Ancient East key business accounts across the county.
- Boyne Valley gateway industry clusters have been identified in East Cavan.
- Ireland's Ancient East - Cavan has featured in familiarisation itineraries of eight international buyers and one international media group.
- COVID-19 Safety Charter – 59 businesses received training.
- Business adaptation fund – 43 businesses applied.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Work is continuing on the implementation of the destination experience development plan for the wider Boyne Valley region over the period 2020-2025.

Action 2:

Develop the 'ancient visitor experience' for the area within the North-East (incorporating Meath and Louth) by identifying 'Ancient and Sacred' sites that have the potential to increase the appeal of the destination and offer opportunities for employment growth.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, OPW

Timeframe for delivery:

Ongoing – these projects comprise a combination of large-scale capital projects as well as a smaller networking and non-capital projects that will be completed between 2020-2025.

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

- Patrick Kavanagh Centre, Inniskeen Co Monaghan – a €1m restoration project telling the story of one of the best-loved poets of the 20th century, through an immersive, multimedia experience.
- King 'John's Castle, Carlingford, Co. Louth – Announcement of €400k restoration project to boost the Castle's visitor experience and appeal to tourists. In addition, the project includes a performance infrastructure which allows the castle to be used as a setting for cultural events
- Cavan County Museum – Visitor engagement review undertaken as well as a local authority Museums Network Training Workshop.

The completion of these capital projects and training events have the capacity both to increase the appeal of the region as a destination to visit and also to equip the 'service providers' with the tools to ensure an enhanced visitor experience.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Work continues to develop key heritage and cultural sites that have the potential to increase the appeal of the destination including sacred sites but not exclusive to them. These include:

- **St. Killian's Centre in Mullagh, Co. Cavan:**

Further development of the visitor attraction based on a historical character unlocking its history and stories.

A review of the current visitor experience and make recommendation on a new interpretation plan for the centre.

Development of the centre as a hub for visitors where they can also discover and connect to other sites of interest in the region and encourage them to stay longer in the area.

Identification of other activities that visitors can do while they are in the region.

- **Ardee Castle:**

This is an historical restoration tourism project linked to the heritage-led regeneration of Ardee. Ardee Castle (also known as St. Leger's Castle), built circa 15th century, is the largest fortified medieval tower house in Ireland. This project is valued at €2.17m

Action 3:

Identify and activate the 'destination town' concept for the North-East ensuring visitor expectations to the town are exceeded. Support the development of and deliver major international festival for the region; and explore how the 'Hidden Heartlands' concept can be leveraged in Cavan.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, local authorities, OPW

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to Q1 2022 and ongoing

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Work is continuing across the following destination towns on boosting their attractiveness and tourism appeal. A total of €500k will be invested in each town.

- Louth – Drogheda
- Monaghan – Monaghan Town
- Cavan – Cavan Town

Work includes but not exclusive to:

- Creation of 'arrival' points for visitors.
- Wayfinding initiatives and trails development.
- Access and orientation plans.
- Interpretation.
- Linking historic assets.
- Support strategies for the development of the evening economy and events.
- Development of Drogheda as a key location for *Púca* as a major international event.

The Cavan Burren Park / Shannon Pot has progressed to Stage III of Fáilte Ireland's *Platforms for Growth Capital Grants scheme*.

Ongoing engagement is continuing between Fáilte Ireland, Cavan County Council and Coillte in regard to the future development of Killykeen Forest Park.

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| Action 4: |
| Support the development of a major international festival for the region. |
| Working Group Members: |
| Fáilte Ireland, Local authorities, OPW |
| Timeframe for delivery: |
| Revised to 2022 |
| Final Status: |
| Action commenced but requires further work |
| Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion: |
| <p>The 2020 event was cancelled due to COVID-19 – the following online activity took place for 2020.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Meitheal held (on-line tour operator event) in July 2020. • 28 appointments taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 16 international, » 12 Irish incoming with strong interest registered from Irish operators. • Screening of specially produced promo film <i>Lighting of the fires of Samhain</i> aired 31 October 2020. • New website went live on 28 September 2020. • Social campaign launch - this campaign will be carried out across Púca official channels – Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. • Message amplification by digital teams in Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora agencies. • Fáilte Ireland provided technical support. |
| Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action: |
| Development of a community fringe festival framework for Púca to engage industry agreed (this has been pushed back to 2021 to COVID-19). |

Action 5:

Fáilte Ireland will work with the relevant Local Authorities to identify and support capital investment for projects to enhance Tourism Infrastructure.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, Local authorities, OPW

Timeframe for delivery:

Capital work on these projects on going 2020 – 2025

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

- Platforms for Growth for activity facilities in Carlingford Co Louth. This is a Fáilte Ireland-led initiative in conjunction with a number of local authorities. The overall objective of this scheme is the provision of permanent facilities to support the delivery of water-based activities (i.e. all-weather changing facilities that include showers, toilets, personal storage facilities and orientation points).
- Drogheda attraction of scale – There has been an initial investment of €150,000 from Fáilte Ireland and Louth County Council. Tenders were sought to scope out what a large attraction of scale for Drogheda would look like. CHL were appointed and are currently developing an options paper to identify a suitable attraction/s of scale for Drogheda as a gateway to the wider Boyne Valley region.
- Living in Carlingford – This is a strategy for sustainable tourism encompassing a masterplan and vision to 2030 to enhance the quality of the village and connect key visitor assets within the wider landscape. An initial investment €1m came from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) with a further application has been submitted to RRDF under Call III to the value €7.2m
- Ardee Castle – This historical restoration tourism project, valued at €2.17m, is linked to the heritage-led regeneration of Ardee. The Castle (also known as St. Leger's Castle), built circa 15th century, is the largest fortified medieval tower house in Ireland.
- Ulster Canal Development Project – Work on this project is taking place in partnership with key stakeholders in the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver this flagship cross-border Ulster canal project in order to restore the all-island inland water system as a premier tourism attraction.
- Ulster Canal Greenway – this project, valued at €5m, is a 4.2km foot and cycle path along the route of the Ulster canal, which passes through the centre of Monaghan town plus extension of 22km of greenway.
- The Peace Campus happening in conjunction with the Border Museum and valued at €15m, is a major project for a state-of-the-art facility in Monaghan Town Centre, comprising a new museum, exhibition space and community facilities.
- The €10m South Dublin Street Regeneration Project aims to progress a transformational project in Monaghan town centre.

Additional Action in the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan

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| Action: |
| Boyne Valley Recovery Taskforce. |
| Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members: |
| Co. Louth Representatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joan Martin – CEO Louth Co Co • Frank Pentony – Directory of Services Louth County Council • Colette Moss – Tourism Manager • Sarah Taaffe Drogheda Bids • Jason Magee – Chair Louth Tourism Forum • Tom McArdle – MD Carlingford Adventure Centre |
| Timeframe for delivery: |
| Ongoing |
| Final Status: |
| Complete |
| Outline of work undertaken during 2020: |
| Working groups established to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry activation and public realm • Destination marketing |
| Final outcome achieved: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing campaign delivered to support national <i>Make a break</i> for it campaign (€30k invested) – Fáilte Ireland put a mentor in place to shape the plan. • Framework established to support walking events across the Boyne Valley through Drogheda BID valued at €10k. • Industry ambassador social media consumer programme is being developed with €10k extra from Fáilte Ireland. • 138 Louth businesses profiled on https://www.discoverireland.ie • A Destination Resilience Programme is under development. |

2. Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Local Enterprise Office activities and outcomes in the North-East Region during 2020

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

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

During 2020, the Agencies and LEOs worked in partnership with regional stakeholders to strengthen regional enterprise ecosystems as well as maintaining their focus on attracting foreign investment, providing guidance and financial supports to the installed base of companies in the region, and fostering new enterprise start-ups.

Enterprise Ireland

Given the huge challenges facing the North-East region with the COVID-19 Pandemic and the impact of the UK leaving the Customs Union with uncertainty over the future relationship with the EU, this year's Strategic Objectives in the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 (REP) have become ever more important and relevant. Enterprise Ireland's contribution to the development of the North-East REP objectives in 2020 can be characterised as dynamic, responsive and holistic. While our report on each of these Strategic Objectives is contained within, it is important to highlight the role of the Border Stimulus package on us supporting these Objectives in 2020.

As we started the year, we were buoyed by the opportunity to develop, deliver and implement a range of Enterprise supports through the €28m Border Stimulus package. This additional funding secured by Minister Humphreys for the six border counties included €15m for a Border region specific Enterprise Development fund, €8.5m Brexit Transformation Fund, €3m for the six LEO's and €1.5m for Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Industry Fellowship programme. The main objective of the funding was to strengthen resilience and capability among the enterprise base and drive economic activity. The Fund built on initiatives, such as the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Technology Clustering Fund and is aligned to national enterprise policy, such as, the Regional Enterprise Plans; Future Jobs Ireland; Climate Action Plan; Brexit Preparedness and Enterprise Ireland's Powering the Regions Border Region initiatives.

The fund aligned to the objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plan for the North-East and allowed the Enterprise Ireland team in the region to work with stakeholders to develop projects and programmes that could deliver on many of the objectives we had set for the region.

On 22nd June, 2020, Minister Humphrey's announced €17.2m in funding for 11 successful projects under the Border Enterprise Development Fund; seven projects are based in the North-East, however, ten projects supported will deliver supports to enterprises in the North-East. Most notably for the North-East, they include:

- Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) Advanced Manufacturing Training and Technology Centre of Excellence. The project aims to address the skills needs in the high value manufacturing and technology sectors. Support companies in multiple sectors to be more intelligent, agile and swift in re-scaling their operations, optimising their supply chains, adopting new business models and embrace new technologies like: collaborative robotics; augmented and virtual reality; automated visual inspections; systems; additive manufacturing; metallurgy.
- Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) Training Centre of Excellence for Supply Chain, Logistics and Procurement (SCLP). The Training Centre of Excellence for Supply Chain, Logistics and Procurement (SCL&P) will build resilience, address skills gaps and innovation requirements, provide a stimulus for north/south trade and assist companies to overcome the imminent challenges of Brexit and to support Ireland's international trade capacity post COVID-19.
- National Data Platform/ North-East Digital Innovation Hub based in Monaghan and focussed on supporting companies implement A.I., machine learning and digitalisation projects. The Hub will prioritise and drive cluster activity in the targeted sectors of agri-food and engineering. The Hub will host educational programmes to upskill staff from companies in domains such as artificial intelligence, coding, machine learning and edge computing.
- DKIT ATHENA STEM Project - launch of a female STEM entrepreneurship and STEM SME management excellence capability focused programme. The role and contribution of women's entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship to women's economic empowerment, economic growth, society and sustainable development has been widely and clearly recognised. The project proposes to build a critical mass of female STEM entrepreneurs and business managers within the three years and engage a cohort of female role models (entrepreneurs and senior/c-Level managers) to act as strategic coaches to the programme participants.
- Irish Wood and Furniture Manufacturing Network and programme based in Monaghan will drive resilience, innovation and diversification among this industry cluster that has a strong concentration in the Border region. Collaboration among members is a key theme with highlighting new opportunities such as circular economy initiatives that will support the sector in the future.
- Creative Spark were successful in the call to develop a town centre Co-Working space in the heart of Dundalk that would help stimulate the start-up ecosystem and attract professional workers back into the town centre by offering flexible co-working space. This initiative assists Louth Local Authority in its place-making plans to revitalisation the town centre and create multi-use and creative environment.
- Louth Local Authority in conjunction with the Mill, Drogheda were successful in developing a new town centre Digital Innovation Hub to stimulate the start-up eco-system in the heart of Ireland's largest town. Given that the Drogheda has the largest commuting population in the Country, this initiative is particularly welcome and aligned to the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan's objective to retain talent in the region.

Working collaboratively with stakeholders and responding to the new macro-economic challenges, Enterprise Ireland worked with the project promoters to align to the strategic objectives of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. There is a strong theme of placemaking, skills and capability development, supporting industry transition to new technologies and increasing the level of innovation. All of these initiatives will assist the enterprise base in the region become more resilient, competitive and diversified. It is important any future initiatives continue to build on these projects and we continue the bottom-up approach to supporting industry respond to new challenges in the future.

In 2020, 17,965 people were employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the North-East, down 0.1 from 2019.

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland is the State's inward investment promotion agency. The mission of the agency is to partner with multi-national companies to win and develop foreign direct investment (FDI), providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland. IDA Ireland works with key stakeholders both in the public and private sectors in order to deliver on this mandate. IDA Ireland partners closely with Enterprise Ireland across the regions on multiple initiatives under the Regional Enterprise Plans and in relation to the provision of property solutions to the indigenous base, where appropriate.

On January 6, 2021, IDA Ireland launched summary results for FDI for the country for 2020, and also launched a new strategy, *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021-2024*.

Employment growth of 3.6 percent in IDA Ireland supported companies was achieved in 2020. Total employment in IDA Ireland client companies in Ireland now stands at 257,394, accounting directly for 12.4 percent of COVID-19 adjusted national employment.

The North-East region includes the counties of Cavan, Monaghan, and Louth. The Region has been successful over a number of years in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI), with employment levels in IDA client companies increasing every year since 2011.

There are vibrant and thriving clusters of well-established engineering, life science, international business services, financial services and consumer goods and manufacturing companies located in the region. Established employers in the region have proven resilient throughout 2020 and maintained operations and vital services and supplies for their customers and parent organisations in the challenging circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

In response to COVID-19, IDA Ireland migrated many of its business development and client engagement activities to digital platforms. IDA Ireland has developed a suite of digital content which can be accessed by potential investors. The agency has developed this further and has put in place an E-site visit experience for potential investors. The use of digital platforms by IDA Ireland staff has contributed to an enhanced digital engagement with existing clients and also in hosting e-site visits with potential new investors.

Reflecting the ambition of the Government's National Economic Recovery Plan, IDA Ireland's new Strategy 2021 - 2024 aims to target 800 investments and 50,000 new jobs with focus on five pillars – growth, transformation, regions, sustainability and impact. A total of 400 of the 800 investments objectives in new strategy are targeted at regional locations.

Established employers in the region have proven resilient throughout 2020 and maintained operations and vital services and supplies for their customers and parent organisations in the challenging circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the leading employers in the North-East include global leaders such as ABB, Becton Dickinson, National Pen, PayPal, Vesta, Prometric and YapStone. The region continues to grow and diversify its FDI footprint. In recent years, the regions traditional strengths have been complemented with new investments from WuXi, Wasdell and Almac, providing a broad range of employment and career opportunities for people living in and moving to the region.

There are 44 IDA supported companies in the North-East region, employing 5,899 people in total at the end of 2020.

Local Enterprise Offices

In 2020 the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) continued to be the 'first stop shop' providing entrepreneurs and business owners with advice, guidance, financial assistance, and other supports. The developing pandemic saw their focus shift from assisting with start-up or growth, to triage and rescue. With 31 offices spread throughout the country the LEOs were truly operating at the coalface of the COVID-19 response to the SME sector and provided a 'signposting' service for all the relevant COVID-19 supports available through all State bodies.

The LEOs supported 35,236 jobs across 7,529 client companies in 2020 of which there was an additional 82 companies outside of the Dublin region. In 2020 there was a fall of 1,494 net jobs during the year the State. It is worth noting however, that micro enterprises were adding jobs with a gross job gains across all regions. The challenge ahead will be to restore businesses to growth once the impact of the pandemic subsides. The LEOs provided significant training and mentoring to small businesses in 2020 to help them navigate the particularly difficult trading environment created by Covid-19 and Brexit. Last year, the Local Enterprise Offices trained over 77,000 entrepreneurs and business representatives, up from 37,000 the year previous. 16,231 completed business mentoring assignments up from 10,756 in 2019.

In response to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the LEOs quickly moved to introduce new schemes and adapt existing supports to meet the needs of micro and small enterprises across all regions and business sectors.

The Business Continuity Voucher, introduced in March 2020, offered businesses with up to 50 employees, across all sectors, a voucher of up to €2,500 in third party consultancy costs, and helped companies and sole traders to develop short-term and long-term strategies to respond to the COVID-19 restrictions and prepare for reopening of the economy.

This scheme closed for new applications in May 2020 and within that period the LEOs processed 14,871 applications and approved 12,077 of these to a value of €25.8m.

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVs) was adjusted from a 50% co-funding basis to 90% and businesses who had successfully implemented a previous voucher were now allowed to apply for a second voucher. Further amendments enabled sectors that were normally excluded from the scheme to apply.

In previous years this scheme would have seen an average of around 1,200 applications; in 2020 the LEOs processed 17,315 applications for TOVs and approved 12,984 of these. The unprecedented demand for the scheme saw funding rise from €2.3m to an estimated cost of €30m.

The Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund, introduced in September 2020, targeted a small cohort of micro enterprises that could not avail of existing government supports by virtue of their sector, size or by way of operating from a non-rateable premises, many of which were small local traders who provided unique services within their communities. A total of 196 successful applicants were awarded a grant of between €500 - €1,000 of vouched expenditure on adaptation and reconfiguration costs, as well as COVID-19 consumables such as PPE and sanitisation equipment.

Throughout 2020 and in spite of the pandemic and lockdowns, the LEOs continued to offer grant aid to entrepreneurs who spotted opportunities in the current climate to start or grow their businesses through their Feasibility, Priming and Expansion grant programmes. To assist in their remit of developing regional employment, the LEOs also continued to offer 'soft' supports by way of their free of charge **Mentoring programme**, where clients work with an experienced mentor to identify solutions to areas of exposure within their business.

The LEOs have pivoted their extensive suite of **Training programmes**, workshops and networking meetups to an online platform covering areas such as: cash management in a crisis; leading your business through COVID-19; and advice for employers impacted by the crisis.

During 2020, there have been 10,255 participants in the Mentoring Programme and 49,623 participants in the COVID training programmes. In addition to this, the LEOs launched a new 'Lunch and Learn' live training webinar series that is open and accessible to all LEO client companies and prospective clients across the country, with no registration or sign-up required. This new series complements existing online training and webinar programmes offered by the LEOs.

Many of the successful projects under the LEO Competitive fund in 2019 had to be put on hold as a result of the pandemic. These were collaborative projects between two or more LEOs; and LEOs working with other local groups like Chambers, Community Enterprise Centres, Education or training bodies, Local Authorities, or colleges. Many of these projects are aligned with the Strategic Objectives in the Regional Enterprise Plans and it is hoped that they can progress.

3. Achieving a Just Transition in Ireland's Regions

The Climate Action Plan 2019 sets out the measures by which Ireland can reduce its emissions from sectors outside the EU's Emissions Trading System by 30% (relative to 2005 levels) by 2030. It sets out ambitious environmental targets for Ireland to meet over the next 40 years.

Just Transition is a key part of climate action policy. It supports the idea that communities and individuals are safeguarded in the move to face the challenges presented by climate change, in a climate-proofed economy.

Under Action 164 of Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees were asked to include a Just Transition standing item on the agenda of each of the nine regional areas. This is now in place for all the Committees and has encouraged consideration of region-specific impacts that transitioning to a low carbon economy will have in their region, and the possible solutions to mitigate these impacts.

How to manage a transition to a fundamentally new economic future was the focus of work at the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in late 2019 and early 2020. The Council's work, a key deliverable in the Government's Climate Action Plan and Future Jobs Ireland 2019, was detailed in their final report, *Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland* published in May 2020.

NESC's report is focused on how to manage the transition associated with climate change and digital automation, and identified recommendations to help Ireland address them and embrace the significant opportunities presented through three broad areas:

- continuous, pre-emptive workforce development;
- building resilient enterprises; and
- delivering high-impact targeted funding to support transition.

In the preparation of their report, NESC consulted with a number of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees to consider the engagement already taking place in the regions and explore how place-based collaborative solutions could be adopted.

Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the North-East supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland.

Administered by Enterprise Ireland, it supports new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions, or nationally. Just under €100m has been approved across 68 projects nationally.

During 2020 the North-East Region secured funding of €4,852,297 for three projects*.

| Project | Location | Description | Grant amount € |
|--|----------|---|-------------------|
| DkIT Connect Designated Activity Company | Louth | A connected health and wellbeing innovation and learning hub | €3,774,337 |
| Monaghan County Enterprise Fund | Monaghan | Digital hub with co-working space and training/mentoring provision | €577,960 |
| Creative Spark CLG | Louth | The establishment of a FabLab digital fabrication enterprise and co-working initiative. | €500,000 |
| Total | | | €4,852,297 |

*See the first North-East Regional Enterprise Plan for details of Calls 1 & 2.

Border Enterprise Development Fund

The €15m Border Enterprise Development Fund 2020 to be administrated by Enterprise Ireland, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, will provide support for collaborative, enterprise capability building projects, to advance entrepreneurship, productivity and innovation in the Border region.

The aim of the fund is to improve the international competitiveness of enterprise in the Border region in the context of Brexit and other market challenges.

On Monday, 22 June 2020 Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys TD named seven successful projects in the North-East.

| Region | County | Grant Approved |
|--|----------|-------------------|
| Creative Spark CLG | Louth | €269,408 |
| Dundalk Institute of Technology | Louth | €254,877 |
| Louth County Council | Louth | €587,747 |
| Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) | Louth | €4,499,829 |
| Louth Total | | €5,611,861 |
| Irish Wood and Furniture Manufacturing Network CLG | Monaghan | €312,320 |
| National Data Platform Designated Activity Company | Louth | €609,584 |
| Monaghan Total | | €921,904 |
| Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board | Cavan | €2,035,613 |
| Cavan Total | | €2,035,613 |
| Grand Total | | €8,569,378 |

Enterprise Centres Fund

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD, announced over €1m in grants for eleven enterprise centres in the North-East under Enterprise Ireland's Enterprise Centres Fund. Enterprise centres are embedded in communities in every county in the country. They provide space and training for entrepreneurs, allowing them to work remotely, access training and advice, and network with other business leaders.

For-profit approvals:

| Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name) | County | Nuts III Region | Grant amount € |
|--|--------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ardee Community Development Company Ltd. | Louth | North-East | 105,420 |
| Total | | | €105,420 |

Not-for-profit approvals:

| Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name) | County | Nuts III Region | Grant amount € |
|---|----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Castleblayney Community Enterprise CLG | Monaghan | North-East/North-West | 45,760 |
| Cavan County Enterprise Fund | Cavan | North-East | 83,200 |
| Cavan Digital Hub DAC | Cavan | North-East | 56,128 |
| Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre Ltd | Cavan | North-East | 99,040 |
| Creative Spark CLG | Louth | North-East | 108,000 |
| Drogheda Enterprise Centre CLG | Louth | North-East | 140,600 |
| Dundalk Institute of Technology t/a Regional Development Centre | Louth | North-East | 146,170 |
| Institute of Technology Sligo t/a Innovation Centre at IT Sligo | Sligo | North-East/North-West | 146,220 |
| Leitrim County Enterprise Fund t/a The Hive | Leitrim | North-East/North-West | 139,637 |
| Monaghan County Enterprise Fund | Monaghan | North-East | 81,600 |
| Total | | | €1,046,355 |

Appendix 2: Statistical snapshot – North-East

| Constituent counties | Cavan, Monaghan and Louth | |
|--|---|----------------|
| Regional Population and change (1996-2016) | 196,423 (1996): 266,446 (2016) increase of 70,023 | |
| Total in employment | 178,900* | |
| Labour Force participation rate | 57.4%* | |
| % of Male employment (State) | 54.3% | |
| % of Female employment (State) | 45.7% | |
| Live Register at 31/12/20 | 13,037 | |
| Unemployment rate | 4.2%* | |
| Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 31/12/20 | 18,318 | |
| Unemployment blackspots ¹ | 12 ² | |
| Employed in Enterprise Ireland companies | 220,613 | |
| Total Employment outside Dublin in Enterprise Ireland companies | 65% | |
| Jobs created in Enterprise Ireland companies ³ | 16,496 | |
| Job Losses in Enterprise Ireland companies ⁴ | 17,368 | |
| Net Change in Enterprise Ireland companies ⁵ | -872 | |
| EI supported employment and number of client companies (2019 – 2020) | 2019 | 2020 |
| | Jobs: 18,045 | Jobs: 17,965 |
| | Companies: 338 | Companies: 344 |
| IDA supported employment & number of client companies (2019 - 2020) | 2019 | 2020 |
| | Jobs: 5,899 | Jobs: 5,894 |
| | Companies: 44 | Companies: 46 |
| New jobs created in 2020 by the IDA ⁶ | Over 20,000 | |
| % of IDA investments to regional locations ⁷ | 52% | |
| IDA net job created ⁸ | 8,944 | |
| LEO supported employment & number of client companies (2019-2020) | 2019 | 2020 |
| | Jobs: 296 | Jobs: -205 |
| | Companies: 602 | Companies: 602 |

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

2. Unemployment blackspots in the the Border Region: Donegal (6)

3. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

4. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

5. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

6. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

7. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

8. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

* CSO Q4 2020 Labour Force Survey

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