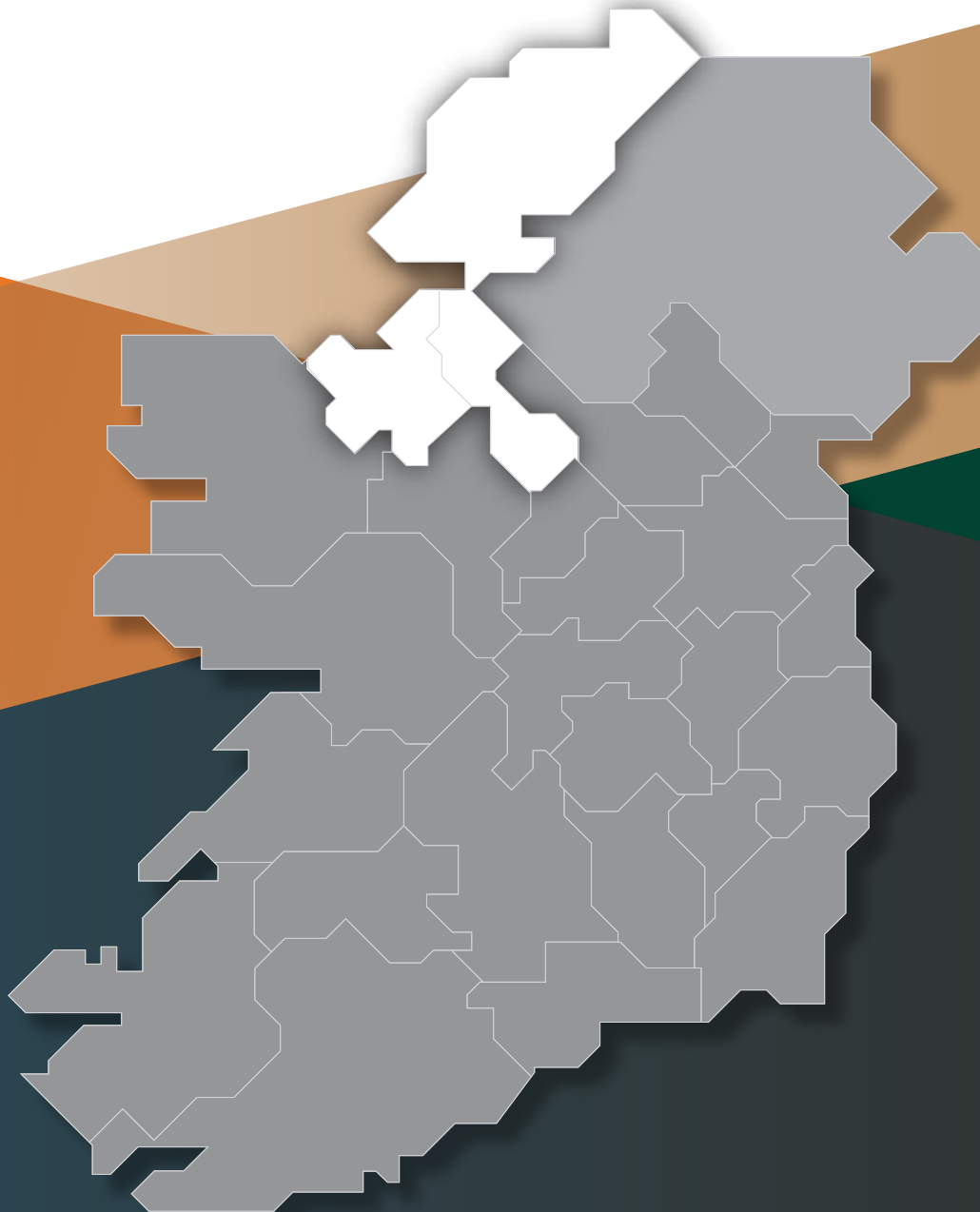




Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# **NORTH-WEST**

## **Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Report**



An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

## Contents

Minister's Foreword	1
Message from the Chairperson	2
1. North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Report	3
Overall high-level outcomes for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020	4
2020 Highlights	6
<b>Strategic Objective 1</b> Identify and enhance the visibility of skills available to employers and potential investors in the North-West.	7
<b>Strategic Objective 2</b> Achieve a step-change in the level of entrepreneurship in the North-West.	14
<b>Strategic Objective 3</b> Harness the potential of the Blue Economy and the North-West coastline as a source of new employment generation.	17
<b>Strategic Objective 4</b> Maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way and tourism for the region.	19
<b>Strategic Objective 5</b> Develop a regional network of landing spaces to support co-working.	25
<b>Strategic Objective 6</b> Support the digitalisation of SMEs in the North-West.	27
2. Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office activities and outcomes in the North-West Region during 2020	30
3. Achieving a Just Transition in Ireland's Regions	35
Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the North-West supported by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation	36
Appendix 2: Statistical snapshot – North-West	38

# Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to welcome this publication of the final Progress Report on implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the North-West region. The report shows that the North-West Steering Committee with regional stakeholders have advanced 96 percent of the actions set out in the Regional Enterprise Plan and are continuing their work on the ongoing actions.

Delivering balanced regional growth through a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland is central to the Programme for Government (PFG). My Department contributes to this agenda in several ways, including through the enterprise agencies; the local enterprise offices at county level; and direct investments in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem (including the regional enterprise development fund, regional technology clustering, investment in RD&I infrastructures, and the IDA property programme).

This report demonstrates that there is added benefit for all if we work together to understand challenges, recognise opportunities and make the most of our complementary skills and resources. The Regional Enterprise Plans, first launched in early 2019, bring together local and regional stakeholders to focus on both vulnerabilities and opportunities critical to the acceleration of enterprise growth and job creation in each region.

The conclusion of the first Regional Enterprise Plan for the North-West has arrived as Ireland's society and economy is facing one of its greatest challenges with the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and now is the opportune time to refresh the Regional Enterprise Plans and ensure that each region makes its contribution to national recovery.

I want to thank all the members of the North-West 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 Mr. Philip Martin, CORA Systems and to welcome recently appointed Programme Manager for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, Anne McTernan.

I very much look forward to further engagement with the North-West Steering Committee over the coming months as a new enterprise recovery and growth agenda is articulated in a refreshed North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024.



**Robert Troy TD,**  
Minister of State for Trade Promotion,  
Digital and Company Regulation

# Message from the Chairperson

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo) aims to further specific strategic objectives in the region through the collaborative efforts of the steering committee and different bodies in the region. The North-West Plan selects both ongoing activities in the region to further and additional strategic objectives which all ultimately aim to bring more jobs to the region.

The North-West region, through tremendous efforts of the regional agencies, educational institutes, and local authorities, has secured funding for nine projects totalling €5.6m from the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and €8.7m under the new Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF). Amongst these funding awards are many great examples of innovation, collaboration which will all benefit the region, notwithstanding the counties that have championed them.

Since the publication of the first progress report, the Coronavirus pandemic has caused untold disruption to our region and our businesses. There are examples within the report of actions which have been delayed until 2021 but equally there have been actions which have been expedited due to the pandemic. COVID-19 has brought an equal challenge of capitalising on this unique opportunity and supporting our businesses through this unprecedented environment.

The almost overnight response from the Regional and local agencies to the COVID-19 pandemic is to be commended:

- The Regional Skills forum has facilitated online engagement and has maintained its status as a single point of contact in the region to help employers connect with the range of training or education supports.
- Fáilte Ireland has created a central support hub in response to COVID-19 and provided significant training.
- The Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and IDA have guided our regional companies during the COVID-19 pandemic with funding, training, and mentoring, for example, the success of the online vouchers has enabled our companies to improve their online presence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited some actions and presented opportunities to advance other objectives which were already underway.

- The Western Development Commission (WDC) in its role as coordinator for the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) hubs network project has published a map of hubs on the AEC website, are working on a web platform booking system for hubs and ran a successful Hub Outreach scheme to enhance hub services during COVID-19.
- Activities to harness the potential of the Killybegs area have resulted in a recruitment process for a cluster manager and a *Technical Study for Marine Development Works* at Killybegs Harbour being undertaken. This should result in several actions to pursue in future months.
- The WDC will publish a talent tool in 2021 to provide an online platform for employers and employees looking for jobs in the West of Ireland. It will provide data of people interested in moving to the region which will be useful for attracting companies to the region.

The steering committee, programme manager and I are optimistic about the next revision of the Plan. We intend to build on some of the objectives in the existing plan, whilst adding some key strategic objectives to 'future proof' our region. The North-West offers unique attributes to people living and working in the region. Trends around remote working and an increased emphasis on quality-of-life post-COVID-19 offers the North-West region a unique opportunity. We need to ensure, regionally, we are positioned to capitalise on these opportunities in a post COVID-19 world.



**Philip Martin,**  
Chair North-West  
Regional Enterprise Plan

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

## NORTH-WEST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Identify and enhance the visibility of skills available to employers and potential investors in the North-West.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Achieve a step-change in the level of entrepreneurship in the North-West.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Harness the potential of the blue economy and the North-West coastline as a source of new employment generation.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way and tourism for the North-West.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Develop a regional network of landing spaces to support co-working.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Support the digitalisation of SMEs in the North-West.

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

This is the final Progress Report of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 which closes out this iteration of the North-West 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-West 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 was made during the lifetime of the Plan and 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 regional strategic objectives in the new North-West Regional Enterprise Plan 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-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. However, this does not preclude these actions from being reconsidered as part of future strategic objectives in the in the new North-West Regional Enterprise Plan.

Table 1: Progress on Actions during 2020 and Final Status

North-West Regional Enterprise Plan	
Total Actions	24
Complete	15
Action commenced but requires further work	8
Action not commenced	1

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 Border 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	Q1 2015	Q4 2020
Border	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%	5.7%

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. However, the unemployment rate fell from 8.6 percent to 4.2 percent over the same period, which is inside the 2020 target.

The figures in Table 2 exclude people who were receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) at the end of 2020. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, a total of 18,361 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)
Donegal	11,956
Leitrim	2,103
Sligo	4,302
North-West	18,361

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

## 2020 Highlights



**Infrastructure** – The region is becoming better connected with the forecast completion date of the N4 road upgrade Q4 2021. The National Broadband Rollout Plan is underway with Sligo being surveyed first in the region. The process of applying for a technological university for the Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA) of GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo is underway.



**North-West Industry clusters** – The regions clusters are developing – Killybegs Marine cluster and Border regions Manufacturing Cluster initiative has been funded through the Regional Clustering Fund; the Cyber Ireland North-West Chapter was launched November 2020. Tech North-West, ICT/Fintech Group and the Atlantic MedTech Cluster are gaining momentum.



**Funding awarded** – The North-West has been awarded €14.3m in funding through the REDF and BEDF funds. The projects awarded range from enterprise hubs, manufacturing centres, creative initiatives and a digital gaming campus. The funding applications were put together by the hard work of LEO's, county councils and other regional agencies.



**Job creation in the North-West** – In 2019/2020 IDA, Enterprise Ireland and LEO clients announced 1000+ new jobs in the region. Over the life of the plan, the regions employment is up 5%.



**Remote working** – The Western Development Commission (WDC), in its role as coordinator for the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Hubs Network project has mapped all available hubs in the region. The AEC is currently developing an IT portal which will list services available in hubs, provide a booking system and provide for collaboration and networking engagement across the hub community.



The reaction of our regional agencies to COVID-19 must be commended. Overnight our councils, LEO's, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Skills Board, Fáilte Ireland and other agencies pivoted to support our existing businesses through training, mentoring, information support and funding e.g. online vouchers for retail, Fáilte Irelands support hub for COVID-19 impacted businesses.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Identify and enhance the visibility of skills available to employers and potential investors in the North-West

**Action 1:**

As part of the Skills for Growth initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises 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 need.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Regional Skills Forum (RSF), Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Education and Training Boards (ETB), Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP)

- Niall McEvoy, IT Sligo
- Padraig Gallagher, LYIT
- Ann McHugh, Donegal ETB
- Tom O'Grady, Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim ETB
- Peter Egan, Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim ETB
- Oran Doherty, North-West Regional Skills Forum Manager. (outgoing)
- Hilary McPartland, North-West Regional Skills Forum Manager. (incoming)
- Mark Butler, HR Director Lotus Works. (Chairman)

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

The Regional Skills Forum continues to support and assist local enterprises identify the skills that they need through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once 'skills that are needed have been identified, the Regional Skills Fora links companies with the education and training providers who are best suited to respond.

In the absence of face-to-face contact due to COVID-19, the Regional Skills Forum has facilitated online engagement through online webinars, events and an innovative employment engagement form is now available on the Regional Skills Forum website. The RSF have also developed a monthly monitoring template that captures regional challenges faced by employers.

**Final outcome achieved:**

The Regional Skills Forum has established itself as a single point of contact in the region to help employers to connect with the range of training or education supports. Data harvested by the RSF through the monthly monitoring template is feeding directly into the Department of Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science, the SOLAS SLMRU Unit, and the Expert Group on Future Skills along with the National Skills Council.

**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 Fora (RSF), Education and Training Board (ETB)

- Peter Egan MSLETB
- Ann McHugh, Donegal ETB
- Oran Doherty, RSF
- Hilary McPartland RSF
- Padraig Gallagher LYIT

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Final Status:**

Action commenced but requires further work

**Expected Completion Date:**

2021

Ongoing throughout 2021

**Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:**

EXPLORE is a Regional Skills Forum initiative developed to help address the issue of Ireland's low level of participation in lifelong learning. The programme is aimed at persons over 35 years of age in employment who have no digital or transversal skills.

Building on the success of our EXPLORE offering, a new programme called DigiECO has been developed. Focussing on digital skills for the green economy, this programme is being piloted in Limerick in conjunction with the Limerick and Clare ETB and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT). It aims to increase awareness in environmental practices that can contribute towards a greener workplace. The plan is to roll out the programme nationwide in 2021.

Since EXPLORE is aimed at people with no digital skills, the inability to conduct onsite business consultations due to COVID-19 resulted in a number of EXPLORE programmes being postponed.

MSLETB had a number of companies registered in both Sligo and Leitrim for November 2020 but this training had to be postponed until 2021 given the increase in COVID-19 restrictions to level 5.

Donegal ETB ran the programme in October with 24 participants.

It is planned to deliver EXPLORE in 2021 subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

**Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:**

EXPLORE is targeted at people who need help to address the digital skills gap both in work and at home. EXPLORE will be delivered in 2021 and will continue to address the need for enhanced digital skills in at-risk sectors. Subject to a successful pilot, it is hoped that DigiECO will be rolled out in the North-West region in 2021.

**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 Fora (RSF), Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

- Niall McEvoy
- Mark Butler
- John Reilly
- Mark Butler
- Hilary McPartland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q2 2019

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

To increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling within the region, and, in collaboration with local enterprise, the Regional Skills Forum Manager for the North-West, assisted, assessed and supported education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+ 2020.

**Final outcome achieved:**

IT Sligo offered 20 courses science, technology and engineering funded by HEA under the Springboard+ 2020 programme. The outcome was a 40% increase in the number of Springboard places which attracted 2,650 Springboard applicants – a significant increase on last year's numbers.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology was initially allocated 308 free places on Springboard+ courses. As part of the Government July Stimulus Provision, additional funding was procured for 10 postgraduate programmes and 13 modular upskilling programmes.

**Action 4:**

Support all actions in the REP where linkages to Education and Training providers are required.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Regional Skills Fora

- Niall McEvoy
- Mark Butler
- John Reilly
- Mark Butler
- Hilary McPartland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

There was collaboration and engagement between all partners on the RSF during COVID-19. The objective of this was to respond to the relevant education and training actions of the Regional Enterprise Plan.

**Final outcome achieved:**

The availability of relevant supports continued on all relevant Regional Enterprise Plan actions where linkage to educational and training providers are required.

**Action 5:**

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

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Regional Skills Fora

- Niall McEvoy
- Mark Butler
- John Reilly
- Mark Butler
- Hilary McPartland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

The Regional Skills Fora through the RSF website and its RSF members continues to disseminate information to employers in the region about the work of the RSF and supports that are available.

The Regional Skills Forum has employed Content Marketing to communicate to employers the services available through the Forum. Content Marketing is a marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a defined audience. In the absence of face-to-face contact, this has proved highly effective. The website, social media channels and an eZine are used consistently.

The Regional Skills Forum Manager is a member of a Steering Committee which aims to develop a promotional campaign for the Fora nationally. This campaign will be rolled out in 2021 with the aim of raising awareness of the work and supports offered by the Regional Skills Forum for regional employers and to encourage new employer engagement.

**Final outcome achieved:**

The Regional Skills Forum Manager is a member of various forums, cluster groups and steering committees and communicates the services of the Forum at any opportunity. The RSF Manager continues to disseminate national/regional information to stakeholders in the region.

**Action 6:**

Complete an audit of available skills across the North-West using AIRO methodology. This Regional Skills Register will be used to market the skills available in the region to potential foreign and indigenous investors.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

LEO's, Local Authorities, IDA, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Western Development Commission (WDC)

- John Nugent, IDA
- Karen Sweeney, WDC
- Niall McEvoy, IT Sligo
- Allan Mulrooney, WDC

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Final Status:**

Action commenced but requires further work

**Expected Completion Date:**

2021

**Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:**

The Western Development Commission plans to launch an online platform called the *Talent Tool* in early 2021. This platform hosted by the WDC website will be an online portal for employees looking for jobs in the West of Ireland and employers who have jobs to advertise. There will also be a facility for partners e.g. IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, local authorities to access high level data from the employees engaged on the portal. Ultimately, while primarily providing a service to skilled people who wish to get a job in the West of Ireland, the portal will provide data on the skills and available talent in the region. This data will be useful for attracting new investment into the region. The portal will be fully managed by the Western Development Commission.

To execute the creation of the portal, there has been consultations throughout 2020 with Local Authorities, employers, Regional Skills Forum, IDA, EI and Institutes of Technology. A test version of the site has been created with user testing and the final design phase is ongoing.

**Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:**

The online portal is in the final stages of design and is scheduled to be launched on the WDC website 'in 2021.

<b>Action 7:</b>
Promote the Regional Skills Register to the Diaspora to inform them about skills needs and vacancies.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
LEO's, Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, WDC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Nugent, IDA</li> <li>• Karen Sweeney, WDC</li> <li>• Niall McEvoy, IT Sligo</li> <li>• Allan Mulrooney, WDC</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2020
<b>Final Status:</b>
Action commenced but requires further work
<b>Expected Completion Date:</b>
2021
<b>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</b>
Ongoing through 2021
<b>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</b>
Once the WDC Talent Tool is launched in 2021, there will be a national virtual roll out, including diaspora communications and in person events in accordance with national public health guidelines. Once limitations on international travel are clarified, an international marketing campaign will be rolled out. This will link in with county specific Diaspora Plans.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Achieve a step-change in the level of entrepreneurship in the North-West

**Action 1:**

Examine the existing and new models of peer to peer mentoring programmes in the region that will result in an increased entrepreneurial outlook in the region, while also examining how to best leverage existing programmes for peer learning.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

LEO's, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Enterprise Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

The Mentor Programme is designed to match up the knowledge, skills, insights and entrepreneurial capability of experienced business practitioners with small business owner / managers who need practical and strategic one to one advice and guidance. The mentor contributes independent, informed observation and advice to aid decision making. Each Local Enterprise Office has a significant number of clients to whom mentoring is offered. The enterprise agencies and particularly, the LEOs continue to focus on this work.

**Final outcome achieved:**

Areas of mentoring provided by the county LEO offices include business planning and strategy, financial planning and management, market research / market development, operations management, managing human resources and E-marketing and social media. Regionally, more than 450 companies availed of the mentoring services provided by the Enterprise offices.



**Action 2:**

Commission a research project to identify the drivers and barriers to entrepreneurialism and start-ups within the region to include a comparative study with national trends.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

LEO's, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Connaught Ulster Alliance

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

Lancaster University has been chosen to execute the research project entitled *Research and Recommended New Approaches to Address the Challenges and Barriers Facing Entrepreneurship Promotion and New Business Start-up Formation in the North-West Region of Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo*. The project is focussed on three specific goals:

1. Review of regional enterprise strategies and academic perspectives on regional approaches to entrepreneurship support.
2. Online interviews with key stakeholders in the three Counties will be completed to build a qualitative understanding of the practices and environment in the region
3. Section 3 will focus on performance, and understanding areas of growth, decline and possibility. There may be a number of workshops planned within public health guidelines.

The project report and debrief is targeted for completion Q3 2021.

**Final outcome achieved:**

The research project has been commissioned and is targeted for completion Q4 2021. Once completed, specific actions from the project will be considered and actioned and, may be included in the next Enterprise Plan.

<b>Action 3:</b>
Develop and implement marketing and communication plans to promote, encourage and celebrate entrepreneurs in the region.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
LEO's, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2020
<b>Final Status:</b>
Complete
<b>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</b>
This is ongoing work of the enterprise agencies and in particular the LEOs at local level on an on-going basis. As well as LEO national campaigns to promote entrepreneurship each LEO actively promotes entrepreneurship through events such as Enterprise Week, IBYE, local enterprise awards and engagement in the Schools Enterprise Competition.

<b>Action 4:</b>
Develop more opportunities between LEO, EI and IDA clients with Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Global Sourcing Events.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, LEO's
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2020
<b>Final Status:</b>
Complete
<b>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</b>
Enterprise Ireland co-ordinates the Enterprise Europe Network in Ireland in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices and the Chambers in Dublin and Cork. The EEN helps Irish businesses innovate and grow internationally.
There were several Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) Meet the Buyer events in 2020, two in each sector of food (Dundalk) and engineering (Combilift, Monaghan).
Two <i>Are you Brexit ready</i> events took place in October and November, engaging up to 500 businesses and offering one to one support.
International global sourcing events have been curtailed due to COVID-19.
<b>Final outcome achieved:</b>
In this region, the Meet the Buyer events assist in growing companies internationally.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Harness the potential of the blue economy and the North-West coastline as a source of new employment generation

**Action 1:**

Support and grow the collaborative potential of the existing informal network of companies in Killybegs Harbour by establishing a formal network that can avail of existing LEO and EI supports.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

LEO Donegal, Enterprise Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Final Status:**

Action commenced but requires further work

**Expected Completion Date:**

2021

**Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:**

A funding award from the Enterprise Ireland Regional Technology Cluster Fund 2019 for the development of a cluster network in Killybegs enabled the process of a formal cluster creation and the recruitment of a cluster manager who will be appointed in Q1 2021.

The Harbour User Development Group is a natural cluster of harbour users who meet quarterly to discuss opportunities in the blue economy to advance enterprise in this area. This group is made up of approximately 20 businesses in the region.

**Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:**

The cluster manager will be appointed in Q1 2020.

<b>Action 2:</b>
Examine the feasibility of developing a marine focused New Frontiers Programme, working in conjunction with the industry to explore bespoke options.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
LEO Donegal, EI, LyIT, Sligo IT
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2019
<b>Final Status:</b>
Action not commenced
<b>Reason:</b>
The concept of a marine focussed New Frontiers programme will be a responsibility of the cluster manager when he or she is appointed.

<b>Action 3:</b>
A working group will be formed to explore future development and potential leveraging of funding supports under Project Ireland 2040 funding streams. The Steering Group will be comprised of representatives of LEO Donegal, Killybegs businesses, Enterprise Ireland, LYIT and others as appropriate.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
LEO Donegal, EI, LyIT, Donegal Local Authority
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2019
<b>Final Status:</b>
Action commenced but requires further work
Study due for completion December 2020
<b>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</b>
Byrne Looby Ltd has been commissioned to complete a Technical Study for Marine Development Works at Killybegs Harbour. The assignment is due for completion in early December 2020.
The study is funded by the Killybegs Harbour Development Group, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office Donegal and Donegal County Council.
<b>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</b>
When the study is completed, it is anticipated that certain follow-on actions will be recommended.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way  
and tourism for the North-West

**Action 1:**

Fáilte Ireland will continue to offer training programmes which specifically assist businesses in the North-West winning more international business. Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer programmes to help businesses to develop their experiences and explore the financials of extending the tourism season. In addition, Fáilte Ireland will offer the following business supports in 2019/2020.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

Fáilte Ireland created a central support hub for business supports in light of COVID-19 at <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/>

As Irish tourism businesses learn to cope with the new reality imposed by COVID-19, Fáilte Ireland provided step-by-step guidance.

This customised support hub — featuring expert insights, advice on support schemes and more — is designed to help businesses to understand and adjust to the extreme challenges they face and will be regularly updated in line with changes.

The tourism industry makes an invaluable contribution to Irish society and all Fáilte Ireland's resources are firmly focused on helping to stabilise and rebuild the sector.

#### Business Supports include expert advice and webinars in these areas:

- HR
- Sales and Marketing
- Operational Performance
- Financial Planning
- Operational Guidelines

Work has also commenced on Visitor Experience Development Plans for Sligo and Inishowen, County Donegal with completion due in 2021. There has been a high level of public consultation for both plans.

#### Final outcome achieved:

Fáilte Ireland's top priority is supporting Ireland's tourism and hospitality businesses to survive, re-open and recover from the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

Fáilte Ireland has created an extensive range of business supports to guide business through operations during COVID-19. These have been developed in consultation with industry experts to meet urgent needs and to help business recover.

#### Operational guidelines

- Hotels and Guesthouses
- Restaurants and Cafes
- B&B's
- Camping and Caravanning
- Self-catering
- Pubs
- Visitor Attractions
- Activity Providers
- Spas
- Hostels
- Tourism Transport

In addition, a number of grant schemes have been in operation to assist the industry

- Restart Grant Plus for B&Bs
- COVID-19 safety charter
- COVID-19 adaptation fund
- Coach tourism business continuity grant

<b>Action 2:</b>
Develop a sustainable management development model to oversee marketing.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2019
<b>Final Status:</b>
Action commenced but requires further work
<b>Expected Completion Date:</b>
2021
Ongoing throughout 2021
<b>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</b>
<p><i>Tourism Ireland market the island of Ireland on behalf of all tourism industry – <a href="http://www.ireland.com">www.ireland.com</a></i></p> <p><i>Fáilte Ireland market to the domestic market at <a href="http://www.discoverireland.ie">www.discoverireland.ie</a></i></p> <p>An extensive nationwide marketing campaign took place from June to October 2020. All marketing ceased when level 5 COVID-19 restrictions were implemented.</p>
<b>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</b>
A new tourism strategy – short term and long term, is in development for 2021 onwards. To encourage staycations in Irish market, an extensive domestic marketing campaign will be a key programme of work for 2021.

**Action 3:**

Implement a series of Visitor Experience Development Plans and other developmental plans aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way. These are 3 to 5-year commercial development plans for an area, which will unlock the economic growth potential.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Action commenced but requires further work

**Expected Completion Date:**

2021

Fáilte Ireland are investing in focused destination development plans which are due for draft publication Q1/2 2021.

**Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:**

Fáilte Ireland is investing in focused destination development plans in identified areas along the Wild Atlantic Way. These are five-year commercial development plans to increase the number of visitors to the destination and to deliver increases bed nights and employment.

Consultations with community groups, the tourism industry and stakeholders took place in Sligo and Inishowen County Donegal to inform the themes and experiences of the Destination and Experience Development Plans. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the workshops were held virtually and in small group settings. The consultants assigned to the Destination and Experience Development Plans (DEDP's) spent a considerable amount of time in the area exploring and assessing the value of the product. Mystery shop reports were completed.

Recently, Fáilte Ireland finalised the Shannon Tourism Masterplan prepared in association with Waterways Ireland and the ten Local Authorities along the Shannon, including Leitrim. The Masterplan will be formally launched in the coming weeks and will set out a framework for the sustainable development of tourism along the Shannon over the next ten years. It is the first time that a single, unitary tourism plan has been prepared for the River Shannon and the Shannon-Erne Waterway.

**Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:**

The report is due for draft publication Q1/2 2021 and the *Shannon Tourism Masterplan* will be launched 2021.



**Action 4:**

Fáilte Ireland will rollout nationally a Large Capital Grants Scheme in order to develop brilliant visitor experiences and enhance the visitor experience around the country. These developments will be in line with four experience brands.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2019

**Final Status:**

Action commenced but requires further work

**Expected Completion Date:**

2022

Ongoing 2019-2022

**Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:****Platforms for Growth – A Programme for Tourism Investment 2019-2022**

Fáilte Ireland's major new capital investment programme, *Platforms for Growth*, is valued at €150m and runs from 2019 to 2022. This is part of the Government's *Project Ireland 2040* strategy which will facilitate the development of major new visitor attractions of scale. Existing attractions will be greatly enhanced under the programme. This is the largest investment programme of its kind to benefit tourism with individual grants available for large-scale visitor attractions of €2.5m upwards. It is unlike any other Fáilte Ireland call in that it specifically targets 'platforms' or project types that have the greatest potential to grow tourism across Ireland and throughout the year.

The first 'Platform' launched on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019 focussed on developing *Immersive Heritage and Cultural Attractions* that appeal to overseas visitors looking for experiences to enhance their connection with Ireland and to bring the country's culture, heritage and people to life.

**Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:**

*Platforms for Growth* builds on the *Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects 2016 – 2020*. Over the medium term, it is the intention of Fáilte Ireland's intention to base future investments in large scale capital projects on 'platforms.' Fáilte Ireland will issue future calls for proposals under other platform headings on a rolling basis. The range of future platforms is yet to be finalised, but examples may include a focus on themes such as 'activity tourism.'

**Action 5:**

Rollout a range of supports to be available to businesses to help them to develop their digital skills with a focus on the effective use of social media for business and website optimisation and working effectively with OTAs (online tour operators). Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer Grow Digital programmes which provide a practical approach to help owners/operators develop a more effective online profile, for their business.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland

<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
2020
<b>Final Status:</b>
Complete
<b>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</b>
<p><b>Keeping employees engaged and upskilled through eLearning</b></p> <p>To support businesses and their workforces, Fáilte Ireland offers online self-directed eLearning training programmes designed to upskill and motivate teams as part of the organisation's response to COVID-19.</p> <p>These short modular style programmes (each averaging 40 minutes with an online assessment) can help businesses maintain staff engagement while they work remotely or operate reduced working hours.</p> <p>The Fáilte Ireland Learning Hub offers 16 short module programmes which are available to employees at all levels, from frontline to management across three specific learning categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations</li> <li>• Management</li> <li>• Compliance</li> </ul> <p><b>Fáilte Ireland Refreshed Accredited Service Excellence Programme (ASE)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The hub also hosts Fáilte Ireland's eLearning Accredited Service Excellence (ASE) programme updated to reflect the current COVID-19 environment.</li> <li>• The updated 1.5 hour interactive programme aims to empower staff with valuable insights, tips and guidelines on giving customers a highly positive and memorable experience. The programme will also help to show businesses how to create opportunities to drive revenue.</li> <li>• There is also an Accredited Service Excellence Programme aimed specifically for attraction businesses and their staff available now on the eLearning Hub.</li> </ul> <p><b>Final outcome achieved:</b></p> <p><b>Free resources to support business to reboot and recover</b></p> <p>Tourism businesses can review revenue management and sales and marketing strategies to prepare for the new marketplace post COVID-19. Time invested in upskilling, website optimisation and rethinking key segments – in terms of who best to target post-COVID-19 will help business to successfully relaunch when the time comes.</p> <p>There is a wealth of free, comprehensive supports available to businesses. Below is a list of some which are designed to help tourism businesses build their expertise in areas such as digital marketing, management and finance and more. This list will be updated regularly as Fáilte Ireland continues to add to new courses and resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management HR and finance training</li> <li>• Sales training</li> <li>• Marketing training including digital marketing/SEO and social media</li> <li>• Food and beverage training</li> <li>• Sustainability and environmental training</li> <li>• Responsible service of alcohol programme</li> </ul>

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Develop a regional network of landing spaces to support co-working

**Action 1:**

Through engagement with the work of the Atlantic Economic Corridor, develop and publish a central list of information on enterprise space availability in the region. The results will be published on the Local Authorities' websites and information will be updated quarterly.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Wester Development Commission, LA's, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2019

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

In its role as coordinator for the AEC Hubs Network Project, the WDC undertook to research and list all potential co-working facilities within their region and funding spheres in 2019 and 2020. Working with Údarás na Gaeltachta, WDC, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, NACEC (the National Association of Community Enterprise Centres), hub owners' managers, LEOs and the local authorities, the agencies have collaborated as part of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Hub Network Project to compile a register of all co-working spaces within one central database. The AEC has published a map of individual hubs, remote working facilities and co-working spaces on the AEC website. The information is updated as new hub information is received. This is managed in one central database and is currently not published on the local authority websites.

**Final outcome achieved:**

The website acts as a database for all hubs in the AEC and lists the services they include.

**Action 2:**

Work with enterprise centre owner/managers to enhance the standard of provision, facilities and services available and maximise opportunities for economies of scale through sharing of best practice, networking and join initiatives.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, LEO's, Udarás na Gaeltachta

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

The AEC is currently procuring a suite of IT systems to help develop a hub community network with the capability of being rolled out nationally. This will be a consumer facing IT portal which will capture information and services for all hubs. It will include a web-listing platform (similar to Air BnB), a booking system for hubs, for example, booking a meeting room and desk and will facilitate payment directory to the hub. There will also be a community building element to the platform which will allow for collaboration and networking engagement across the hub community, similar to LinkedIn for hubs.

The *Hub Outreach Scheme* was launched, awarded and funds dispersed in 2020. This fund was administered by AEC officers in the 10 local authorities and was used to enhance hub services and to assist them to re-open with COVID-19 measures in place, for example, audio-visual systems, converting open workspaces to cubicles and an increase in partitioning and COVID-19 health and safety measures. Through this scheme, 65 hubs received funding.

Through *The Hub Outreach Scheme*, the process of data collection and the procurement of the new IT systems, there is a considerable amount of ad hoc networking, workshops and consultation happening in the hub community. This collaboration has been between public agencies, networks and private hub owners.

The AEC communications team is currently developing a marketing plan. The purpose is to promote nationally the database and online booking tool. This action will continue in 2020.

**Final outcome achieved:**

With COVID-19 accelerating the already existing trend of remote working, a lot of excellent work has been completed in 2020.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 6

## Support the digitalisation of SMEs in the North-West

**Action 1:**

Provide support, where possible, to the NWRA in their development and implementation of a project plan to incentivise SMEs to adopt digital solutions and that will result in increased competitiveness and increase efficiency, as part of the DEVISE project.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

2021 (work and meetings are ongoing)

**Final outcome achieved:**

A working group for this strategic objective was established in October 2018. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly was responsible for establishing the working group for this Strategic Objective and the first meeting took place in October 2018. The working group was made up of representatives from the following and has met a total of five times:

- Three Local Enterprise Offices,
- Enterprise Ireland.
- Údarás na Gaeltachta,
- LYIT
- IT Sligo
- Regional Skills Forum
- ERNACT

During meetings, there are number of new actions have been identified and it is anticipated that the Working Group will continue to meet into 2021.

**Action 2:**

Undertake a supply and demand analysis which will map the sectors that could increase their competitiveness by utilising digital services offered by SMEs and start-ups in the region.

**Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:**

NWRA, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q3 2019

**Final Status:**

Complete

**Outline of work undertaken during 2020:**

This action was carried out as part of the Interreg Europe DEVISE project. Along with the EU project partners, stakeholders in Ireland developed a set of questions to be sent as part of a supply and demand analysis. The supply was focused on suppliers of digital/ICT solutions and the demand questionnaire was sent to other business sectors looking to adopt digital solutions.

The aim of the survey was to find out the main challenges and benefits traditional sectors such as manufacturing found when adopting and implementing digital technology solutions. The survey also aimed to identify the challenges that the ICT/digital sector was confronted with when getting companies to implement digital technology solutions. The Local Enterprise Office, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta sent the two questionnaires to their client companies in Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo.

**Final outcome achieved:**

A total of 58 businesses completed the questionnaires for the supply and demand Analysis.

The results from the supply and demand analysis questionnaire showed

**Main Benefits of Digitalisation:**

1. Increases efficiency
2. Increased Competitiveness
3. Enhanced Customer Satisfaction
4. Improved Decision making
5. Opens door to new markets

**Main Obstacles to Digitalisation are:**

1. Access to Finance
2. Knowledge Gap & high training costs
3. Rapid pace of technological change
4. Management Change/mindset
5. Integrating into existing systems

<b>Action 3:</b>
Identify good-practice case studies which enable businesses to adopt digital technologies to increase competitiveness.
<b>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</b>
NWRA
<b>Timeframe for delivery:</b>
Q3 2019
<b>Final Status:</b>
Complete
<b>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</b>
<p>This Action was also carried out as part of the Interreg Europe DEVISE project. Stakeholders in the working group identified good practice case studies which support the digitalisation of SMEs in Ireland. The three good practices identified are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology Gateways – <a href="http://www.technologygateway.ie">www.technologygateway.ie</a></li> <li>• Operational Excellence Offer from Enterprise Ireland – <a href="https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/company/esetablish-sme-funding/operational-excellence.html">https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/company/esetablish-sme-funding/operational-excellence.html</a></li> <li>• Small Business Innovation Research <a href="http://www.sbir.ie">www.sbir.ie</a></li> </ul> <p>The stakeholders in Ireland also looked at good practice case studies in Ireland to see what type of support mechanisms could be adopted to enhance the digital transformation of SMEs. A list of the good practices reviewed are on the DEVISE project website: <a href="http://www.interregeurope.eu/devise/">http://www.interregeurope.eu/devise/</a></p>
<b>Final outcome achieved:</b>
<p>The three good practices identified are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology Gateways – <a href="http://www.technologygateway.ie">www.technologygateway.ie</a></li> <li>• Operational Excellence Offer from Enterprise Ireland – <a href="https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/company/esetablish-sme-funding/operational-excellence.html">https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/company/esetablish-sme-funding/operational-excellence.html</a></li> <li>• Small Business Innovation Research <a href="http://www.sbir.ie">www.sbir.ie</a></li> </ul>

## 2. Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office activities and outcomes in the North-West 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-West 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-West 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-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 (REP) have become ever more important and relevant. Enterprise Ireland's contribution to the development of the North-West REP objectives 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 in supporting these Objectives in 2020.

In January 2020, 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 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 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 (REDF) and the Regional Technology Clustering Fund (RTCF) 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-West 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 set for the Region.



On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2020 Minister Humphrey's announced €17.2m in funding for 11 successful projects under the Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF); Four projects are based in the North-West, however, nine projects supported will deliver supports to enterprises in the North-West. Most notably for the North-West, they include;

- Donegal Alpha Innovation Centre – This project is a development of a purpose built, high tech workspace facility in Letterkenny which will include a bespoke pre-accelerator programme for early idea entrepreneurs along with a programme of wrap-around supports for businesses. This project will help transform Donegal's entrepreneurial and innovation capacity leading to the creation of more jobs and new start-up's while supporting established businesses to enhance and develop their innovative capabilities. This dedicated space will provide an innovative ecosystem and business centre where both new and existing businesses will have the opportunity to operate their day-to-day business activities, to network, to collaborate and share ideas and to explore and develop the potential of new ideas into viable and scalable propositions, contributing to greater resilience in the enterprise base and economic growth in the region.
- ERNACT – The proposed **Innovation-as-a-Service** or IaaS is a new service that enables innovation hubs to effectively manage the delivery of customised technology transfer solutions to their client SMEs from universities, institutes of technology and private sector companies. The service is unique in that it leverages the power of sophisticated digital collaboration tools to form an effective innovation partnership between the SME, hub and solution provider, overcoming the challenge posed by lack of geographic proximity to effective solution implementation.
- ITS Sligo Leitrim Development DAC wishes to set up a **Digital Futures Manufacturing Centre**, (DFMC) based in Sligo, serving the North-West and border regions. With the emergence of advanced ICT technologies this is creating a radical transformation across the manufacturing sector. Such is the scale of this transformation that it is often referred to as the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0. The Digital Futures Manufacturing Centre (DFMC) will promote knowledge and implementation of cutting-edge innovation to stimulate intercompany and industry collaboration and third level institutions across the North-West region. The centre will have a primary focus on supporting industry with developing capability in automation of manufacturing supply chain technology and creating an environment to allow companies focus on developing and implementing Industry 4.0 strategies.
- Manorhamilton Innovation and Development CLG – This project is an **Innovation and R&D Centre for the Quarry and Construction industry** under Industry 4.0 focusing on robotics and cobotics, artificial intelligence and smart data, virtual reality, augmented reality, 3 D industry Printing, software development to develop new prototypes or products and upskill staff, within both industries. The Quarry and Construction industries are the fastest growing industries in value-added products within Ireland and globally. This project will focus on educating companies in the area of robotic manufacturing which will help companies to cut costs, improve efficiencies, and increase profitability.
- 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-West REP. There is a strong theme of entrepreneurship, skills and capability development, supporting industry transition to new technologies and increasing the level of innovation. All 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. Furthermore, the potential negative impacts on the North-West region from a no-deal Brexit cannot be overestimated given the contribution the Fisheries and Agri-food Industries have on the Region. Any future initiative should seek to enable the region to capitalise on future opportunities such as Floating Off-Shore Wind, renewable energy generation and/or Clean Hydrogen generation. Such initiatives should have support and collaboration across Government and relevant departments.

In 2020, 6,140 people were employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the North-West.

### IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland's mission is to partner with multi-national companies to win and develop foreign direct investment, providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland. IDA Ireland works with key stakeholders both in the public and private sectors 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<sup>th</sup>, 2021, IDA Ireland launched summary results for FDI for the country for 2020, and also launched a new Strategy, *"Driving Recovery & 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 IDA North-West region consists of the counties of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. IDA Ireland, via regional offices in Letterkenny and Sligo, supports 44 companies employing 6,992 people in the region across a range of business sectors and activities. The North-West Region continues to grow and develop its FDI footprint with employment in FDI clients up 16% in the overall Border Region since 2014. The impact of FDI in the region extends beyond the direct employment and includes interactions between FDI & Indigenous clients through clustering initiatives within the region such as Atlantic MedTech Cluster, TechNorthWest, ICT / Fintech Cluster and the recently formed NW Chapter of Cyber Ireland. 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.

IDA Ireland continues to market and position the North-West Region to existing and potential investors, particularly in the areas of Manufacturing, Software Engineering, and Global Business Services. This continues through direct client interaction, familiarisation programmes, and tailored value propositions and itineraries. In response to COVID-19, IDA 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 staff has contributed to an enhanced digital engagement with existing clients and also in hosting e-site visits with potential new investors.

The North-West continued to perform strongly in terms of foreign direct investment in 2020. The existing base of FDI has shown continued resilience. There are 50 IDA supported companies in the North-West region, employing 7,129 people in total at the end of 2020.

IDA partners with stakeholders across the Region in areas of education, infrastructure and Placemaking ensuring the region has the best possible receiving environment for employment creating investments and an attractive location to work, live and learn. Leading companies in their sectors throughout the region collaborate with Letterkenny IT and IT Sligo and Letterkenny on trainee, graduate and research programmes and the respective ETB's in Donegal and Sligo / Leitrim. These collaborations lead to knowledge sharing, further opportunities and spill-over benefits.

IDA's focus on the North-West is to build on the strengths and competencies of the Region and to expand the FDI base further with a particular focus on opportunities arising in Life Sciences, Technology and Services sectors. To this end IDA Ireland has invested significantly in the property portfolio in the North-West including the construction of a 48,437SQ FT (4,500 SQM) Advance Office Building in Sligo which is scheduled for completion in Q3 2021.

### Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

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 premise, 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 despite 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 & 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 because 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-West 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-West region secured funding of €371,600 for one project\*.

Project	Location	Description	Grant amount €
The Leitrim Design House CLG	Leitrim	Development of a creative cluster	€371,600
<b>Total</b>			<b>€371,600</b>

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

## Border Enterprise Development Fund

The €15m Border Enterprise Development Fund 2020 to be administered 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 4 successful in the North-West.

Region	County	Grant Approved
Donegal County Council	Donegal	€3,663,193
ERNACT	Donegal	€348,504
<b>Donegal Total</b>		<b>€4,011,697</b>
Manorhamilton Innovation & Development CLG	Leitrim	€2,945,475
<b>Monaghan Total</b>		<b>€2,945,475</b>
Sligo Leitrim ITS Regional Development Projects DAC	Sligo	€1,919,974
<b>Sligo Total</b>		<b>€1,919,974</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>€8,877,146</b>

## Enterprise Centres Fund

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD, announced €844,441 in grants for 10 enterprise centres in the North-West 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.

**Approvals (for profit centres):**

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
Haslette Holdings Ltd. t/a ManorHUB	Leitrim	North-West	16,304
Ionad Fiontar Pobal Iar Dheisceart Dhun Na Ngall Teoranta	Donegal	North-West	10,648
Total			€26,952

**Approvals (Not for profit centres):**

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
Castleblayney Community Enterprise CLG	Monaghan	North-East/ North-West	45,760
COLAB Letterkenny Institute of Technology	Donegal	North-West	150,000
Donegal County Enterprise Fund	Donegal	North-West	90,648
Drumshanbo Enterprise Centre Company CLG	Leitrim	North-West	81,384
Drumshanbo Community Council CLG	Leitrim	North-West	96,240
Institute of Technology Sligo t/a Innovation Centre at IT Sligo	Sligo	North-East/ North-West	146,220
Tubbercurry Development CLG t/a An Chroí South Sligo Enterprise Centre	Sligo	North-West	67,600
Leitrim County Enterprise Fund t/a The Hive	Leitrim	North-East/ North-West	139,637
Total			€817,489
Grand Total			€844,441

## Appendix 2: Statistical snapshot – North-West

Constituent counties	Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim	
Regional Population and change (1996-2016)	210,872 (1996); 256,771 (2016) increase of 45,889	
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	13,395	
Unemployment rate	4.2%*	
Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 31/12/20	18,361	
Unemployment blackspots <sup>1</sup>	6 <sup>2</sup>	
Employed in Enterprise Ireland companies	220,613	
Total Employment outside Dublin in Enterprise Ireland companies	65%	
Jobs created in Enterprise Ireland companies <sup>3</sup>	16,496	
Job Losses in Enterprise Ireland companies <sup>4</sup>	17,368	
Net Change in Enterprise Ireland companies <sup>5</sup>	-872	
EI supported employment and number of client companies (2019 – 2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 6,859	Jobs: 6,140
	Companies: 222	Companies: 212
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 <sup>6</sup>	Over 20,000	
% of IDA investments to regional locations <sup>7</sup>	52%	
IDA net job created <sup>8</sup>	8,944	
LEO supported employment & number of client companies (2019 – 2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 179	Jobs: -133
	Companies: 632	Companies: 621

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 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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