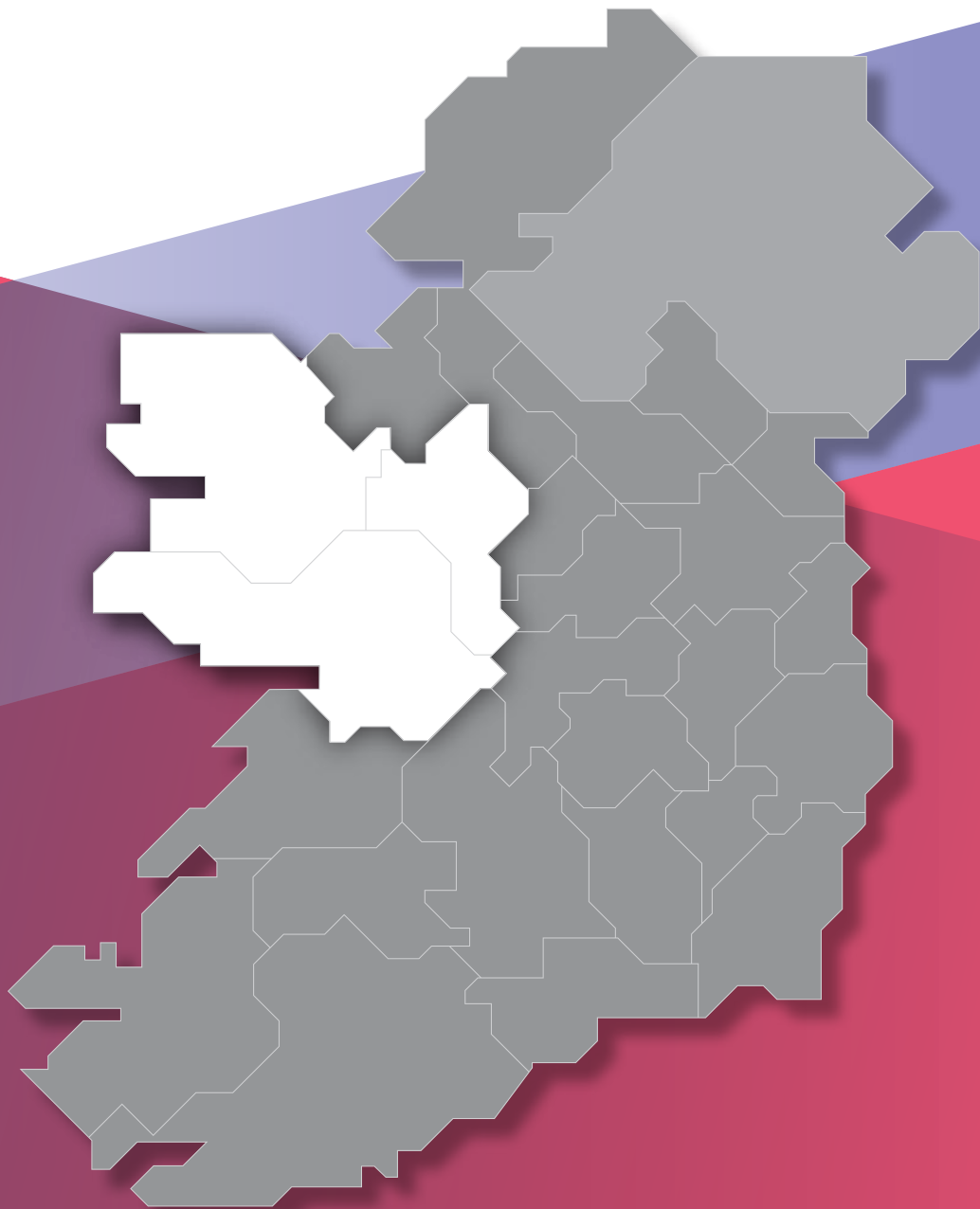




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

WEST

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 am pleased to welcome this publication of the final Progress Report on implementing the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the West region. The report shows that the West Steering Committee with regional stakeholders has advanced over 90 per cent 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 a number of ways, including through the enterprise agencies; the local enterprise offices at county level; and direct investments in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem (incl. 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 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. It is therefore an opportune time to refresh the Regional Enterprise Plans and ensure that each region contributes to national recovery.

I want to thank all the members of the 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.

In welcoming our new chairperson to the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the West, Evelyn O'Toole, Founder and CEO of CLS, Galway, I also want to pay tribute to the contribution of the outgoing chairperson, Gerard Kilcommins, Vice President Medtronic Global Vascular Operations. Gerard led the committee through the preparation and early implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 and before that, the implementation of the previous West Regional Action Plan for Jobs from 2015-2018.

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



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Troy', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

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

Message from the Chairperson

It gives me great pleasure to present this final Progress Report on the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the West region. I want to acknowledge the efforts of each member of the Steering Committee for their contribution to advancing the implementation of the Plan over the past two years.

As I assume the position of Chair at the end of this current Regional Enterprise Plan, I want to make particular mention of our outgoing Chair, Gerard Kilcommins, VP Worldwide Vascular Operations, Medtronic, who led the Committee through the preparation and implementation of the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 and indeed the previous Regional Action Plan for Jobs for the West region. Gerard has made an immense contribution as Chair and continues to champion the developmental interests of the West.

The publication of this report represents not only the closing out of the current Plan but also importantly represents a new beginning as we start the process to develop a new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the West and continue to build on the strong foundations that have been laid in the work undertaken under the 2020 Plan.

The West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the West had six strategic objectives. These objectives recognised sectors with growth potential and focused on where we could strengthen the business environment for new growth. I am pleased to report on behalf of the Steering Committee that more than 90 percent of the actions were progressed. In addition, over €9.6 million has been secured for the region under Call 3 of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund which was announced in early 2020. This funding is a very significant boost to our efforts to drive enterprise growth in the region.

As we contemplate the creation of a new enterprise plan for the region we do so in very different circumstances to that of a couple of years ago with the continuing challenges presented by COVID-19 and the need for economic recovery, as well as the impact of Brexit for businesses in our region.

I am committed to ensuring that we unlock the potential that is in this region and believe that collaboration is key. As a region we must celebrate all wins, regardless of where they are secured. We must also focus on ensuring that the benefits we generate have broad impact within the West.

I welcome the appointment of Roger Sweetman, from the Western Development Commission, as interim Programme Manager who will support the Committee in its work in the first phases of preparing the next Regional Enterprise Plan for the West and look forward to seeing the position of Programme Manager role being filled over the longer term with the support of the Local Authorities and the Western Development Commission later this year.

Finally, I want to thank the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment for their support to the Regional Enterprise Plans and the Committee looks forward to working with the Department as we move to the next stage.



Evelyn O'Toole,
Founder and CEO of Complete
Laboratory Solutions (CLS)

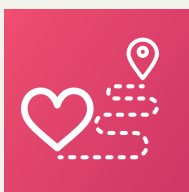
1. West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Update

WEST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



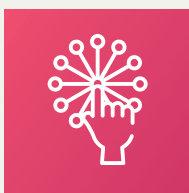
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Build greater capability within the life sciences sector to meet its future needs.



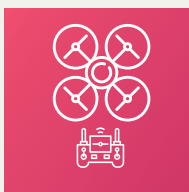
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Ensure the continued sustainable growth of tourism in the West, including maximising the opportunities for the growth of Business Tourism.



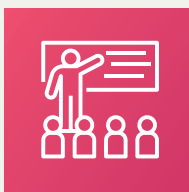
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Build on the West's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Enhance the growth potential of AgTech in the West.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Align training provision to local current and future skills needs.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West.

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

This is the final Progress Report of the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 which closes out this iteration of the 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 West Regional Enterprise Plan's scope and lifetime to 2020, although we have noted on some of the complete actions that work is continuing because of their iterative nature.

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 strategic objectives in the new West 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 West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. These actions will be reconsidered as part of future strategic objectives in the next West Regional Enterprise Plan.

Table 1: Progress on Actions during 2020 and Final Status

West Regional Enterprise Plan	
Total Actions	25
Complete	9
Action commenced but requires further work	14
Action not commenced	2

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 West 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
West	180,300	220,700	22.4%	40,400	12.6%	3.6%
State	2,014,400	2,306,200	14.4%	291,800	10.5%	5.7%

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q4 2020

Since the launch of Regional Action Plan for Jobs in 2015, 40,400 more people are in employment between Q1 2015 and to Q4 2020. This is an increase of 22.4 percent which exceeds the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 target while the unemployment rate also fell from 12.6 percent to 3.6 percent over the same period, in the region, again well 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 31st December 2020, a total of 30,621 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)
Galway	18,211
Mayo	8,727
Roscommon	3,683
West	30,621

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

2020 Highlights



Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) Approved by Regional Technology Clustering Fund to develop a Life Sciences Cluster organisation in the region.



EU Funded Tourism Project Spot-Lit, involving Western Development Commission (WDC), Poetry Ireland, Failte Ireland & Creative Ireland provided €75,000 direct support to SMEs for product innovation and adaption to the pandemic.



The Creative Enterprise West (CREW) programme was awarded €2.7m under the REDF programme. Led by ComhOibriu CLG, with the WDC, GMIT and the Galway Film Centre, this programme supports the digital creative sector across the AEC Hub Network.



The LEOs and Enterprise Ireland have conducted a scoping exercise of Ag-tech competence in the region. This will leverage the BIA Innovator Campus which will host 40+ food companies creating 360 jobs and skills.



A new sales apprenticeship programme with three intakes of 30 apprentices each year has been developed and rolled out by the Education and Training Boards (ETBS) in the West to develop sales skills.



The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Hubs project completed a strategic plan for a network of enterprise hubs. They have mapped the hubs, provided a scheme to fund COVID-19 compliance, and procured an IT System to support the hubs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Build greater capability within the life sciences sector to meet its future needs

**Action 1:**

Establish a panel of life-science sector representatives to assess skills needs and to engage with the Regional Skills Forum to explore relevant provisions to meet these needs. Digital disruption is creating new skills needs and the potential for a digital 'talent gap' in the Life Sciences sector. This action involves bringing together a panel of sector representatives, from multinational and indigenous companies, to map the current and future skills needs of the Life Sciences sector and the region's ability to meet those needs.

Working Group Members:

IDA Ireland, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Education and Skills Boards (ETBs), Regional Skills Forum (RSF)

Timeframe for delivery:

Q1 2019

Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

In February 2020, the Galway Executive Skillnet published a report *Boosting Medtech, Manufacturing, Engineers and Finance Talent to Drive Jobs Growth in the West Region*. The report carried out an analysis of the life sciences sector in the region and highlighted several key actions to implement. Key actions highlighted included R&D lifecycle education for engineers converting to R&D, upskilling operators to technicians and engineers, and attracting engineers back to Ireland. The report's project advisory group included representatives from ICE group, Galway Executive Skillnet, BTG plc, Western Development Commission, GMIT, NUIG, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

In April 2020, the West Regional Skills Forum formed the Regional Skills West Manufacturing Excellence Group which includes a range of interested manufacturing companies. The forum's goal is to collaborate to identify and resolve skills gaps and issues and convert knowledge into best practices for the manufacturing sector in the West Region. Regional Skills West Manufacturing Excellence Group has close to 15 member companies of all sizes, alongside education and training providers. The group has met four times during 2020.

Final outcome achieved:

The Regional Skills West Manufacturing Excellence Group has been established by the Regional Skills Forum in the region. The group meets regularly to assess skills needs across the sector and collaborate with relevant training and skills providers to deliver solutions where required.

Action 2:

Identify opportunities to strengthen the life sciences innovation ecosystem and its connectivity within the region so as to drive increased take up of innovation supports and programmes.

Working Group Members:

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Education and Training Boards

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

This action is ongoing. The life-sciences sector in the west region is long-established and has many networking fora and events throughout each year, such as *MedTech Rising and MedTech Brew*. The sector benefits from a strong multi-national base and a growing indigenous start-up ecosystem. Many organisations are working collaboratively to build the sector.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

This action will continue long term and requires consistent action from all stakeholders to strengthen the sector and encourage further uptake of innovation supports and programmes.

GMIT is in the process of recruiting an education and outreach manager for the digital health industries cluster. This role will be important in further developing the life sciences sector in the west region. Its function is to support and enable companies in the med-tech, life sciences and ICT sectors. It will help achieve sustainable growth and development through a range of areas, including increased engagement in R&D activities and new trends in the industry.

Action 3:

Improve the delivery of supports to Life Sciences start-ups in areas such as enterprise space, finance, and mentoring. Supporting start-up companies is crucial for the sustainability, diversity, and innovative capacity of the Life Sciences sector in the West. This action will focus on improving the delivery of supports to Life Sciences start-ups in areas such as enterprise space, finance, and mentoring.

Working Group Members:

HEIs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, ETBs

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

GMIT has recently completed a significant extension of the iHub at their Dublin Road campus in Galway. The extended iHub has additional dedicated MedTech R&D units, testing and validation on-site along with hot-desking and other supporting infrastructure.

In 2019, NUI Galway launched a business innovation centre which includes 6,500sq. ft of fully fitted lab space for start-ups in the life sciences sector. NUIG continue to deliver the BioExel programme and Health Innovation Hub with support from Enterprise Ireland.

Údarás na Gaeltachta has dedicated two spaces (wet labs) in gteic@An Spidéil to life-science start-ups, and both are now occupied, one since Q2 and the other since Q3 2020. Both clients have aspirations to grow and hopefully will be accommodated in larger bespoke facilities as their needs grow.

Galway/Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETb) has a new Further Education and Training (FET) centre in Athenry and plans to run several Science programmes for learners in the Science Laboratory there. Galway/Roscommon ETB is building on links from further education to higher education to support the transition into science-related courses.

Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta are providing mentoring as required to start-ups.

IDA Ireland has completed the construction of an advanced manufacturing building at Parkmore and is currently marketing the facility to mobile FDI through its global team.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Need for a significantly improved life-science incubation and innovation facilities provision. This could be in the Nuns' Island innovation district (currently being master-planned by NUI Galway and Galway City Council) or other locations around the region.

New models are emerging globally to support life science companies. In Cambridge, fully equipped labs are available for rent on very flexible terms. Not only are such labs fully equipped, but key operational staff are on the staff. e.g., a full DNA sequencing suite with the necessarily experienced technicians is available to rent. This is a very different idea to supplying wet labs to companies who must then have a significant investment on board to stock the lab and hire the technical staff directly. Such an approach needs a dedicated working group established in 2021 to articulate and develop and explore the full proposition.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Ensure the continued sustainable growth of tourism in the West, including maximising the opportunities for the growth of Business Tourism

**Action 1:****Business Tourism Training**

Continue to offer training programmes which specifically assist businesses in winning more business from corporate clients i.e. in terms of ensuring that familiarisation trips and site inspections are delivered in a professional manner. Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer programmes to help businesses to develop their experiences and explore the financials of extending the tourism season.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte 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:

When COVID-19 struck, Business Tourism (BT), like all tourism, stopped with immediate effect. However, the Fáilte Ireland BT team and the regional convention bureaux have promoted Ireland as a BT destination.

- There were 544 events, worth €296.4m cancelled in 2020; 78 of these are for 2021 with an estimated value of €61.4m
- Fáilte Ireland, working with industry partners, has managed to reschedule 212 events, worth €155m, for future years.
- Ireland continues to win business for future years despite the significant challenges. In 2020 Fáilte Ireland generated 206 new leads worth €121m and converted and supported 88 new leads worth €59m for events up to 2024.
- Fáilte Ireland pipeline of leads for future years (up to 2032) is now more than €1bn.

As Irish tourism businesses learn to cope with the new reality imposed by COVID-19, Fáilte Ireland created a customised support hub – featuring expert insights, advice on support schemes and more. The hub is designed to help members in the hospitality sector understand and adjust to the industry's extreme challenges (policies, HR plans and payroll) and be regularly updated when the situation changes.

Fáilte Ireland also issued sector-specific guidelines for tourism and hospitality businesses to guide sector members in meeting the Government's public health advice. Each employee was eligible to complete appropriate COVID-19 hygiene and safety control training set out in the terms and conditions of the charter.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Fáilte Ireland will continue to roll out activities throughout 2021 to ensure that Ireland's business tourism sector will recover post-COVID-19.

Action 2:

Support Fáilte Ireland in the delivery and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDP) under the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brands.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, OPW, Coillte

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to long-term Plan

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Connemara and Aran Island VEDP: The priorities for 2020 included several short-term actions which were identified in the first quarterly Connemara and Aran Islands Tourism Network (CAITN) meeting 2020 to prioritise in 2020. Individual members adopted the following specific items to champion:

- Promote existing festivals associated with the sea/Islands of Stone, and all other 32 actions in the Plan relating to Islands
- Strengthen the link between Clifden and the Derrigimlagh site.
- Mountain Access Scheme: to assist in formalising access to and on existing and future hillwalking routes.
- Carry out a feasibility assessment on the introduction of a Galway-Clifden-Leenane-Westport shuttle bus.
- Undertake a review of the positioning and current branding of Connemara and Aran Islands
- Explore opportunities to link existing aquaculture, farm and fisheries producers with tourism experiences and food businesses.
- Introduce talks and events linked to 1916 at Pearse's Cottage Visitor Centre.
- Ensure that all festivals are promoted within GCC's Annual Events Calendar.
- Investigate the opportunity for Dark Skies accreditation for the Islands and pursue astro-tourism.
- Promote *Made in Galway* brand for crafts and promote craft makers.
- Produce loop walk pocket trail maps/guides using a similar format to that developed for The Burren.
- Expand on the existing concept of a Connemara and Aran Islands film trail (see Discover Ireland)
- Create a Gaelic Experiential Trail
- Work with Connemara and Aran Island accommodation providers and restaurants to put local food on menus and celebrate local produce by highlighting the local stories and using the Irish language.

Clew Bay Update

Year 1 Action/Short Term Actions (underway)

- Publish the VEDP and community briefings
- Establish Implementation Group and appoint Chair/s
- Identify short-term actions and quick-win projects and establish Activation Teams for each project.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

VEDP work is underway in both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brands, and several areas above are being actioned. However, all projects this year are impacted by COVID-19, and there may be some delays.

*New long-term plan referenced above:

- Overview of Wild Atlantic Way VEDPs

Connemara and Aran Islands Visitor Experience Development Plan: This plan was designed to encourage all operators and organisations involved in delivering a tourism product to reinforce and add value to the experience through aligning with the stories and themes identified therein and target the *Culturally Curious and Great Escapers* market segments. The vision was to extend the season and attract visitors to engage with the Connemara Coast and Aran Islands' true essence and story without compromising the region's environment or culture.

- Clew Bay Visitor Experience Development Plan – Co. Mayo: The Clew Bay Visitor Experience Development Plan's key objectives are to develop compelling experiences for this stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way that will position Clew Bay as a 'must do' destination and motivate visitors to stay overnight and spend more.
- There is no Roscommon VEDP under Ireland's Hidden Heartland (IHH).

Action 3:

Continue the work to roll out an integrated network of greenways, blueways and key trails that stretch across the entire region and connect to networks outside of the region.

Working Group Members:

Local Authorities; Leader companies; LEOs; Fáilte Ireland; Industry

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

- **Blueways – Galway, Mayo and Roscommon**
- The original Blueway was on the Galway Mayo coast, and Connemara Leader was managing it. It technically still exists at Bofin Harbour on Inishbofin, Killary Fjord in Leenane, Keem on Achill Island, and Mannin Bay and Old Head (Louisburgh) in Co. Mayo. Activities will include snorkelling and open water kayaking.
- **Waterways Ireland Lough Derg Blueway** incorporates Galway while the Shannon/Lough Key one includes Roscommon.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Blueways update

- **Status update for Lough Derg Blueway (Waterways Ireland)**

Established blueway, inland, lake. It is intended to complete the full accreditation process.

- **Shannon Blueway status update (Waterways Ireland)** Confirmed Stage 1 approval. It is intended to complete the full accreditation process.
- **Shannon Erne Blueway** – Confirmed Stage 1 approval. It is intended to complete the full accreditation process.
- **Overall update on Blueways from Waterways Ireland:** Ongoing contacts with most blueway developers. Some of the developers are distracted by COVID-19 due to the implications for their timetables and staff resources.

Greenways update

- **Connemara Greenway**
 - » Section 1: Funding provided to complete 22km between Clifden and Recess. Works to be completed in 2021
- **Connemara Greenway**
 - » Section 2: Preliminary Design and Environmental Evaluation for 17km section from Clifden to Kylemore.
- **Connemara Greenway**
 - » Section 3: Preliminary Design and Environmental for 8km section from Clifden to Derrigimlagh
- **Connemara Greenway**
 - » Section 4: Galway city to Moycullen - Preliminary Design and Environmental section
- **The Quiet Man**
 - » Concept and Feasibility Design, Project Appraisal Plan – Athenry to Milltown
- **Galway to Dublin Greenway Euro Velo 2**
 - » Galway city to Ballinasloe, (feasibility and environmental stage) to link up with Athlone to Dublin already constructed.
- **Great Western Greenway**
 - » Westport to Achill Sound – complete
- **Clew Bay Greenway**
 - » Achill Sound and extension to Bunnacurry. Construction of Grade Separated sections from Westport to Murrisk. Will contribute to 56km route, Great Western Greenway

Action 4:

Establish a plan for the sustainability of the Galway Convention Bureau and develop a model for sustaining the Galway Convention Bureau, including securing any necessary funding or resources.

Working Group Members:

Galway Convention Bureau, Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to Q4 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:**Model for sustaining the Galway Convention Bureau:**

COVID-19 has severely impacted business models. Additional financial support is required for Business Tourism and for the actions commenced to strengthen our new USPs and supports. This includes the continuing push to make Galway one of the most sustainable destinations for business events, as 'Regenerative Tourism' takes centre standing due to the pandemic. We have engaged with future ambassadors of Galway and leading international sectors. With the collapse of the tourism industry in 2020, the initiatives we have set will help kick-start the recovery progress in 2021.

Securing any necessary funding / resources:

In recent weeks, Fáilte Ireland has developed an *Ireland Based Inbound Agents Business Continuity Scheme* to support this essential sector's long-term viability. Funding of circa €10m, subject to funding availability, has been allocated by Fáilte Ireland to the scheme. Ireland based Inbound Agents such as Destination Management Companies (DMCs), Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) and incoming tour operators (leisure and golf) deliver and manage significant international leisure and business tourism to Ireland each year. They play a vital role in the tourism ecosystem, generating business for all our hotels, venues, restaurants, pubs, attractions, and transport providers. COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on international tourism, resulting in a significant drop in revenue for our Ireland-based inbound agents. It is imperative to the recovery of Ireland's tourism industry that this sector survives.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

To overcome COVID-19 restrictions, remote working, and virtual/hybrid conferencing were implemented. With this, digital accessibility to global destinations emerged, shifting the central USP in conversions from accessibility (airport/transport) towards residential influencers in industry sectors. With hybrid conferencing, planners witness financial and marketing benefits, attracting wider audiences while resourcefully creating repurpose content. Choosing a hybrid platform with on-site technology is complex, and for it to succeed takes additional resources, skillsets, and time. Galway Convention Bureau needs to promote the potential opportunities, open memberships to wider regional services (creative/ICT Sector), provide available packages, reduce financial risk for newcomers, and set a competitive standard.

Action 5:

Secure conference/convention bookings from multi-nationals in the region. Approach MNCs based in the region, to pitch for the West as a destination for companies' global conferences.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, Galway Convention Bureau, Local Authorities, Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to Q4 2021.

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Whilst our traditional lead generating activities have paused, The Fáilte Ireland Business Tourism team has been busy over the past few months hosting and attending virtual events.

Fáilte Ireland launched the *Virtual Market Access Fund*. Between the *Virtual Market Access Fund* and all our virtual sales platforms, Fáilte Ireland has delivered 14 international sales platforms giving industry 230 opportunities to connect with 2,200 buyers.

Also, Fáilte Ireland has been conducting a full review of existing bid documents to benchmark the tendering standards against global competitors. This is a collaborative exercise involving convention bureaux across Ireland to align our messaging, ensure consistent content, and improve all aspects of future media material.

The reimagined *Ambassador Programme* (corporate and conference) will include more resources and include a dedicated team to oversee the programme. Over the years, Fáilte Ireland has had a very successful conference *Ambassador Programme*. There is now a project under the way to reimagine this to attract the corporate ambassador market for corporate meetings and events.

The key challenge in the short term is ensuring that travel is safe and hygienic for their employees – they have a duty of care. At present, we think it will be 2022 when we see these come back in any great number, but the advancement of vaccines will determine this.

We have enquiries for corporates for large global tech events for Ireland as an option for 6600 people next November. This shows us that the 'promotable' corporate meeting will return. We need to ensure we are competitive and that as a destination, we offer all aspects of safety and security.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Continue to generate new leads and convert business throughout 2021. Roll out of a bid document review project in early 2021 and implement the Reimagined Conference Ambassador Programme.

Action 6:

Develop a suite of new and improved experiences for Mayo and Roscommon outside of the high season.

Working Group Members:

Fáilte Ireland, private tourism operators, Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to ongoing - Work is ongoing on developing a range of saleable experiences for Roscommon and Mayo.

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

- The Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands team is developing a range of new saleable experiences for these counties for the Autumn/Winter period. Experiences are being audited and tested. Providers are getting training and mentoring from Fáilte Ireland to improve the product's quality and their sales capability to grow their international sales.
- Face-to-face saleable experiences training took place up until March 2020, and the programme is currently on hold since COVID-19 and small businesses focus on their immediate business priorities. It will return in 2021 either as a virtual programme or will resume in small groups face to face. COVID-19 disrupted the normal 'season' for tourism. It is difficult for businesses to recalibrate their experience for the winter season during COVID-19 closures and restrictions.
- Experiences are being fed into B2B distribution channels to tour operators by Fáilte Ireland and overseas B2C campaigns via Tourism Ireland. There is a plan to incorporate experiences into domestic campaigns under Discover Ireland in 2021.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

A large amount of work remains to be completed on saleable experiences for the Autumn/Winter season and this will resume fully as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Build on the West's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector

**Action 1:**

Form a project team for the creative economy (business/education/public sector) to develop and implement a plan to achieve enterprise and employment growth in the creative sector.

Working Group Members:

Western Development Commission (WDC), Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

1. The Regional Creative Economy team has engaged with regional stakeholders including Western Development Commission (WDC), TG4, Galway Film centre, Údarás na Gaeltachta, IDA, NUIG and the creative industries themselves (almost 200 in total) to identify and develop growth priorities for the sector.
2. In Q3 the WDC commissioned a synopsis of the sector in the region which the steering group used as part of the submission to the draft National Economic Recovery Plan consultation
3. In Q3 the WDC, recognising the unique and immediate macro challenges, commissioned and completed a key *Survey of the West region Creative economy (Create Consult/NUIG)*. This captured the issues and growth needs of 140 regional SMEs in the creative sector.
4. Offering immediate assistance, the regional support bodies implemented key support programmes to creative businesses in 2020: e.g., Údarás na Gaeltachta/TG4's Graduate employment assistance programme and skills bursary, WDC's regional film fund (WRAP), and the €1.9m Literary tourism EU-supported project *Spot-Lit* which offered regional businesses support to develop this emerging sector, linking tourism and the creative offerings for the future with international partners.

Outcomes achieved:

- The regional working group has provided inputs to the National Economic Recovery Plan consultation on the growth requirements of the creative economy in the region.
- The regional working group via the WDC has commissioned a unique survey of the economic status and needs of the Creative economy sector in the region – this involved 140 SME's and the final report and synopsis is being drafted to inform the working group members and guide the decision making of future support requirements (Q1 2021).
- The working group has identified an industry le regional advisory group which may be engaged to inform future growth.
- As stated previously, the working group members have engaged in support programmes to respond to the pandemic impacts (seen from the preliminary survey results to be disproportionately severe on the creative sector performing SMEs).

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

- Region Activation Group (RAG) not convened (although identified) as initial feedback from sector highlighted the need to address the immediate issue of identifying short term actions to stabilise the SMEs within the sector. Thus, a decision was made to undertake a sector survey, which is now complete and being written up.
- A draft sectoral action plan and priorities may be available by Q2 2021.

Action 2:

Develop a programme to increase the scale of companies in the creative sector. This action will focus on developing the business capability and acumen of small companies and sole traders in the creative sector to increase scaling potential and resilience.

Working Group Members:

WDC, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs, ETBs

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work under during 2020:

- Ongoing Creative economy support works in the region include:
 - » Regional Film fund (WRAP) implementation (WDC) leading to major regional productions.
 - » Approval under the REDF for the *Creative Enterprise West* (CREW). programme through ComhOibriu CLG in partnership with WDC, GMIT and the Galway Film Centre.
 - » Graduate placement initiatives (TG4 and Údarás na Gaeltacta).
 - » Galway 2020 programme.
 - » Literary tourism programme.spot-lit.
- Key initial findings of the WDC surveys of the SMEs in the creative economy include:
 - » Survey response was 140 SMEs involved in 3 sub-segments, Craft, Culture and Creative in the west region
 - » Survey Value of the sector (2018): €478M, # SMEs 3,132, employees 7,413
 - » Pandemic impact: 18% fall in year-on-year sales, but performance facing sectors and craft predicting a much bigger, potentially unrecoverable reduction in sales.
- Conclude ongoing programmes of scale.
- Review survey recommendations for priority new opportunities for investment.
- The literary tourism initiative (Spot-Lit), will run through 2021 with SMEs.
- The WRAP film fund will run through 2021.
- Graduate initiatives are ongoing.
- Galway 2020 finished in Q4 2020.

Final outcome achieved:

- **Regional film fund:** The implementation of the West Region Audiovisual and Producers (WRAP) fund has led to multiple investments in new productions and associated employment.
 - » Ten productions invested in by the WDC /WRAP fund to a total of approx. €445K leveraging €3.45m in total investment in the productions, e.g., ‘Calm with Horses’ released March 2020.
- **Graduate placement – TG4/Údarás na Gaeltachta:** The first cohort of six graduates completed their year with production companies. In Q3 2020 the initiative was publicly announced again, and seven graduates have now commenced employment with seven production companies.
- **Regional Creative enterprise accelerator:** This was approved for the region under REDF January 8, 2020. The region developed a *Creative Enterprise West* (CREW) programme through ComhOibriu CLG in partnership with WDC, GMIT and the Galway Film Centre. It will target the digital creative sector and will build on WDCs research in the creative industries sector and government policy through key actions
- **Regional Literary tourism product: The Literary Tourism Product Innovation Programme (PIP)** launched in Region in Q1 2020 to enable regional SME’s to “develop new literary tourism business products, services and experiences”, and in turn develop a class-leading innovative, creative product in the region. Key points achieved:
 - » **60+ SMEs** involved in three regional workshops in 2019 (Galway, Mayo).
 - » A €50K funded call to invite sector participants to apply for up to €10,000 and support (including links to international expertise), to develop new products in the sector.
 - » In Q3/Q4 2020 the region initiated a flagship performance model to accelerate the growth of the nascent sector with literary-based performances scheduled for 2021.
 - » International literary tourism network established in Q4 2020.

<p>Action 3:</p> <p>Develop an umbrella brand for the promotion of the West region creative sector.</p> <p>This action proposes to achieve for the creative sector in the West region what the Wild Atlantic Way has achieved for tourism along the Atlantic coast – a branding proposition that brings together existing assets and which will feed into diverse placemaking and regional promotion initiatives.</p> <p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>Western Development Commission, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland.</p> <p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>Final Status:</p> <p>Action commenced but requires further work</p> <p>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</p> <p>A regional creative survey was completed in Q4 2020.</p> <p>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</p> <p>This work has been rescheduled for review by the working group etc. with reference to the results of the regional creative survey.</p> <p>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</p> <p>The working group/RAG will advise on whether the need and realisation of a creative region brand are possible based on the completed survey inputs.</p>

Summary overview of West region creative sector pre-pandemic

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place • Environment • Openness • Authenticity • Attractiveness • Urban/Rural • Collaboration • Quality of Life 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Infrastructure • Coherence • Representation • Space • Digital Infrastructure
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration & Co-production • Digital • Exports • Experience • Cross Sector • Environment 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tastes • Housing • Support • Place • Finance • Digital

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Enhance the growth potential of AgTech in the West



Action 1:

Conduct a scoping exercise for the AgTech sector in the West region.

This exercise will explore the supply side of the sector (what is out there and what do companies need?), and the demand side (what opportunities exist in the marketplace?) as a basis for developing a 'plan of action' for the sector.

Working Group Members:

AgTech' Forum'/Working Group - Teagasc, Leader, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices and Bord Bia

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

The LEOs in the West region and Enterprise Ireland took the lead in carrying out a scoping exercise to gauge the region's Ag-tech sector's amount of activity. This exercise explored the supply side of the sector (what is out there and what do companies need?) and the demand side (what opportunities exist in the marketplace?) as a basis for the development of a "plan of action" for the sector.

Final outcome achieved:

The scoping exercise was completed. The scoping exercise has identified opportunities for the sector on a regional and national basis.

Action 2:

Identification of best practice in enhancing capability and strengthen the AgTech network by identifying an Enterprise Champion.

Working Group Members:

AgTech' Forum'/Working Group

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action not commenced.

Reason:

Due to COVID-19, identifying Enterprise Champions within the AgTech space was not feasible, as individual businesses faced several challenges within their own organisations that needed to be prioritised.

Action 3:

Develop a 'plan for action' for the sector. With the information gathered within the scoping exercise above and best practice models, the group can then begin to examine the possibilities of programme development to increase scale in existing companies and encourage startups in the AgTech space.

Working Group Members:

AgTech' Forum'/Working Group

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

As part of the scoping exercise, a series of actions were identified to help grow the AgTech sector in the West. Due to COVID-19, work on formulating these actions into a plan has stalled.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

The plan of action will be revisited in 2021.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Align training provision to local current and future skills needs



Action 1:

Progress the development and roll-out of a 'Skills for Growth' initiative in the West Region.

Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum, and partners including Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Education and Training Board, and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

The *Skills for Growth* initiative is continuing, but given the impact of COVID-19, a new online engagement form through the Regional Skills website has been developed. In the absence of face-to-face audits, a new online form enables businesses to submit skills needs to Regional Skills West. The *Spotlight on Skills* project in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland has also gone online, and the first webinar pilot workshop in the West was conducted in December 2020.

The process is now online and facilitates business developing their critical skills strategy with an online meeting then conducted with Regional Skills West to respond based on each company's skills needs.

Final outcome achieved:

As part of the Skills for Growth initiative, the Regional Skills Forum has helped local enterprises identify their skills' needs through various 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 linked companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills needs.

Action 2:

Develop a panel of business representatives to engage with second-level students.

Working Group Members:

Individual Educational Institutions and Education and Training Boards, LEOs

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

This action has commenced, Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) has the Employer Engagement Unit in place with an employer engagement officer, *Skills to Advance* coordinator and *Skills for Work* coordinator all working to support employers in the region.

Part of this unit's work is to link with services to Business and the Guidance Service in linking with second-level schools in the region and deliver a series of webinars in a range of topics from entrepreneurship to apprenticeships and traineeships. The purpose is primarily to ensure second-level students know what key opportunities are available to them and what employers require in an employee.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

As outlined above, this has commenced. However, COVID-19 impacted the initiative's progress. Most employers and school are operating in a digital space now, so this can be achieved particularly via virtual technology.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

This action aims to finalise the business representatives who would be available to participate. A schedule of 'virtual' meetings will be in place during 2021 to advance the initiative. Links with schools will be defined and timelines in place for a series of webinars facilitated through Eventbrite. This would allow students to register for a specific talk on a particular business opportunity/career. It is planned to have a range of guest speakers available to engage with the students on various career paths/ opportunities.

Action 3:

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

Working Group Members:

RSF, Higher Education Institutes (HEI)

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2019

<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Complete</p>
<p>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</p>
<p>Completed in 2019. However Regional Skills West also provided the same support to GMIT and NUI Galway in 2020. Additional support to education and training providers was also given in developing Human Capital Initiative (HCI) proposals and funding for additional places and modular.</p>
<p>Final outcome achieved:</p>
<p>Providers in the region were awarded 36 Springboard courses and 10 HCI courses. NUI Galway was awarded €7.5 million in funding for its <i>ASPIRE: Next Generation Graduates</i>’ project HCI funding, while Connacht- Ulster Alliance (CUA), of which GMIT is a partner, secured €12.4 million in HCI funding for its project <i>HigherEd 4.0: Enabling agile responsiveness from Higher Education</i>, which will help propel higher education into a new and exciting age of learning.</p>
<p>Action 4:</p>
<p>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.</p>
<p>Working Group Members:</p>
<p>Education and Training Board, Regional Skills Forum</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>Q4 2019</p>
<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Complete</p>
<p>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</p>
<p>This was completed in 2019, with the number of participants on the EXPLORE programme doubled. Also, 23 more people were upskilled through the EXPLORE programme during 2020, despite the challenges of COVID-19 upheaval and restrictions.</p>
<p>Final outcome achieved:</p>
<p>The number of participants on the EXPLORE programme was doubled in 2019 over the 2018 figure, with additional places provided during 2020. The EXPLORE programme addressed the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the region.</p>

Action 5:

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

Working Group Members:

Regional Skills Forum (RSF) and other stakeholders

Timeframe for delivery:

2020

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

Regional Skills West continued to be open for business and tailored its efforts to deal with the impacts of COVID19 through online communications channels since mid-March 2020. A series of webinars on upskilling businesses was held during the first lockdown, while a business mentoring series was conducted over the summer. Information on State-funded COVID-19 supports for businesses and all available skills provision was made available online and disseminated on social media and via an e-zine.

Final outcome achieved:

The services available through the Regional Skills Forum to assist with resolving emerging skills needs have been communicated to employers.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

6

Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West



Action 1:

Publish a regional enterprise space audit. Through engagement with the work of the AEC Taskforce, develop and publish a central list of information on enterprise space availability in the region.

Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Officers, Department of Rural Community Development (DRDC)

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

AEC Officers in each Local Authority collected data on vacancies in many key towns. This data was collated and stored centrally in a GIS-based system

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

AEC and Department of Rural and Community Development will discuss the progression of enterprise space data and future use and updating.

Action 2:

Work with the owners/managers of existing enterprise space to assess and address the facilities and functionality of current enterprise spaces.

Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, AEC Officers, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action not commenced.

Reason:

This action is dependent on the progression of the data in action 1.

Action 3:

Network/connect existing enterprise spaces to other business supports. Assess the extent of connection between existing enterprise spaces and other supports such as mentoring, finance facilities, and business development supports, developing a plan to improve this networking where there are gaps.

Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Officers, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland.

Timeframe for delivery:

Revised to Q1 2021

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Data collected on all hubs across the region. In 2019/2020 consultation events were held with hubs outlining future plans and ascertaining hubs' needs. This will lead to the formation of a hub network across all AEC counties.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Launch event to be held in early 2021 of a centralised hub booking system. Beyond this, the continuation and development of a hubs network will allow for information sharing and access to supports in the future.

Additional Actions in the West Regional Enterprise Plan

Action 1
Mapping of hub locations.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Atlantic Economic Corridor, Western Development Commission
Timeframe for delivery:
Q3/4 2020
Final Status:
Complete
Outline of work undertaken during 2020:
Locations and details of existing hubs across AEC counties were collected and collated via AEC officers and each local authority. The WDC then mapped the data on an interactive map. Final outcome achieved: Interactive map is now available at: https://www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie/hubs-map/
Action 2:
Roll out of <i>The Hub Outreach Scheme</i> .
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Atlantic Economic Corridor, Western Development Commission
Timeframe for delivery:
Q3/4 2020
Final Status:
Complete
Outline of work undertaken during 2020:
The <i>Hub Outreach Scheme</i> was launched in July 2020 with a total fund of €300,000 available for hubs across the AEC. Under the scheme, hubs could apply for a grant of up to €5,000 to cover costs associated with reopening/adjusting their space under COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. This included video conferencing equipment, sanitation equipment, marketing etc.
Final outcome achieved:
A total of 65 hubs were funded under <i>The Hub Outreach Scheme</i> .

2. Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office activities and outcomes in the 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 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.

Enterprise Ireland

2020 was a year like no other. Enterprise Ireland's (EI) clients were faced with unprecedented challenges and EI worked with many clients in the West region to stabilise, reset and recover.

The following is the summary of **COVID-19** supports to companies in the West region totalling nearly €20m:

COVID-19 Supports	Galway Approval amounts (no of companies)	Mayo Approval amounts (no of companies)	Roscommon Approval amounts (no of companies)	Total approved to West
Sustaining Enterprise Fund	€12,365,000 (47)	€3,625,000 (13)	€600,000 (<5)	€16,590,000
Business Financial Planning	€304,800 (62)	€115,120 (24)	€59,245 (12)	479,165
Lean Business Continuity Voucher	€67,500 (27)	€25,000 (10)	€5,000 (<5)	€97,500
COVID-19 On-line Retail Scheme	€969,015 (26)	€284,338 (8)	€107,390 (<5)	€1,360,743
COVID-19 Products Scheme	€1,158,148 (<5)	n/a	n/a	€1,158,148

The implications of **Brexit** have also added to the challenge for Irish indigenous SMEs exporting to the UK and EI client companies have been supported to the value of €1.172m to more than 70 companies across the WEST region through Brexit specific supports including market discovery funding and strategic planning grants.

Enterprise Ireland invested €48m in 125 new start-ups, including Competitive Start Fund projects in 2020 with 50% of them outside Dublin.

The 2020 global ranking by PitchBook, a leading Venture Capital (VC) and Private Equity Investment Platform, has put Enterprise Ireland first in terms of top VC investors in global funding. Pitchbook ranks the most active global investors by VC deal count.

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 invested €48m in 125 new start-ups, including Competitive Start Fund (CSF) projects in 2020 with 50% of them outside Dublin. 6 HPSUs and 6 CSF projects were funded in the West region.

Galway-based start-up CitySwift announced 50 new jobs in Sept 2020 and will be hiring for roles in software, data science, sales and marketing over the next two years.

During 2020, Enterprise Ireland client companies created 883 new jobs and brings the total to 15,011 jobs in Enterprise Ireland client companies in the West region across 465 companies.

Regional Enterprise Infrastructure:

Enterprise Ireland also continued to support enterprise infrastructure development across the region with total funding approved in REDF 3 to the West of €9.6m across 5 regionally strategic projects (January 2020). This brings the total REDF funding to the West region to a total of €16.7m towards the development of 9 projects since 2017.

In addition, existing Enterprise Centres were supported by EI in 2020 to reset because of COVID-19 impact and 14 Enterprise Centres in the West were supported with funding of €1.2m announced in Nov 2020 to help with implementing recovery plans.

Regional Technology Cluster Fund

The Wood and Furniture Manufacturing Cluster will help the sector to scale rapidly and sustainably. It will help businesses to improve competitiveness, productivity and collaboration; develop and adopt innovative technologies; efficiently create novel products and services; and enhance access to talent, R&D capacities and international supports.

The MedTech and Life Sciences Cluster will enable SMEs to scale rapidly through increased engagement in research, development and innovation activities and the efficient creation of novel products and services. It will help them to capitalising on future trends, especially in Digital Health, and to adopt innovative technologies.

The above projects, managed by GMIT, were approved funding of €363,671 each to develop these clusters across the region.

R&D, Innovation and HEI Supports:**GMIT iHub Expansion:**

Build an innovation centre of scale in Galway City to double GMIT's iHub capacity to support 40+ enterprises. Expansion from 1,150 sq. m to 2,400 sq. m with 95% funded by EI. This centre will have a Med Tech Focus/ Digital Tech focus and will support new and existing companies in this sector.

BioInnovate:

Started in 2011, the BioInnovate programme has become recognised as a global centre for medical technology innovation. Based in one of the world's largest medical device hubs (Galway, Ireland), BioInnovate is ideally located to enable the most forward thinking (progressive) professionals from a network of academic, clinical and industry settings to collaborate and enhance the future of healthcare and ultimately improve millions of patients' lives worldwide. <https://www.bioinnovate.ie/>

BioExel Medtech Accelerator BioExel at NUI Galway, is supported by Enterprise Ireland, to further enhance the medical technology sector start-up ecosystem within Ireland and attract global talent to the region. Other partnership sponsors for this Enterprise Ireland supported accelerator are the Western Development Commission, the Galway University Foundation and the Bank of Ireland Seed and Early-Stage Equity Fund. This Accelerator runs a 6 month programme each year and application can be submitted from teams or individuals both in Ireland and international, with an opportunity in the medical technology sector. <https://www.bioexel.ie/>

Technology Gateway in GMIT:

The MET Gateway, based in Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, offers technology solutions targeted at medical device and engineering companies including data analytics and biomedical data collection. Funding of €840,000 was approved for this centre of excellence and it is one of 15 Gateways across Ireland.

Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund:

9 companies in the West region are leading or consortia members of disruptive & innovative projects announced under the 2nd DTIF call in 2019 to a value of more than €40.6m. to 15,011 jobs in Enterprise Ireland client companies in the West region.

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 6th, 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, up from 10.7 percent in 2019 as a result of the severe impact of the pandemic on certain domestic facing sectors and the employment growth within IDA Ireland's client base.

The IDA Ireland West Region includes the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. There are 120 IDA supported companies in the West Region, employing 27,695 people in total and the knock-on impact in the local economy is substantially more. In 2020, just over 400 jobs were created by IDA Ireland client companies in the West region.

Over several years, the West region has been successful in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI) with employment levels in IDA client companies consistently increasing every year since 2009 with particular strengths in the life sciences and tech sectors. There were investment announcements from new name FDI companies Diligent Corporation, Triggerfish, and Globalization Partners in 2020, adding to the West's growing tech and services sectors. The number of people employed in software engineering, technical support, global business services and R&D in the region has also grown considerably in recent years with companies, such as Lionbridge in Ballina, Valeo in Tuam and SAP, Cisco, Avaya and EA Games in Galway having all expanded their operations.

It is well recognised that there is a global cluster of life sciences (both multi-national and indigenous) companies in the West, supported by active research assets, infrastructure and property solutions which has helped drive strong cluster development. The third level Institutes in the region, NUIG and GMIT, collaborate closely with industry and provide a large graduate talent pool. The strength of the sector is further evidenced by the continued growth of companies across the region such as Allergan (an Abbvie company) in Westport, Baxter in Castlebar, Hollister in Ballina in Mayo, Surmodics in Ballinasloe and Medtronic, Merit Medical and Boston Scientific in Galway and Harmac Medical Products in Roscommon. Harmac Medical Products announced the creation of 60 new jobs in 2020 with IDA Ireland's support at its Castlerea plant where 300 people are already employed, and Meissner based in Castlebar announced that their new manufacturing facility is now operational and recruitment underway.

Many of these MedTech manufacturing companies and their staff responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing vital medical technologies. For instance, Medtronic increased its ventilator production five-fold in less than five months, moving to 24/7 operations in the Galway plant and shared full designs for a Medtronic Galway engineered ventilator.

The West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 is built around six core objectives, IDA Ireland was cooperated in the following:

Strategic Objective 1: Build greater capability within the Life Sciences sector to meet its future needs. In this regard, IDA looks forward to continuing our close collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders to continue building on the Lifesciences sector's expertise to ensure continued growth and that future needs are met.

Strategic Objective 3: Build on the West's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector. Having collaborative partners was particularly relevant in 2020 as IDA promoted Galway and the West Region to Triggerfish. This South African animation company has subsequently announced the creation of 60 jobs in Galway. The West's image as a 'creative' Region is a factor attractive to potential investors and significant for placemaking.

Strategic Objective 5: Ensuring that training provision is aligned to local current and future skills. There is a thriving, dynamic and innovative enterprise base in the Region and the presence of the 3rd level institutes of the National University of Ireland Galway and the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology in Castlebar and Galway are key to nurturing and producing the talented graduates required to attract further investments into the existing FDI client base in the Region and winning new investments. Leading companies in their sectors throughout the Region collaborate with the 3rd level institutes on trainee, graduate and research programmes and the respective Education and Training Board's (ETB) in Galway/Roscommon and Mayo/Leitrim. These collaborations lead to knowledge sharing, further opportunities and spill-over benefits. In 2020 IDA Ireland worked with SOLAS and the ETB's to pilot a 'Skills to Advance' programme to help upskill and retain staff in existing client companies. These often lead to new roles being created and filled within the region resulting in growth. Also, IDA Ireland actively participates in the Regional Skills Forum from which the Sales professional network and the Manufacturing Excellence network, both industry-led groups, have spun out.

Strategic Objective 6: Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West. IDA Ireland's property investment programme was put in place to support the delivery of IDA's previous strategy. This strategy concluded in 2019. It focused on the delivery of Advance Building Solutions, infrastructure investment in several utility intensive strategic sites. The upgrading of existing business parks is continuing. This resulted in the construction of Advance Building Solutions (ABS) in Castlebar, Co. Mayo and Parkmore East, Galway and an advance office building, also in Parkmore, Galway delivered through a PPP model. A c.35,000sqft advance building solution designed to achieve LEED CS accreditation in Parkmore East is now available and actively marketed by IDA Ireland.

Work continues on IDA Ireland's strategic landbank's servicing element in Athenry Co. Galway, and a significant upgrade of the Mervue IDA Business and Technology Park has taken place. IDA Ireland has flagship business parks in key locations in Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. These locations have been designed and landscaped to a high standard and are occupied by many high-end manufacturing and international services clients with the capacity to facilitate and accommodate new international investment.

IDA Ireland also works closely with the private sector to secure appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions suitable for FDI clients. IDA Ireland work in partnership with the four Local Authorities in the region in relation to property options, their role in the provision of critical infrastructure and placemaking. The creation of attractive places to live and work is good planning and good enterprise policy. It can provide a competitive edge to Irish towns and cities regarding attracting and retaining the skills and talent on which FDI is reliant. New developments in incubation space are also welcomed, and IDA Ireland will continue to promote FDI appropriate properties that support co-working spaces as they develop, e.g. The Portershed in Galway, Ballina Innovation Hub and Monksland Innovation Hub.

The impact of COVID-19 has presented undeniable challenges. The introduction of travel restrictions worldwide disrupted the typical way IDA engage with investors, resulting in fewer site visits and client meetings. 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 Ireland staff has contributed to an enhanced digital engagement with existing clients and also in hosting e-site visits with potential new investors.

IDA Ireland are operating in an extremely competitive and challenging environment with competition for foreign investment continuing to be intense. We welcome the continued engagement with and support from all stakeholders in the region and our parent Department to ensure the environment is optimal to continue to work to retain and secure further FDI for the West Region.

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 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 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 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 how 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 possible solutions to mitigate these impacts.

Managing 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 preparing 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.

Finally, two calls for proposals under the Just Transition Fund, administered by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, have resulted in Strand 1 grant offers totaling €1.2m for 16 successful applicants, and Strand 2 grant offers totaling €27.8m for 47 projects, all to be implemented in the transitioning peatlands area, including projects in east Galway and Roscommon¹.

1. A detailed list of projects which received provisional letters of offer appears at Appendix 3.

Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the West supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment during 2020

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 West region secured funding of €9,612,915 for five projects*.

Project	Location	Description	Grant amount €
Comhoibriú CLG	Galway	Centre of Excellence providing co-working space, incubation and accelerator programmes, training and outreach services	€2,694,833
Galway City Innovation District (GCID)	Galway	Support export oriented fast-growth tech companies	€1,205,833
Galway Technology Centre DAC	Galway	Facility for tech and digital enterprises in the Region.	€4,023,400
SCCUL Enterprises CLG	Galway	Enterprise centre to support Start-ups, SMEs and Social Enterprises.	€1,239,408
Grow Remote CLG	Galway	Fosters community chapters of remote workers locally through their ChangeX platform by providing education and through supporting hubs.	€449,442
Total			€9,612,915

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

Enterprise Centres Fund

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD, announced €969,929 in grants for 12 enterprise centres in the 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.

For-profit approvals:

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
Charlesford Ltd t/a The Spool Factory	Roscommon	West	67,500
Mobile Clipboard Ltd	Galway	West	10,905
Total			€78,405

Not-for-profit approvals:

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
Action Tuam Company Limited by Guarantee	Galway	West	150,000
Ballinasloe Area Community Development CLG Ballinasloe Enterprise Centre	Galway	West	50,176
Enterprise Castlerea Company Limited by Guarantee - t/a The Hub / An Chistin Food Hub	Roscommon	West	52,500
Bia Innovator Campus CLG	Galway	West	54,000
Galway City Innovation District CLG	Galway	West	149,978
Galway Mayo Institute of Technology - GMIT Innovation Hubs - Galway (iHub Galway)	Galway	West	101,442
Galway Technology Centre DAC	Galway	West	149,400
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Innovation Hub Mayo	Mayo	West	75,828
IRD North Mayo - West Sligo (t/a Moy Valley Resources)	Mayo	West	10,200
National University of Ireland Galway Business Innovation Centre (BIC) - Innovation Office	Galway	West	98,000
		Total	€891,524

Appendix 2: Statistical snapshot – West

Constituent counties	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	
Regional Population and change (1996-2016)	352,353 (1996): 453,109 (2016) increase of 100,756	
Total in employment	220,700*	
Labour Force participation rate	60.3%*	
% of Male employment (State)	54.3%	
% of Female employment (State)	45.7%	
Live Register at 31/12/20	14,714	
Unemployment rate	3.6*	
Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 31/12/20	30,624	
Unemployment blackspots ¹	8 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: 15,256	Jobs: 15,011
	Companies: 429	Companies: 465
IDA supported employment & number of client companies (2019 - 2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 27,300	Jobs: 27,695
	Companies: 115	Companies: 120
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: 317	Jobs: -119
	Companies: 685	Companies: 697

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 Galway County (2), Mayo (5) & Roscommon (1)

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

Appendix 3: Just Transition Fund Projects (Department of Environment, Climate and Communications)

Stream 1

	Project Name	Lead Applicant	Counties impacted
1	Provision of Remote Working Hub and Training Facility: Moore Community Hall	Moore Community Council	Roscommon
2	Geopark and Biosphere Research Study	Green Offaly	Offaly
3	Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk	Umeras Community Development	Kildare, Laois, Offaly
	Roscommon County Council	Roscommon	Kildare, Offaly
4	Athlone Co-Working Hub	Athlone Co-Working Hub (CWH)	East Galway, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
5	Producing and Promoting Green Energy Birr and SW Offaly	Birr 20:20 Vision Company Limited	East Galway, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon
6	Lanesboro Anaerobic Digestion Facility: Feasibility Study	Longford County Council	Longford, Roscommon
7	Lough Ree Technology Cluster Study	FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited	Longford, Roscommon
8	Ballyforan Area Development Feasibility Study	Ballyforan Area Transition Team	East Galway, Roscommon

Stream 2

	Project Name	Lead Applicant	Counties impacted
1	A Brown to Green Jobs Transition to Eliminate Energy Waste in Midlands Homes	Hub Controls Ltd	All counties
2	Ballyforan Greenway Loop	Ballyforan Area Transition Team	East Galway, Roscommon
3	Bord na Móna Employee Supports - Training and Upskilling Project	Bord na Móna	All counties
4	Bord na Móna Medicinal Herbs Project	Bord na Móna	All counties
5	Climate Action Training and Mentoring Programme	Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office	All counties
6	Cloontuskert Ballyleague Bog Heritage Train	Roscommon County Council	Roscommon
7	Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm	Roscommon County Council	Roscommon
8	Connecting Communities with Peatlands	Irish Rural Link	All counties
9	Digital Learning Hub - Longford	Longford Westmeath ETB	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
10	Employment Development Information Centre Transition Campus	Employment Development Information Centre Longford	Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
11	Empower Eco	Athlone Institute of Technology	All counties
12	Enablers of a Just Transition for Communities in the Midlands Region	University of Limerick - Centre for Environmental Research	All counties
13	Lanesboro Food Hub	Premier Lakelands Hub	Longford, Roscommon
14	Lanesborough Tourism Hub	Longford County Council	Longford, Roscommon
15	Littleton Labyrinth	Tipperary County Council	East Galway, Laois, North Tipperary
16	Lough Boora Discovery Park and Midlands Cycling Destination - Sustainable Connections 2020	Offaly County Council	All counties
17	Lough Boora Enhancement: Cycle Way and Feasibility Study - Industrial Art Space	Bord na Móna	All counties
18	Lough Ree Access for All	Lough Ree Access for All CLG	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
19	Lough Ree Distillery - Phase 2	Blacksmith Ventures Limited	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
20	Midland Bioenergy Development Project	Irish BioEnergy Association	All counties
21	Midlands Retrofit Growth	KORE Retrofit Ltd	All counties
22	Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park Greenway	Longford County Council	Longford, Roscommon
23	Pulse Hub: Creation of Remote Working Hubs in Ballinasloe Town	Ballinasloe Area Community Development CLG	East Galway, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
24	Social Enterprise Exchange	The Cluster Centre	East Galway, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
25	St. Joseph's Community Centre Development	Kilcormac Development Association	Offaly
26	Strategic Area Response Plan Implementation	Shannonbridge Action Group	East Galway, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
27	Superhomes Midlands	Tipperary Energy Agency CLG	All counties
28	The Lir Project	Fergal Moran and Brian O'Carroll	Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath

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