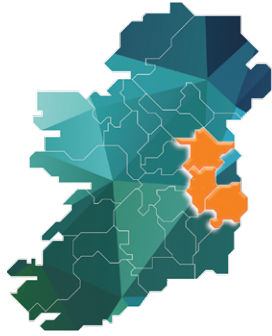




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



REGIONAL ENTERPRISE PLAN TO 2024

MID-EAST



An initiative of the Department
of Enterprise, Trade and Employment



Table of Contents

Minister's Foreword	1
Message from the Chair	3
Mid-East Regional Profile	4
Overview of Strategic Objectives and Actions	5
Chapter 1: The Regional Enterprise Plans Initiative	7
Chapter 2: Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024	9
• Strategic Objective 1: Position the Mid-East as the primary location for the development of the agri food hubs	9
• Strategic Objective 2: Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the screen content creation sector	13
• Strategic Objective 3: Enable the development and expansion of equine businesses across the Mid-East	16
• Strategic Objective 4: Ensure that the Mid-East Region accelerates the transition to a low carbon economy	19
• Strategic Objective 5: Support the continued development of a positive enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East	22
Chapter 3: Implementation	24
Chapter 4: Mid-East Enterprise Agencies and Local Enterprise Office	25
• 4.1 Enterprise Ireland: Focus to 2024	25
• 4.2 IDA Ireland: Focus to 2024	27
• 4.3 Local Enterprise Office: Focus to 2024	29
Chapter 5: Complementary Strategies and Initiatives	30
• 5.1 Fáilte Ireland: Focus to 2024	30
• 5.2 Regional Skills Forum: Focus to 2024	32
• 5.3 The Regional Assembly	33
• 5.4 Local Authorities – Local Economic and Community Plans	33
Appendices	34
Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee	35
Appendix 2: Mid-East Regional Statistical Snapshot	36
Appendix 3: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development	37
Appendix 4: Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025	39
Appendix 5: Regional Enterprise Development Funding	40
Appendix 6: Methodology	41

Minister's Foreword



Damien English

Damien English TD,
Minister of State for Business,
Employment and Retail

There is a huge appetite to facilitate regional enterprise development and grow job opportunities right across the country. I am delighted to see this outlook reflected strongly in the publication of this Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the Mid-East.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the regional stakeholders – the Enterprise Agencies, LEOs, Local Authorities, Regional Skills, Higher & Further Education, the Regional Assembly, Private Sector, and many other participants – for their determination and intense engagement for the betterment of the Mid-East.

Together they considered important questions to enhance enterprise development for their region, about enterprise resilience; place attractiveness; competitiveness; and the twin business transformation imperatives - low carbon and digital in developing their Plan.

Looking to the future, through the framework of our Economic Recovery Plan, and the recent review of the National Development Plan 2021-2030, the Government is committed to achieving a balanced, sustainable, and inclusive recovery for our people and our regions. The imperative to realise the enterprise and jobs potential in all our regions and reducing disparities between them remains a core priority.

My Department has an important role to play in the promotion and funding of regional development, through the work of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, and the Local Enterprise Office Network, by assisting businesses directly, and through ecosystem strengthening measures. These include initiatives such as the IDA regional property programme, the EI Regional Enterprise Development Fund and investments in innovation and start-up infrastructures. Critically, in overseeing the development of Regional Enterprise Plans, we recognise that there is added benefit if stakeholders work together regionally to understand their unique enterprise opportunities and challenges; and collaborate on solutions.



This new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the Mid-East is future-focused and centred around a number of priorities including:

- Positioning the region as the primary location for the development of agri food hubs,
- Development of a Content Creation Enterprise Hub,
- The expansion of equine businesses,
- Creating job opportunities from the transition to a low carbon economy, and
- Supporting the development of a positive enterprise ecosystem.

With continued regional collaboration, knowledge sharing and a solutions mindset, the actions within this Plan can make a real and lasting difference for the Mid-East, and to the collective national economic recovery.

I would like to especially thank the Chairperson of the Mid-East Regional Steering Committee Owen Brennan, Executive Chairman, Devenish, for his leadership on the preparation of this new Plan, and Conor Sweeney, Mid-East Programme Manager for his critical coordination role in delivering the final outcome. I am very appreciative of the time and energy given by all the members of the Steering Committee, and for your ongoing commitment to the Regional Enterprise Plan.

To assist the Regional Enterprise Plans, my Department, through Enterprise Ireland, has made available over €126m in funding since 2018 to assist locally-led regional enterprise development projects. Of this, over €8.9m has been approved for the Mid-East Region under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme.

New funding of up to €180m will be made available for the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative enterprise projects that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the regions.

This funding will complement the aims and objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plans and through their new Plan, the Mid-East Region is well positioned to compete for future funding calls to help improve the capability and competitiveness of their regional enterprise development offering and to encourage entrepreneurial activity among their local vibrant business community.

I am very much looking forward to further engagement with Owen and the members of the Mid-East Steering Committee as implementation progresses towards 2024.



Message from the Chair



Owen Brennan,
Executive Chairman, Devenish, Chair,
Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan

As Chair of the Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, I am pleased to see the publication of this Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024.

The successful implementation of the previous *Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020* provided the committee with a strong foundation upon which to develop further projects and initiatives that will continue the region's tradition of supporting enterprising businesses and sectors. I want to acknowledge the excellent work of our previous Chairman, Eamonn Sinnott, for his direction and guidance through that process. As I assume the role of Chair, I look forward to harnessing that spirit of collaboration, which will be a key element in the delivery of the plan.

Following a period of intensive consultation with our key stakeholders, we are setting out the priority objectives that we believe will act as differentiators for the Mid-East Region.

This Plan focuses on five key objectives:

1. Position the Mid-East as the primary location for the development of the agri food hubs.
2. Develop and operate a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew.
3. Enable the development and expansion of equine businesses across the Mid-East.
4. Develop key projects that facilitates the job creation opportunities that result in the transition to a low carbon economy.
5. Support the continued development of a positive enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East.

The committee has been particularly mindful of focusing their energy and resources on developing projects in sectors that will make the greatest immediate impact to the region. As we navigate a world that has been subjected to economic and societal shocks over the last number of years, we want to ensure that the infrastructure and talent is in place for the expansion of the agri-food, equine and content creation sectors. The plan will also ensure that the region focuses on opportunities that support the transition to a low carbon economy. This particular objective will be a great opportunity to collaborate with other regions across the country in meeting the targets set out. All of the stated objectives will be underpinned by timebound focused actions and supported by dedicated working groups, who will be tasked with ensuring their delivery.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our dedicated project delivery team and the wider steering committee for their contributions and commitment over the past number of months. I look forward to continuing to work with this group to see the Plan implemented successfully.



Mid-East Regional Profile

The Mid-East Region's proximity to our main city offers it a unique opportunity to capitalise on the shift to a more flexible working model whilst remaining closely connected to our key routes. The Mid-East Region as a whole is well served by high quality road networks. Motorway corridors radiating out from Dublin to the rest of the country traverse the Mid-East Region, providing fast access to Dublin city centre in addition to other urban centres such as Galway, Limerick, Belfast, Cork and Waterford. The region has access to a well-educated and innovative workforce that has ensured the attraction of major FDI investment over the last number of years.

The region has key areas of strength and areas of potential that offer opportunity for further enterprise development and economic growth:

- Well-established and growing concentrations of activity among multinational and indigenous companies in sectors such as Internationally Traded Services and High-Tech Manufacturing
- A competitive advantage in its excellent connectivity and access – an asset for enterprise development as well as facilitating tourism and infrastructure-dependent sectors such as distribution and logistics
- A strong and diverse agri-food sector encompassing microenterprises, companies of significant scale, in addition to food technology and innovation facilities
- Proximity to many of the State's universities, as well as its own Maynooth University, which has a strong track record in facilitating and prioritising research commercialisation
- Strong assets to support tourism, leisure and recreation, including some of the country's most significant heritage assets and an internationally renowned horse sport tradition
- A reputation as a hub for the film industry, the region has excellent capacity for large-scale film production, hosting two state-of-the-art film studios facilitating both indigenous and international productions with planned infrastructural expansion

Since the launch of *Regional Action Plan for Jobs (APJ)* in 2015, 65,500 more people are in employment in the region in Q3 2021 relative to Q1 2015. This is an increase of 22.2 percent, while the unemployment rate also fell from 9.5 percent to 6.2 percent over the same period.

The impact of COVID-19 has been felt across all sectors of the Mid-East. According to the CSO Labour Force Survey employment in the region dropped from 345,100 at Q4 2019 to a low of 310,800 in Q2 2020. This is a decline of 34,300.

The ambition of the new Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan is focused on building upon the region's past successes while working collaboratively around areas of commonality within the Mid-East to build an innovative, forward-looking region. The Plan will also aim to create a sense of regional identity while respecting the region's diversity and position the region at the forefront of addressing the difficulties presented by COVID-19 and embrace the challenges of climate action and digitalisation.



Overview of Strategic Objectives and Actions



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Position the Mid-East as the primary location for the development of the agri food hubs

- Action 1.1** The completion of the Boyne Valley Food Hub (Phase 1) and the development of the Digital Innovation Smart Agri Hub (Phase 2).
- Action 1.2** The development of the Athy Food, Drink and Skills Innovation Hub.
- Action 1.3** The development of food incubation development hub in County Wicklow.
- Action 1.4** The creation of the Boyne Valley Culinary Centre of Excellence.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the screen content creation sector

- Action 2.1** Develop and operate a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew.
- Action 2.2** Establish a Crew Development Hub to develop and nurture new and diverse talent from across the region.
- Action 2.3** Implement the Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy to support the growth of the industry across the region.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Enable the development and expansion of equine businesses across the Mid-East

- Action 3.1** Establish the first National Equine Innovation Centre in Ireland.
- Action 3.2** The development of programmes and training to support the equine sector.
- Action 3.3** Conduct a feasibility study to examine the expansion of the National Equine Innovation Centre.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Ensure that the Mid-East Region accelerates the transition to a low carbon economy

- Action 4.1** Conduct a feasibility study for the development of a regional green technology enterprise hub.
- Action 4.2** The development of a Green investment and enterprise zone in Allenwood, County Kildare.
- Action 4.3** The establishment of Marine Enterprise Facilities in the Mid-East.
- Action 4.4** The establishment of a Marine Education and Training facility for the Mid-East.
- Action 4.5** The creation of a circular economy cluster for the Mid-East Region.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: Support the continued development of a positive enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East

- Action 5.1** Deliver upon multi stakeholder initiatives that will support Start-Ups, SMEs and microbusiness across the region.
- Action 5.2** Commission a regional strategy that will adopt an evidence-based approach to co-working hub and innovation space development and investment for the Mid-East.

1

The Regional Enterprise Plans Initiative

Introduction

In early 2019, nine Regional Steering Committees established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), finalised and commenced implementation of the first *Regional Enterprise Plans*. This 'bottom-up' collaborative mechanism, involves the enterprise agencies, local enterprise offices, local authorities, regional assemblies, higher and further education bodies, private sector and others, within each region, chaired by a senior figure from industry. The Committees were formed initially in 2015 to drive the Regional Action Plans for Jobs until 2018.

The Regional Enterprise Plans each contain agreed 'Strategic Objectives' for enterprise development, accompanied by a time-bound set of actions that deliver to the objectives. Progress Reports on implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 are available on the Department's website.

Policy Context

Delivering balanced regional growth through a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland is a stated objective within the Programme for Government (PfG) and more recently emphasised in the *Economic Recovery Plan 2021*.

DETE contributes to this agenda in a number of ways, including through: the enterprise agencies; the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs); and direct investments in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem (incl. Regional Enterprise Development Fund, IDA property programme etc.), guided by our national enterprise policy. This work takes place in the context of the National Planning Framework (NPF), which provides the vision and holistic future planning framework for Ireland's spatial development across society and economy over the longer-term, and its translation through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and the aligned Local Authority County and City Development Plans.

The NPF and the three RSES provide a statutory long-term framework for the spatial, economic and social development of all regions in Ireland, offering an ambitious and sustainable proposition to delivering balanced regional development in Ireland. Smart Specialisation (S3) represents one of the key economic principles adopted in each of these high-level statutory frameworks, with a key enabling condition for funding interventions under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) also being the development of and alignment with the Member State's S3. By placing Smart Specialisation as one of the thematic areas of the Regional Enterprise Plans, we can ensure that regional enterprise priorities identified and supported in these plans are aligned with the long-term vision and objectives of the NPF and the RSES.



Other pertinent national policies include the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, *Innovation 2020* (with a new innovation strategy forthcoming); and *Making Remote Work* amongst others. Also, as part of the Shared Island initiative, there will be added impetus to delivering balanced regional growth by leveraging the potential to grow the all-island economy, while driving growth and job creation North and South.

Ensuring that all regions can realise their enterprise development potential and that regional disparities are reduced therefore requires that the Department works closely with relevant partners across Government to strengthen the enabling conditions for investment and business growth.

The Regional Enterprise Plans recognise that enterprise policy coherence and collaboration at the national level needs to be mirrored from the 'bottom up', to enable:

- a place-based perspective on needs, capabilities and opportunities to inform national enterprise and other policies;
- economies of scale through joined up actions and investment;
- effective targeting of national initiatives to areas of opportunity and greatest need; and
- development and delivery of a programme of collaborative actions that can drive better outcomes in terms of regional job creation

Although the Plans themselves are focused and timebound, the Steering Committee mechanism also maintains a live agenda at regional level, responsive to emerging opportunities and challenges, for example: Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic impacts, remote working opportunity for regions, climate action/just transition, and regional shocks requiring joined up responses.

Developing new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024

The outgoing Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) concluded at the end of 2020. Final Progress Reports from the nine Steering Committees show that the model has impact and that actions delivered are complementary and add value to the mainstream interventions of the enterprise agencies and other bodies working to enable enterprise development at a regional level.

The new Plans to 2024 build on the first iteration of the REPs and each Steering Committee had a clear mandate to deliver a new Plan to 2024 that would:

- complement and translate national enterprise policy in a regional context;
- facilitate collaboration regionally to address prioritised ecosystem gaps and opportunities, and help achieve Agency and LEO investment and jobs targets in each region; and
- use collective insight and resources in each region, and available regional funding, to progress initiatives to enable enterprise growth and job creation in each region.

The Department highlighted a number of national policy challenges that each of the Regional Committees were asked to consider as part of the preparation of the new Plans: enabling recovery and building enterprise resilience in the context of COVID-19 and other external shocks; the twin transition imperative for enterprises to digitalise and contribute to a carbon neutral economy; improving competitiveness through effective placemaking, including enabling flexible work patterns; and capitalising on existing and emerging sectoral strengths and capabilities through smart specialisation.

The development of Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 has for the first time been done in parallel with the creation of Ireland's forthcoming new Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). The stakeholder consultation events undertaken as part of the development of these Regional Enterprise Plans has acted as an entrepreneurial discovery process which has contributed valuable insights to the S3 for Ireland.

The final appendix summarises the various stages that has led to the publication of the Regional Enterprise Plans. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the development of the nine new Plans to 2024 was undertaken in a virtual environment. The Regional Enterprise Plans and Initiatives Unit, within DETE, will oversee the implementation of the new Plans at the national level, while roll-out of the process in each region will be driven on the ground by the existing Regional Steering Committees, assisted by Programme Managers appointed by the Local Authorities in each region.

Finally, to help drive delivery of the new REPs to 2024, drive best practice across regions, and encourage cross-regional collaboration on areas of common interest and opportunity, the Department has established a National Oversight Group (NOG) for the REPs, chaired jointly by Minister Robert Troy and Minister Damien English. This grouping includes the Chairpersons and the Programme Managers of the Regional Steering Committees, national level representatives of the enterprise agencies and other relevant bodies, as well as relevant Government Departments. The Group will meet over the lifetime of the new Regional Enterprise Plans.





Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024

Strategic Objective 1:

Position the Mid-East as the primary location for the development of the agri food hubs

Context and Vision to 2024

The agri food sector makes a powerful contribution to the economy of Ireland's Mid-East. Therein, the Boyne Valley region has been synonymous with food production and trade dating as far back as 10,000 years ago. The region typifies the ambition of Food Vision 2030 'A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems' which launched in 2021. This ambitious and innovative roadmap for the agri-food sector aims to increase agri-food exports from €14bn to €21bn by 2030 – further enhancing Ireland's position as global leader in safe, sustainable agri-food exports and acts as a base for some of Ireland's leading indigenous and high growth food businesses – Largo Foods, Dawn Farm, Meade Potato Company, Kerry Foods and Avoca. They are joined by a growing crop of micro food businesses blazing a trail to market through the efforts and support of Local Enterprise Offices across the Mid-East. The ambition is to further develop the industry through the construction of three interconnected food hubs across the region. This will further support the development of an ecosystem framework that joins these leading-edge companies leveraging cooperation with each other and uniting with public sector drivers for food, innovation, regional development and education at national and regional level. Through collaboration, innovation, and clustering, this objective will facilitate the development of scalable, sustainable and profitable food businesses across the Mid-East.



Actions to 2024

Action 1.1: The completion of the Boyne Valley Food Hub (Phase 1) and the development of the Digital Innovation Smart Agri Hub (Phase 2).

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Meath County Council Meath Enterprise Boyne Valley Food Innovation District	Enterprise Ireland	Phase 1: Q2 2022 Phase 2: Q4 2024

Rationale:

Phase 1:

The Boyne Valley Food Hub (BVFH) is a key phase 1 deliverable of the Boyne Valley Food Innovation District (BVFID) which transforms 790m² of enterprise space in Navan Enterprise Centre into food grade facilities with nine units available for start-up and scaling food businesses, a timeshare development kitchen and a food specific co-working and knowledge lab to create higher levels of connectivity, collaboration and innovation in the food and drink sector. This project is greatly shaped by and influenced by Food Vision 2030, which aims to increase agri-food exports from €14bn to €21bn by 2030.

A recognised lack of easy-to-access food grade facilities is seen as a serious barrier to the establishment and growth potential of artisan food producers who struggle to support the capital requirements of setting up a production facility. As a now proven response in rural Ireland, timeshare community kitchens can act as a very tangible incubator of emerging artisan food producers in an area. The community kitchen concept first emerged in the US as a unique way to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with time-share access to value added production facilities and the opportunity to start and expand specialty food and catering businesses without the prohibitive cost. The Boyne Valley Food Hub will incorporate a well-equipped kitchen space, available to rent on a timeshare basis for low risk and eligible food production and proof of concept innovation projects.

Phase 2:

As part of phase 1 funding, planning and development, the site preparation and ground works for the new Boyne Valley Digital Innovation & Smart Agri Hub (BVDISAH) will have been completed. The Feasibility Study for BVDISAH was funded by Enterprise Ireland under Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) in 2019 and completed in Q1 2020. The feasibility study findings were clear. The evolution of the BVDISAH as a Digital Innovation & Smart Agri Hub will not only benefit regional and sectoral development by promoting inclusive economic growth, sustainability and social cohesion but will also support Ireland's policy endeavours to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

A full planning application for the BV Digital Innovation & Smart Agri Hub was submitted to Meath County Council in August 2021 and should be in place by Q1 2022. With a scale of 2,730m², over 4 floors, in a configuration of individual business units, co-working opportunities, co-creation labs and digital learning spaces, the BV Digital Innovation & Smart Agri Hub is where food innovation, Agtech and digital tech entrepreneurs and digital skills learners will come to work and learn, to connect with peers and mentors, and to access specialist resources. Beyond the building, it will provide SME innovation and accelerator supports, digital transformation of SMEs and the people/talent pool across the region as well as supporting collaborations and future proofing the regional ecosystem in consideration of climate and supply chain systems in a rapidly changing environment.

Target clients for BVDISAH are all entrepreneurs, and in particular, disrupters in the Agtech and food-tech sectors that want to digitalise, increase productivity and expand international activity. All players across the value chain will be supported from the Hub - from the farmer to the processing industry, logistics and the end consumer. The Boyne Valley region has been synonymous with food production and trade dating as far back as 10,000 years ago and the addition of BVDISAH in terms of a permanent infrastructure and programme base for the region will strengthen an already thriving Agtech and food innovation and incubation nexus and enable the next step in positioning the region as a centre of excellence for food and Agtech.



Action Outcome:

Phase 1: Hub Development – deliver 9 units available for Start-Up and scaling food businesses. Project management, design, planning and tendering for construction of new units and associated works has commenced. The development of 9 individual food units and production labs in a continuum of sizes from 22.5m² to 110m². This involves reconfiguration of 792m² of space within Meath Enterprise Centre and a second step in the vision to dedicate the entire centre 7,879sm² to food by Q4 2025.

Phase 2: Hub Development – deliver 2,730m², over 4 floors, in a configuration of over 30 office and enterprise units ranging in size from 13-47m². It will also deliver over 400m² of community, coworking, event and training facilities to support flexible working, collaboration and ecosystem development and the design and delivery of a much-needed continuum pathway structure to support agri-tech businesses to grow and scale which will be embedded from the outset.

Action 1.2: The development of the Athy Food, Drink and Skills Innovation Hub.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare County Council/Kildare LEO	KWETB Coca-Cola IT Carlow Maynooth University County Kildare Chamber Department of Rural and Community Development Kildare LEADER	Q4 2023

Rationale:

The Athy Food, Drink & Skills Innovation Hub will unlock the potential of a vacant, distinguished resource (Old Model School) to provide a state-of-the-art place to work, connect and train.

Within 3 years it will create a number of much needed impacts:

- Opportunity to strategically grow businesses to work from or progress from the Hub. There will be an ambition to support them to progress to HPSU status, achieve internationalisation and growth.
- Job creation activity for the Athy local economy and the wider region.
- Give a clear recovery pathway to food and hospitality sector through economic stimulus, education and innovation, skills attainment and job paths for learners.
- Youth and long term unemployed will engage in learning opportunities that will allow them to either enter the workforce for the first time or return to the workforce after a lengthy absence, in the food and hospitality sector.
- Act as a centre of excellence in supporting innovative companies across the region.
- Develop Kildare’s first social enterprise zero waste café as an exemplar climate action hospitality hub.
- Through the Discovery Centre, provide community and schools outreach education in healthy eating, career pathways (emphasis on non-formal routes) and sustainable living.

Action Outcome:

Through the provision of funding and a dedicated project team to oversee its development, the hub will house a training kitchen, incubation kitchen, three food incubation units, a café, co-working space and an agri tech incubation hub. The project will deliver an inspiring refurbishment in a unique location to realise a food incubation and skills centre of scale, with 10,500 square foot of food, hospitality and Foodtech/Agtech specific commercial space dedicated to the growth of young food companies and the training and retraining of future sector employees.



Action 1.3: The development of food incubation development hub in County Wicklow.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow County Council	Wicklow Local Enterprise Office, Wicklow Naturally, Kildare/Wicklow Education & Training Board Wicklow LEADER	Q4 2024

Rationale:

The Wicklow Food and Drink Strategy was developed with the intention of reinvigorating the food and drink scene in Wicklow. One of the key aspects of the strategy is the investigation of the potential impact of a Food Incubation Centre in Wicklow and an assessment of the feasibility of establishing one. Sourcing premises equipped for food production is difficult in Wicklow. A review of advertised food production facilities in the area reveals very low availability. A feasibility study has been carried out for Wicklow County Council and has recommended the establishment of a food hub and incubation units for the County with a focus on the development and support of food businesses in Wicklow.

Action Outcome:

The Food Incubation Centre will initially have four food production facilities, with the ability to add another four. The centre will also have a development kitchen for product development, training and demonstration. The hub will also incorporate a conference facility to permit presentations to customers and potential investors.

Action 1.4: The creation of the Boyne Valley Culinary Centre of Excellence.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Meath County Council Boyne Valley Flavours	Louth County Council Meath Partnership Meath LEO Louth LEO	Q4 2024

Rationale:

A feasibility study was undertaken to establish the viability of setting up a Culinary Centre of Excellence in the Boyne Valley region of Ireland. A Culinary Centre can typically be described as a food education establishment focusing on best practice, research, innovation and promotion of gastronomy and nutrition. More recently there has been a seismic shift in terms of educational focus with growth of the term 'Gastronomy' rather than a pure focus on culinary activities with education facilities also incorporating applied learning and field study aspects. The key feasibility findings concluded the following:

- A gap exists for a Culinary Centre of Excellence
- The Boyne Valley region as the ideal location for this but the culinary centre must be positioned as a national project, and not just a regional one
- It should represent the heritage, preservation and future direction of the Irish food landscape
- There is a risk of skills being lost from the sector
- The project should be perceived as a new way of thinking about Irish food, and part of that should include the establishment and growth of intellectual property associated with it
- There is a demand from chefs to meet the producers and visit the source of food
- There was general consensus of the importance of industry sponsors to the project

Action Outcome:

Year 1 – 2022: Set up a foundation as a base structure. – Create regional partnerships with host producers, farms and venues, who meet alignment criteria with the project – Revisit prospect of carrying out international benchmarking field trip with regional stakeholders. **Year 2 – 2023:** Commence attracting funding partners and commence any public funding applications e.g. "Rethink Ireland Fund" – Create a holding company to handle the commercial aspects – Continue the Think Tank calendar as per 2022 with new themes. **Year 3 – 2024:** Identify suitable premises to lease or buy – Fit out kitchen and classrooms (if a physical building is required) – Commence with an education partner – Launch an international student programme.



Strategic Objective 2:

Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the screen content creation sector

Context and Vision to 2024

Within the Mid-East Region, Wicklow and the East Coast has an established screen creation sector with an existing internationally recognised screen industry cluster, a long tradition of content creation for the film and television industry, the presence of two of the major studios in Ireland, a large number of skilled crew and talent living in the area, and an attractive connected location. The screen creation cluster in Wicklow represents a strong best practice model.

The first six months of 2021 witnessed 37 film, TV and animation projects going into production in Ireland with a value of €289m. The Mid-East is well placed to benefit from the increase in production activity in the country. In particular, there have been a number of infrastructural investments in Wicklow that will greatly enhance its offering.

A new film studio and media campus in Co Wicklow has been granted planning permission which will involve the construction of 73,511 sq metres of film studio across 15 buildings. This is in addition to the internationally recognised Ardmore Studios and Ashford Studios which play a pivotal role in film production in the region and whose owners have committed to significant future investments at both studios.

Actions to 2024

Action 2.1: Develop and operate a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow County Council Wicklow LEO	Enterprise Ireland Wicklow Film Office	Q4 2022

Rationale:

Finding affordable business premises is a challenge for smaller companies, particularly those working in the Animation, VFX, and Games sectors. There is a current distinct lack of suitable cluster or accelerator spaces, meaning many of these companies end up with employees working from home, which has a major impact on productivity. In other markets, investment in such facilities has been shown to generate networking and agglomeration effects, magnifying the impacts of public support for these industries.

Providing specialised, customised and sector-specific business supports that drive start-ups, growth and internationalisation of Irish content creation businesses, the Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus will support the positioning of Ireland's East Coast region as a leader in content creation and production by facilitating content creation entrepreneurs to identify and exploit new businesses models for the creation and commercialisation of content.

Funding of €1.43m was secured under the Government's REDF, through Enterprise Ireland. The outstanding cost for the build will be provided by Wicklow County Council. The project has commenced construction and is due for completion in Q4 2022.

Action Outcome:

The Content Creation Enterprise Hub will provide 10,000sq ft of private and co-working spaces and aims to boost job creation in the sector and spin out services feeding into these industries.

It is intended to support content creation and will complement the film industry, with a particular focus on businesses servicing productions happening in Ashford Studios and Ardmore Studios.

The Hub will also offer a collaborative social space, conference centre, podcast studio and screening facility along with access to a range of existing meeting rooms and training facilities on the larger Clermont campus.

The project will include the courtyard buildings, the second floor of the existing campus building and the chapel, which will be refurbished and renovated. It will also include a newly-built two-floor extension to the courtyard buildings.



Action 2.2: Establish a Crew Development Hubs to develop and nurture new and diverse talent from across the region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow County Council Wicklow LEO Wexford LEO Wicklow Film Office Screen Wexford	Screen Ireland Screen Skills Ireland Ardmore Studio Ashford Studios Tara Studio KWETB Waterford Wexford ETB IT Carlow Gorey School of Art Screen Guilds of Ireland Glenealy IT Centre	Q4 2024

Rationale:

Following a successful funding application from the consortium, led by Wicklow County Council and Wicklow Film Office, a regional hub will be established in Wicklow for the region and will support existing and planned studio infrastructure, making them even more attractive for international productions seeking to locate in Ireland.

As the screen sector in Ireland continues to develop and with the expansion of studio infrastructure, it is likely that the demand for highly skilled crew at all levels will continue to grow substantially in the coming years. The Crew Development Hub for the Mid-East and South-East will organise and deliver skills and talent development initiatives for crew roles in the screen industry, aiming to create and broaden opportunities for new and existing crew; bridge gaps between third level and industry; and support experienced industry crew with further skills development and career progression opportunities. Diversity and inclusion, with a strong focus on regional talent, will underpin all of these activities.

The hub will supplement and run alongside existing work-based learning and upskilling programmes for crew put in place by Screen Skills Ireland, the skills development unit of Screen Ireland. It will also build on Screen Skills Ireland's work across Section 481 Skills Development requirements and the new Competency Framework being developed for crew roles by Screen Guilds of Ireland.

Funding of €300,000 has been awarded by Screen Ireland to develop the programmes in partnership with the consortium.

Action Outcome:

In partnership with a number of key stakeholders within the region, the Clermont Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Rathnew will co-ordinate the delivery of impactful courses that will develop a diverse and regional pool of senior creative talent, whilst also addressing the needs of emerging talent within the industry and raise awareness amongst a younger cohort about to make career decisions.

The consortium has a shared vision to focus on regional development and diversity, with an emphasis on supporting career growth opportunities for creative talent across a range of departments and skills while addressing identified skills gaps.



Action 2.3: Implement the Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy to support the growth of the industry across the region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow LEO Wicklow County Council Wicklow Film Office	Fáilte Ireland Production Companies in the region Wicklow Tourism Wicklow Arts Office	Q4 2024

Rationale:

Through the development of a screen sector strategy Wicklow County Council wants to ensure that the county and wider region is fully prepared to avail of the projected growth in Ireland’s audiovisual sector over the next five years. According to the Olsberg SPI report, Ireland audiovisual sector could double employment in film, television and animation to over 24,000 full time equivalents (FTEs) and a gross value added of nearly €1.4bn.

A consultant has been appointed and intensive engagement with the industry stakeholders is ongoing to develop a strategy that will set out a number of actions to match the ambitious growth for the industry.

Action Outcome:

The strategy will focus on delivering upon its remit across a number of key areas.

- Specify how the Film sector can position itself as a key sustainable economic driver and employer for the county.
- Consider opportunities to develop regional relationships across the film industry, with a specific focus on the Mid East and South-East.
- Outline key actions that will continue to attract and secure future foreign direct investment into the film sector in Wicklow.
- Propose the most appropriate method of funding apparatus to aid in the development of filmmakers in the county.
- Identify actions that will support the promotion and communication of the positive attributes of the film industry in Wicklow to a wider audience, with a particular focus on screen tourism.

By highlighting the recommendations and actions required the outputs will drive economic growth within this and associated sectors and create sustainable employment. This will in turn aid of the continued success of the screen industry in the Mid-East.



Strategic Objective 3:

Enable the development and expansion of equine businesses across the Mid-East

Context and Vision to 2024

According to an economic impact study conducted by Deloitte on behalf of Horse Racing Ireland in 2017, Irish racing and breeding is among the most prominent in the world. The study found that the industry plays a key role in supporting the rural economy, providing 9,500 jobs in the core industry and a further 5,700 jobs in directly related roles, including those in equine science and veterinary, farriers, and horse transport. The industry also produces almost €2bn in annual expenditure each year. The Mid-east in particular is renowned for its racecourses, and world class breeding and training operations.

A more recent study has highlighted the importance in particular of The Curragh to the local economy. It is the headquarters of the horseracing industry in Ireland and in turn supports 1,176 jobs with a direct and indirect economic impact valued at almost €100m.

In order to support the growth of this industry and the growing equine business community, Kildare County Council and its partners are developing a National Equine Innovation Centre and putting in place supports for the industry across the region.

Action 3.1: Establish the first National Equine Innovation Centre in Ireland.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare County Council	Kildare LEADER Irish National Stud Kildare LEO Meath LEO Wicklow LEO MERITS	Q1 2022

Rationale:

The establishment of the first National Equine Innovation Centre at the Irish National Stud will act as a sectoral stimulus to develop an equine innovation hub of enterprise, innovation, applied research, commercialisation and learning. The project will transform the current museum on the grounds of the National Stud into an equine innovation centre. There is no centre of this kind in Ireland currently. Uniquely, it will offer a single access source of equine technical and entrepreneurial innovation. The building would be reimagined to combine physical infrastructure, service provision and networking appropriate to the growth needs of the Ireland's high potential equine economy.

Action Outcome:

The project has been jointly funded by Kildare Leader Partnership and Kildare County Council and now that construction has been completed, a number of Kildare based companies will locate to the innovation centre.

- Create an environment which supports the fast-track commercialisation of research and the growth of equine innovation knowledge-based businesses. It will promote the commercial development of academic and business research, and the exploitation of a wide scoping research base for industrial application. This is an environment where knowledge can be exploited for commercial gain (through the development of key academic partnerships and new funding mechanisms).
- Provide a specialist place of work and offer wrap around services (hub & spoke) that drive growth through experienced mentor programmes as well as securing smart capital to exploit commercialisation opportunities.



Action 3.2: The development of programmes and training to support the equine sector.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare LEO	Irish National Stud Kildare Chamber of Commerce Meath LEO Wicklow LEO	Ongoing to 2024

Rationale:

As the industry expands over the coming years, there will be greater demand across the country to ensure that the training and supports are in place for equine businesses. Whilst also working with existing clients of the NEIC, there will also be an engagement with the wider industry to understand their needs and requirements. There will be a particular focus on providing business development and growth programmes for business owners in the horse racing and breeding industry. The programmes will offer them a clear pathway to sustainability whilst also offering them an opportunity to collaborate more closely with their peers within the equine sector.

Action Outcome:

- A continued pipeline of new businesses that wish to establish within the industry.
- The sustained growth of existing companies.
- Greater collaboration and partnerships across the sector.
- The establishment of an equine innovation network/cluster.
- Creation of training programmes to meet needs of equine network and identify skills shortages in network and develop programmes to address these.



Action 3.3: Conduct a feasibility study to examine the expansion of the National Equine Innovation Centre.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare County Council	Enterprise Ireland Irish National Stud Kildare LEO Kildare Chamber of Commerce Meath LEO Wicklow LEO	Q4 2022

Rationale:

With the development of the National Equine Innovation Centre, there is an opportunity to explore future expansion of the footprint of the building to accommodate more start-ups and companies from the Mid-East and other regions across the country. Ireland is the largest producer of thoroughbreds in Europe and the third largest in the world behind the United States and Australia. Irish horses, trainers, jockeys, and breeders are recognised as among the most accomplished on the planet and consistently excel on the world stage. The expansion would also accommodate international partnerships with similar centres of equine innovation across the world.

The key target market (users) for the National Equine Innovation Centre include national and international clients in the following categories:

- Start-up businesses by researchers who can commercialise their research. The convergence between ICT technologies and subsectors in the agri economy (including equine) has resulted in a number of HPSUs globally. The potential of HPSU formation is high with successes dependent on access to incubation space, specific research outputs and access to national and international markets.
- Incubator and business base for equine-tech companies. Companies that progress to full commercialisation may have access to industrial zoned land throughout the region.
- Intense Innovation base for existing equine-tech companies seeking an offsite venue for ideation.
- Soft landing space for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – international companies wish to plug into Ireland's international reputation in the equine sector.

Action Outcome:

The study would form the foundation for an application under the Enterprise Ireland Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) with indicative approach as follows:

- To carry out a research and scoping exercise in relation to the need for an expanded equine innovation hub and to prepare a feasibility study and a business case that sets out the viability of the project.
- To quantify and report the additional demand and added value for use of the training space, incubation units, innovation space and product development in the Hub from prospective clients, based on findings.
- To identify and recommend the optimal use of the existing available property in terms of innovation, training, product development, start up and incubation space to maximise benefits to the equine sector and to ensure sustainability of the facility.
- To carry out desk research and focus groups to engage with all relevant stakeholders. To undertake interviews with potential clients to determine the demand for such a facility.
- To ascertain potential job creation.
- To identify the factors associated with success & failures encountered in similar projects developed nationally or internationally.
- To identify key issues for the partners in terms of their desired outcomes, resources available, facility management and governance issues.



Strategic Objective 4:

Ensure that the Mid-East Region accelerates the transition to a low carbon economy

Context and Vision to 2024

As entire sectors of the economy undergo radical changes related to the transition to a low carbon economy, new types of enterprises and jobs will be created. In order to meet that challenge, the Mid-East has identified a number of areas where we can capitalise on the transition. By targeting the right projects in areas most impacted, we can ensure the creation of sustainable employment in green enterprise across the region. One of the key objectives of Ireland’s National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 is to mobilise clusters regionally and sectorally to become centres of excellence for the adoption of low carbon technologies. Projects associated with Just Transition, Offshore Wind Energy and the circular economy can achieve this objective in the Mid-East.

Considerable funding has been allocated to the wider Midlands region to support workers, companies and communities affected by the closure of the peat-fired power stations and the end of peat harvesting by Bord na Móna. The Mid East will continue to engage with this process to ensure that the benefits associated with Just Transition are realised.

Offshore wind energy is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan’s ambition to cut CO² emissions in the electricity sector by two-thirds and increase the renewable energy share of electricity demand to 70 per cent by 2030 from its current 35 per cent.

Delivering just the 3.5 GW of offshore wind energy required under the Climate Action Plan will require an initial investment worth €8.6bn, create thousands of jobs in planning, development and construction and hundreds of long-term jobs in operations and maintenance. The offshore wind farms that are currently in development along the east coast has the potential to transform communities in the Mid-East.

Action 4.1: Conduct a feasibility study for the development of a regional green technology enterprise hub.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare County Council Kildare LEO Meath LEO Wicklow LEO	Climate Action Regional Office Enterprise Ireland Maynooth University	Q4 2022

Rationale:

As we accelerate the transition to a greener economy, the interest from companies to meet its obligations to the climate continues to increase. In order to support the development of this ecosystem, Kildare County Council along with their regional partners are proposing to develop a green technology enterprise hub. To ensure the most appropriate location and to facilitate consultations with regional stakeholders, we will commission a feasibility study to examine the future viability of the hub.

Action Outcome:

The feasibility study will consider a number of proposals, but it is intended that proposed hub would be in a position to:

- Provide upskilling and training on low carbon transitioning right through to green innovations start ups.
- Become a Centre of Excellence in the Circular Economy and designing out waste.
- Run training programmes to support businesses in meeting their obligations under the Green/Sustainability Agenda.
- Promote Green Competitive Programmes.
- Accelerate the Remote Working Agenda to assist the stimulation of balanced regional development.
- Identify New Green Opportunities for Entrepreneurs or companies.



Action 4.2: The development of a Green investment and enterprise zone in Allenwood, County Kildare.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Allenwood Community Development Association	Kildare County Council Kildare LEO Kildare Chamber KWETB	Q4 2022

Rationale:

This project addresses the challenges inherent in the imminent ending of peat harvesting for power generation in the region. While Kildare is the second most affected county in terms of job loss impact due to the transition from brown to green, it is also disadvantaged by a shortage of suitable sites for the establishment of new green enterprises in this location. The development of the zone will create a considerable number of opportunities that are aligned with the skills of those impacted by imminent closures by ESB and the direct impact on Bord na Móna's workers. The Zone's tenant companies will be examined for their potential impact on the displaced workforce. In addition, the development of the remote working facilities will also enable an affordable place to work on site for potential businesses and a close to home base for Kildare's many commuters.

Action Outcome:

The Board of ACDAL have already secured Just Transition funding to carry out this development. In establishing this zone, it will unlock serviced sites to facilitate the establishment of up to 16 new/relocating green manufacturing and service enterprises with the potential to create 160 new jobs on this former ESB/ Bord na Móna site.

Action 4.3: The establishment of Marine Enterprise Facilities in the Mid-East.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow County Council Wicklow LEO	KWETB IT Carlow Renewable Energy providers BIM	Q4 2024

Rationale:

The harbours at Wicklow and Arklow are well positioned to service the offshore wind industry and other marine services such as aquaculture. The creation of Marine Enterprise Hubs at Arklow and Wicklow harbours will provide services to the offshore renewable energy industry as well as to fishing, and to the expanding aquaculture sector. There are opportunities to foster new marine related enterprise in a value-added product.

There is significant potential to repurpose underused quayside properties as marine enterprise spaces offering many benefits and opportunities including driving innovation and improvements in the operation and maintenance of offshore wind, identifying opportunities to maximise the economic impact of investment in the renewable energy sector.

Action Outcome:

The promotion and fostering of economic development, enterprise and innovation will be an essential element of the proposal. It is estimated that there is the potential for in excess of 1,200 jobs in the area. The proposal envisages harnessing the quays and harbour as a catalyst to stimulate economic regeneration and wider investment in Arklow and Wicklow. Investment in the quays and harbour will generate economic confidence in the area and trigger further private investment. The Mid East REP will work with key stakeholders to advance this facility.



Action 4.4: The establishment of Marine Enterprise Facilities in the Mid-East.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Wicklow County Council Wicklow LEO	KWETB IT Carlow Renewable Energy providers National Maritime College of Ireland MTU	Q4 2024

Rationale:

Experts advise that there is the potential for 2,532 direct jobs in offshore renewable energy in Ireland to be created during the development & construction of 3.5GW of offshore wind with the majority of these jobs created between 2025 and 2030. It is likely that the majority of the pre 2030 jobs will be created off the East Coast between Louth and Wexford.

A number of projects are at advanced stages of planning off the County Wicklow Coast. In addition to the Arklow Bank Ireland’s first offshore wind farm, there are four projects (out of a total of seven nationally) off the County Wicklow Coast which have been declared to be “Relevant Projects”.

Developers of Relevant Projects will have priority over earlier stage projects in accessing the planning process for those Relevant Projects when the new offshore consenting regime is in place.

Action Outcome:

It is proposed to develop a purpose-built marine training facility at Wicklow County Campus. This will complement other types of training for the offshore renewable energy sector such as technician courses and apprenticeships which could be offered on site also.

In addition to providing training for the renewable energy sector, there may be opportunities to offer other types of marine training for emergency services and for the fishing, aquaculture, leisure and hospitality sectors.

The Mid-East REP will work with key stakeholders to advance this facility.

Action 4.5: The creation of a circular economy cluster for the Mid-East Region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare LEO Wicklow LEO Meath LEO	KWETB Mid-East Regional Skills Forum Industry Partners	Ongoing to 2024

Rationale:

There is an opportunity to identify a number of sectors within the Irish economy that have the potential to make significant contributions to the circular transition. The circular economy can also support viable and sustainable enterprise opportunities, jobs and training. The circular economy can thrive within multiple innovative business models. New circular economy focused enterprises are beginning to proliferate, and many longer-established companies are beginning to incorporate circular practices as well. The circular economy also requires workers skilled in repair and maintenance across all product types. This represents a (re) training and upskilling opportunity for both young and older workers across the region.

Action Outcome:

The REP steering committee will engage with cluster experts to develop a model for the region that will

- Identify the need for cluster capacity building with the sector.
- Facilitate engagement between likeminded stakeholders on an important initiative to develop new specialisation, skills and accelerate innovation and change.
- Form a cluster that will support the green transition.



Strategic Objective 5:

Support the continued development of a positive enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East

Context and Vision to 2024

The SME and micro enterprise sector continue to be a key driver of the economy and will play a critical role as Ireland recovers from the economic shocks resulting from Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. The SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, which was published in January 2021, set outs a number of recommendations that will assist entrepreneurs to start new businesses, to increase productivity, innovation and digitalisation in existing SMEs, to bolster business clustering and networking structures, and to assist more SMEs to export. Given the strong collaboration model that exists through the Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, the region is well placed to deliver supports that allow these companies to become even more innovative and resilient.

Following the successful establishment of a network of co-working and innovation hubs through the Mid-East REP to 2020, the region will continue to lead on the future development of these critical pieces of infrastructure for enterprise creation. Set against the backdrop of a more mobile and agile workforce, it will be imperative that the economic, social and environmental benefits associated with remote working are maximised and that these hubs and innovation centres are located in areas where they will have the greatest social and economic impact for the communities that they serve.

Action 5.1: Deliver upon multi stakeholder initiatives that will support Start Ups, SMEs and microbusiness across the region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare LEO Meath LEO Wicklow LEO	Enterprise Ireland Kildare Chamber Meath Chamber Wicklow Chamber Maynooth University IT Carlow Mid-East Regional Skills Forum	Ongoing to 2024

Rationale:

By engaging, empowering and inspiring entrepreneurs across the region, we can provide them with the tools and assist them in creating an environment for innovation that will help them to implement a competitive edge in their respective industry. These actions will be strongly supported and facilitated by the Local Enterprise Offices.

Action Outcome:

1. Host an annual regional Innovation Conference for the SME community in the Mid-East to increase innovation awareness and pathways.
2. Deliver a series of innovation workshops that will build capacity in the areas of design thinking, business model innovation and customer experience mapping.
3. Support MERITS to provide hub and spoke innovation supports to the hub network across the region and explore further collaborations between the higher education sector and enterprise in the region.
4. Provide opportunities for non tech businesses to collaborate with experts in the adoption of new technologies to drive efficiencies and capabilities across multiple sectors.



Action 5.2: Commission a regional strategy that will adopt an evidence-based approach to co-working hub and innovation space development and investment for the Mid-East.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Kildare County Council Wicklow County Council Meath County Council	Enterprise Ireland Kildare LEO Wicklow LEO Meath LEO Kildare Chamber Meath Chamber Wicklow Chamber Mid-East Regional Skills Forum Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment Department of Rural & Community Development	Q4 2022

Rationale:

A considerable amount of hub and innovation space development has occurred across the Mid-East since the Mid-East REP was launched in February 2019. In order to ensure that the Mid-East remains the prime destination for the remote worker and entrepreneurs that want to locate or relocate, a regional hub strategy will be developed. The strategy will be formulated in line with the National Remote Work Strategy and will facilitate continued investment in remote work hubs and enterprise infrastructure whilst ensuring we adopt an evidence-based approach when considering their future locations.

Action Outcome:

Each local authority area will commission an individual hub strategy to assess the current and projected landscape for hub development and to receive feedback and insight from the relevant stakeholders. Once the strategies are finalised, an overall strategy for the Mid-East will inform future hub and innovation centre development and propose actions that will further develop key sectoral capability across the network.



3



Implementation

The consultation process to develop the Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) to 2024 was enhanced by an understanding amongst stakeholders of the importance of ownership, collaboration, and the definition and delivery of specific measurable actions that could add value to the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant bodies involved in supporting enterprise development. These priorities are reflected in the implementation structure for the Mid-East REP to 2024.

Implementation of the REP will be overseen by a Regional Enterprise Steering Committee. The Steering Committee for the Mid-East Region will be chaired by Owen Brennan, and this is welcomed by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

- Oversee and drive delivery of the REP.
- Nominate and secure Public and Private Sector leads, where appropriate, to support delivery of the Strategic Objectives.
- Oversee the formation of working groups as necessary to drive implementation of actions.
- Explore and propagate new ideas and opportunities for collaborative projects and funding opportunities.
- Provide a forum for the sharing of updates and information by members on key enterprise development initiatives including those set out by the Agencies and LEOs in this Plan and other pertinent updates (incl. REDF, RSES, URDF, RRDF Project Ireland 2040 etc.).
- Oversee, contribute to and sign off on Progress Reports to the Department.

The Chairperson will convene at least two meetings of the Steering Committee per year and will present a progress update on the implementation of the Plan. The Chairperson will also lead the Committee in the preparation of both a mid-term and a final progress report, to be submitted to the Department. These reports will be the subject of a meeting between the Chairperson and/or the Steering Committee and the Minister during one of the biannual meetings.

The Mid-East Regional Steering Committee will oversee the formation of five working groups to drive delivery of each of the strategic objectives and their list of actions in the REP. Working Groups will convene as frequently as is required and will report on progress to the Chairperson and the Regional Steering Committee.

The Department will be responsible for the oversight and coordination of the REPs at national level. A National Oversight Group (NOG), which all Chairpersons attend, will oversee implementation of the new REPs. This group will be chaired by Ministers of State Robert Troy and Damien English and will provide a fora for the Chairs to share good practice and identify potential areas for inter-regional cooperation.





Mid-East Enterprise Agencies and Local Enterprise Office

The Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 are based on a collaborative approach to regional enterprise development. The Strategic Objectives and actions identified are set alongside and complement the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). Each Agency have corporate strategies which include national level objectives as well as activities that support specific regional enterprise development potential. This Chapter provides an overview of those Agency activities and that of the LEOs in the Mid-East Region to 2024.



4.1 Enterprise Ireland: Focus to 2024

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. Enterprise Ireland work in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and achieve international growth. In this way, Enterprise Ireland support sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment.

Balanced regional development is central to Enterprise Ireland's remit. Enterprise Ireland manage a number of regional development funds on behalf of Government and work in collaboration with key stakeholders in all regions to deliver regional enterprise infrastructure, strengthen the enterprise base and deliver regional growth.

Strengthening regional enterprise development is a key focus in the new *Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2022-2024*, reflecting the varying needs and opportunities of enterprise across the different regions.



Recent developments in the Mid-East Region

In 2021, the Mid-East Region was home to 419 Enterprise Ireland supported companies, employing 20,426.

Between 2018-2020, Enterprise Ireland invested €30m in client companies in the Mid-East Region supporting employment creation, innovation, competitiveness, and expansion.

The enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East has and continues to be strengthened significantly through funding awarded to infrastructural projects under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). Three key projects identified through the previous regional enterprise planning process have received funding of over €5m from the REDF programme and significant additional funding through Kildare, Wicklow and Meath County Councils.

The MERITS (Mid-East Regional Innovation Think Space) caters for new and existing companies and supports their development and training in collaboration with Maynooth University. Based in Naas this project is due to be opened in Q1 2022 and already has the management team in place. This Hub is a major digital investment which will cluster Irish and international new technology companies in a collaborative space. It is also the core development in a series of digital hubs throughout the region.

Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG was successful in securing €1.4m in REDF funding for the Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus in Rathnew. The Hub will provide 10,000 sq. ft of private and co working spaces and sector specific business supports for the creative film and screen sector in Wicklow and the broader East Coast regions. The Hub will provide 112 work-spaces in the extended and refurbished Clermont House, Coach House, Courtyard and adjacent buildings. This building development will be completed in 2022. Significant funding was also made available from Wicklow County Council for the project.

The Boyne Valley Food Innovation District is likely to be completed in 2022. Boyne Valley was awarded €1.58m through the REDF and will be a significant project helping SMEs in the food sector to grow and scale. Significant funding was also provided from Meath County Council.

Enterprise Ireland's objectives for the Mid-East Region to 2024

Enterprise Ireland's development objectives for the Mid-East to 2024 focus on the dual priorities of delivering an effective and supportive enterprise ecosystem and driving entrepreneurship activity across the region.

To support these objectives, our strategic priorities to 2024 include:

- Enterprise Ireland's sectoral specialists working with clients across the region to support growth plans and assist companies on transformation initiatives such as climate change, digitisation, competitiveness, and sustainability.
- Collaboration with local stakeholders to identify gaps in the Mid-East's enterprise ecosystem and to plan and help fund essential regional enterprise-enabling infrastructure.
- Broadening and strengthening the Mid-East's exporting base by identifying and supporting first-time exporters, growing knowledge and capability and supporting SMEs to scale-up their exporting opportunities.

Enterprise Ireland is a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the Mid-East Region and looks forward to working closely with our partners on the implementation of this Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the region.





4.2 IDA Ireland: Focus to 2024

IDA Ireland's mission is to partner with multi-national companies (MNCs) 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, including under the Regional Enterprise Plans and in relation to the provision of property solutions to the indigenous base, where appropriate.

IDA's strategy *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth* 2021-2024 was developed in the context of the Government's National Economic Recovery Plan and positions IDA to respond to the emerging trends that are accelerating as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It identifies the opportunities for sustainable growth among IDA's established base of clients through a focus on transformative investments to increase the productivity of Irish operations and their workforce through RD&I, digitisation, training, and actions on sustainability. Crucially it also maintains a focus on attracting the next generation of leading MNCs to locate in Ireland, further driving sustainable growth and maximising the impact of FDI in Ireland to 2024 and beyond. The Strategy has five pillars:

- 1 **Growth pillar** – win investment to support job creation and economic activity
- 2 **Transformation pillar** – partner with clients for future growth in Ireland
- 3 **Regions pillar** – win investment to advance regional development
- 4 **Sustainability pillar** – embrace an inclusive and green recovery; and
- 5 **Impact pillar** – maximise FDI's positive impact on local businesses and communities

Regional development is at the centre of IDA's strategy. Although FDI cannot be the sole contributor in addressing the challenges facing Ireland's regions – from Brexit to COVID-19, digital transformation to the climate transition – it can have a significant impact in propelling economic recovery and realising more balanced growth. IDA is targeting half of all investments (400) from 2021-2024 to regional locations and is maintaining the same high level of investment as targeted in IDA's previous strategy for each region of the country.

Under the regions pillar of *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth*, IDA will:

- Win investment to propel recovery and support development in each region;
- Partner with existing regional clients to transform through innovation and upskilling;
- Develop clusters to support transformation, spill overs and linkages;
- Collaborate with clients and stakeholders to facilitate remote working opportunities; and
- Continue to roll-out IDA's regional property programme, including delivery of 19 Advanced Building Solutions (ABS) to regional locations over the course of the strategy.

The global competition for FDI is intense as countries compete for investment to support economic recovery. It is in this context – of greater competition for potentially fewer projects – that IDA wins investment for Ireland and engages with MNCs on the benefits of choosing regional locations for their investment projects. Key to IDA's success in the past and essential to success in the future is strategic collaboration with national and local stakeholders to ensure that each region has the necessary conditions in place to foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. The delivery of necessary infrastructure and property solutions, the availability of a skilled and future ready workforce, and an emphasis on quality of life and placemaking in each region are pre-requisites to winning continued investment from MNCs.



Regional Economic Impact of FDI

IDA client companies directly employed almost 145,000 people outside of Dublin in 2020. Combined with indirect employment of 116,000, an estimated 260,000 jobs in the regions were supported by FDI in 2020. Clients in regional locations had an annual spend of €7.9bn on payroll, €2.7bn on Irish services and €2.2bn on Irish materials in 2019. They contributed a further €1.3bn on in-house R&D. These linkages support diverse, innovative, and vital local economies.

Over the period 2021-2024 IDA Ireland will:

- Win 800 total investments to support job creation of 50,000 and economic activity
- Partner with clients for future growth through 170 RD&I and 130 Training investments
- Win 400 investments to advance Regional Development
- Embrace a green recovery with 60 sustainability investments
- Target a 20 percent increase in client expenditure in Ireland to maximise the impact of FDI

Read more about IDA's 2001-2024 Strategy *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth* at www.idaireland.com.

IDA Ireland objectives for the Mid-East Region to 2024

The Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan encompasses Kildare, Meath and Wicklow which forms the bulk of the IDA Mid-East Region that also includes Co. Louth. IDA is targeting 40 investments across these four counties under its *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth* strategy, 2021 to 2024.

The three counties of Kildare, Meath, and Wicklow are home to 67 IDA client companies employing 14,024 people. The region has been successful in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI) with employment levels in IDA client companies maintaining an upward trajectory in this region since 2009. Counties in the Mid-East also benefit hugely from the direct and indirect employment generated by IDA client companies located in Dublin.

The Mid-East has a significant ecosystem of well-established companies across Technology, Life Sciences, International Financial Services and Engineering & Industrial Technologies. It has also won significant investment in the Food and the Film sub-sectors.

IDA will continue to market the Mid-East Region drawing on existing assets, including property solutions and placemaking. IDA will continue to focus on investment opportunities arising in Global Business Services, High Tech Manufacturing and Research, Development & Innovation and Sustainability. In support of these opportunities, further upgrade works are progressing on IDA Parks, and IDA will work closely with the private sector in the Mid-East to secure the provision of appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions for client companies.

IDA client companies in the Mid-East Region include some well-established Technology, Biopharmaceuticals, International Financial Services and Engineering companies including Intel's €22bn investment in Kildare, MGS, HPE, Facebook, P&G, Pfizer, Takeda, MSD, Elavon, Nypro, Coca Cola and IFS State Street. More recent arrivals include Facebook, Keurig Dr. Pepper, MSD Dunboyne (Shire), Endress and Hauser, and INIT.

In addition to marketing IDA sites, Hub Spaces across the Mid-East Region, such as the Kells Tech Hub and MERITS (Naas) offer a flexible and varied range of property solutions which facilitate not only smaller investments but larger investments whilst clients are waiting for a longer-term solution. These Hubs will also facilitate remote working which has become a focus of many FDI clients during COVID-19 restrictions.

IDA Ireland will continue to work with education providers Maynooth University, IT Carlow and IT Carlow's satellite campus in Co. Wicklow, as well as the Regional Skills Forum, to support the delivery of skills pipeline aligned to the growing FDI presence in the region

IDA Ireland is a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the Mid-East Region and looks forward to working closely with our partners on the implementation of this Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the Mid-East Region.





Local Enterprise Office

4.3 Local Enterprise Office: Focus to 2024

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high quality supports for your Business ideas.

The Local Enterprise Office is the *First Stop Shop* for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Ireland.

Entrepreneurs and Businesses are supported to:

- Increase exports
- Build resilience
- Increase productivity
- Prepare for the Low carbon economy
- Embrace the Digital economy
- Innovate
- Be managed by ambitious & capable individuals
- Fuel regional growth

Recent developments in the Mid-East Region

Regions	Client Numbers 2021	Total Jobs 2021	Net Job Change 2021
Mid-East	663	3,320	351

Led by Kildare, the regions LEOs are building the Mid-East cluster ecosystem and linking this into the international cluster community. Clusters emerge from an industry-led, shared learning. Clusters require 3 ingredients: Trust, Social Capital and Tacit Information flow. The LEO'S will support and connect companies to optimise sectorial Cluster Performance to deliver growth & Innovation. Through training and workshops, the LEOs aim to build cluster capacity, and make progress towards international best clustering practice.

The Mid-East will focus on Six main Clusters:

- Equine
- Tech
- Food
- Logistics
- Circular Economy /Green Cluster
- Film

Local Enterprise Office objectives for the Mid-East Region to 2024

The LEOs in Kildare, Meath and Wicklow are focused on activities that will build resilience across the various sectors so as to ensure we deliver an inclusive and balanced recovery whilst also future proofing our economy and society. There are 6 key priority areas that the LEO's will prioritise:

- Entrepreneurship
- Competitiveness & Digitalisation
- Green/Sustainability
- Innovation
- Exporting/Internationalisation
- Networks & Clustering

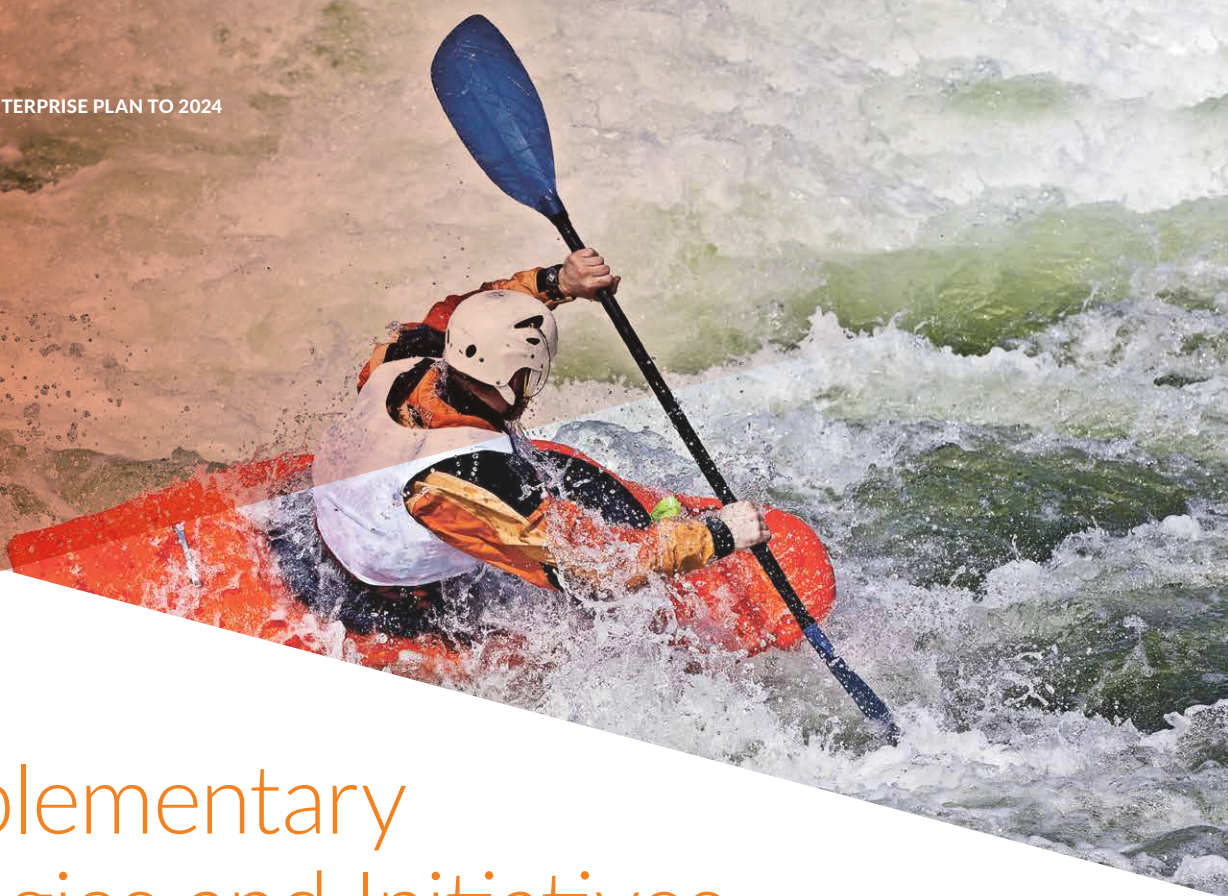
Irish SME's face unique challenges to their operating environment as a result of the economic shocks caused by COVID-19 and Brexit. For all of the challenges that COVID-19 and Brexit have presented, it has also highlighted the agility of the Irish SME and its ability to adapt quickly. The strategic objectives and actions set out in the Mid-East REP to 2024 have been designed to ensure that they align with the priorities of the Local Enterprise Development Plan to 2024 to accelerate and support business model change. There is a particular emphasis in this plan on the agri-food, screen, renewable energy, equine and tech sectors. The stakeholders in the Mid-East have identified these sectors as the key drivers for future economic growth in the region. By fostering and stimulating an environment that supports entrepreneurs and business in these areas, we can facilitate the establishment of new businesses that are capable and ambitious for growth. Their input will support business in achieving higher levels of efficiency, innovation, internationalisation and exporting but also support the on their development curve as they realise these capabilities and achieve their objectives.

The LEO's have been a critical element in the establishment of a network of regional hubs and innovation centres throughout the Mid-East and will continue to play a central role in the development of new hubs in the agri-food, content creation, renewable energy, equine and tech sectors.

Kildare, Meath and Wicklow LEO's are key members of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the Mid-East Region and look forward to working closely with our partners on the implementation of this Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the Mid-East. Through interdependence between entrepreneurship, innovation and business activities, it will allow all of the key stakeholders within the region to turn innovation excellence into business



5



Complementary Strategies and Initiatives



5.1 Fáilte Ireland: Mid-East Region Focus to 2024

As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland's role is to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland. In addition to helping to develop destinations, Fáilte Ireland also provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business supports and training programmes and buyer platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fáilte Ireland's mission over the next three years is to support the survival and drive the recovery of the sector in order to maximise the sustainable economic, environmental, cultural and social contribution of tourism to Ireland. It is also Fáilte Ireland's objective to spread the benefits of tourism more evenly around the country.

The Mid-East Region is served by Fáilte Ireland's regional tourism brand, Ireland's Ancient East. Fáilte Ireland is currently preparing a suite of four Regional Tourism Strategies (one for each of the four Regional Tourism Brands), which will be published in early 2022.

Through these regional brand development initiatives, Fáilte Ireland has worked closely with a wide range of industry and stakeholder partners towards the sustainable development of tourism in the Mid-East Region.

Since March 2020, with the onset of COVID-19, Fáilte Ireland has delivered significant business supports, by way of direct grant-aid, mentoring and training. Destination Recovery Task Forces were established to provide targeted supports to tourism businesses.

At the same time, Fáilte Ireland has remained focused on the medium-to-long term sustainable recovery and development of tourism in the region. For example, preparation of the Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Visitor Experience Masterplan (led by Wicklow County Council and in association with Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, NWPS, OPW, Dept of Housing and local stakeholders), and the development of two Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs) in the Mid-East Region.

These plans are aimed at unlocking the tourism potential of the region through a range of targeted strategic initiatives.



Fáilte Ireland objectives for the Mid-East Region to 2024

The overall tourism objective for the Mid-East Region continues to be to increase visitor numbers by raising awareness of the region as a visitor destination through sustained domestic marketing and sales promotion; and by substantiating the Ireland's Ancient East brand propositions with exciting saleable visitor experiences that appeal to our target audiences. Fáilte Ireland will also work with colleagues in Tourism Ireland to ensure awareness of all that's new in the Mid-East Region such that it informs their international marketing activity as well.

- Priority areas of focus for Fáilte Ireland over the coming three years in the region include:
 - Continuing to develop and raise awareness of the region as a visitor destination and of the range of things for visitors to see and do.
 - Providing a range of business supports focused on meeting the needs of tourism businesses in the region in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic over the next three years.
 - Implementation of the Ancient DEDP and associated actions in partnership with industry stakeholders, Local Authorities and other government agencies and deliver the catalyst projects including:
 - › A re-imagined Boyne Valley Drive.
 - › Boyne Navigation & Greenway.
 - › Bringing Ancient stories alive through active & cultural immersion.
 - › 5000 years of Irish food stories.
 - Implementation of the Thoroughbred Country DEDP and associated key projects and actions through partnership with the TCDEDP Steering Group including:
 - › Development of International Thoroughbred Trail (which will set out cluster development framework and destination orientation).
 - › New visitor experiences at the Irish National Stud, Fethard Horse Museum/ Coolmore Stud, Curragh Behind the Scenes, Racing Festivals and Destination Events.
 - › New Experience / Product Development Programme – Behind the Scenes and Premium Product focus.
 - Working with a range of industry and stakeholder partners to prepare a series of Destination Development Plans that will agree the shared development priorities that will improve both the destinations' appeal and the experience they offer on the ground; and by extension, help to increase visitor dwell time and spend in the region.
- Helping tourism providers to secure new business by introducing them to new markets and buyers and helping them to secure incremental sales. In particular, helping them to hone their saleable experiences to ensure they are picked up by domestic and international tour operators.
- Liaising with Local Authorities and other State Agencies such as Coillte, Waterways Ireland, the OPW, NWPS and Bord na Móna in optimising the benefit of state assets and attractions for tourism, through the development of Greenways, Blueways, and walking trails, which can be leveraged by tourism enterprises to create new jobs.
- Complete the development of a masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park with a view to unlocking its potential as an outdoor destination.
- Ensuring that the potential of existing strategic tourism infrastructure, assets and facilities is fully explored and that they are fully leveraged by tourism businesses in order to create new enterprises and jobs, in particular, the Royal Canal Greenway, Grand Canal Greenway, Blessington Greenway, Wicklow National Park and The Curragh Plains.
- Establishing and assisting a range of effective commercially focused tourism business networks throughout the region and helping them to cross-promote and cross-sell one another.
- Aiding the digital transformation of the tourism industry in the region through a 'Digital that Delivers' initiative, aimed at providing improved online presence and bookability for tourism businesses, enhancing their connected distribution and improving their digital skills.
- Develop and execute a sustained strategy for Tourism Skills & Careers to both attract and retain staff within the tourism industry – the absence of staff represents an existential crisis as businesses capacity to trade is being restricted.
- Work with Meath County Council to develop the Boyne Navigation & Greenway across the Boyne Valley as an attraction of scale for the Boyne Valley.
- Work with Louth County Council to develop an attraction of scale for Drogheda, the gateway to the Boyne Valley.
- Support the implementation of a reimagined Boyne Valley Drive across Counties Meath & South Louth in partnerships with Meath & Louth County Councils.

As a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the Mid-East Region Fáilte Ireland looks forward to continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the Mid-East Region.





5.2 Regional Skills Forum: Focus to 2024

The National Skills Strategy to 2025, provides a framework for skills development that drives Ireland's growth both economically and societally. One of the key elements of the Strategy was the development of a National Skills Council (NSC) and 9 Regional Skills Fora (RSF). The Fora structure fosters engagement and collaboration between relevant Government Departments and agencies, the education (Further and Higher) and training system, and enterprise.

The RSF seek to bring people together at local and regional level, to identify, interrogate and validate skills needs, and to ensure that employers & enterprise are linked with the appropriate resources across the education and training system. The RSF provide an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. The RSF work to ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

The Regional Skills Forum leads a number of key activities in each region:

- acting at local and regional level, to drive forward the National Skills Strategy;
- assisting local enterprises identify skills needs to ensure that the region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity;
- linking (once skills needs have been identified) companies with regional education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need; and
- assisting with actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required.

The principal areas of focus for the Mid-East Regional Skills Forum for the coming years are to create responses and assist companies across all sectors to better understand their skills needs especially in relation to mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit. Key areas of focus for the Forum over the period of the Regional Enterprise Plan include: Digitisation and Automation; Advanced Manufacturing / Industry 4.0; and The 'Green Agenda', including the development of off-shore wind capacity off the coast of Co. Wicklow.

The Mid-East RSF will continue to communicate to employers and enterprises in the region to:

- build awareness of the services and supports provided by members of the Mid-East Regional Skills Forum;
- demonstrate how the members, either individually or collaboratively, can provide partly or fully funded, flexible responses to employers for their skills needs;
- communicate examples of how providers can solve skills issues for employers in the region; and
- encourage employers to pay attention to the skills needs of their companies and consider what they need to do to upskill / reskill their employees.

The Forum will continue to collaborate on programme development in response to industry needs such as:

- **Rethink-Redesign** – a collaborative partnership between Maynooth University, Kildare Chambers, Meath Chambers, Meath Enterprise and Clark Recruitment to help regional business understand how digital transformation and innovation can help transform businesses and assist with essential skills planning.
- **DigiEco** – a Regional Skills initiative that helps employers to adapt their business for the green economy, delivered in the Mid-East by the further and higher education institutes along with energy related experts and agencies. Local Enterprise Offices will also collaborate as the programme.
- **Explore** – a Regional Skills Forum initiative developed to help address the issue of Ireland's low level of participation in lifelong learning, particularly targeting persons over 35 years of age in manufacturing employment. This short upskilling programme comprises digital skills, personal development, and continuous improvement offering an opportunity to boost employee's digital skills, adaptability, and productivity.
- **Skills to Advance** – The Mid-East RSF will continue to collaborate with SOLAS and the regional ETBs in the development and promotion of Skills to Advance initiatives. Following the success of the 'Developing Leaders in Hospitality' courses the Mid-East RSF will be actively involved in the promotion of the new SME modules on Business Administration, Sales and Marketing, and Customer Service.





5.3 Regional Assemblies

The Eastern and Midlands regional Assembly (EMRA) covers nine counties containing twelve Local Authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils and Dublin City Council.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

One of the principal functions of the Assembly is the delivery of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), which sets out the strategic regional development framework for the region. The primary aim of the RSES is to implement Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF), at the regional tier of Government and to support NPF policy for achieving balanced regional development.

The Region's priorities for investment are identified in the RSES and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) and set a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development for the region in line with vision and objectives for national change in the NPF and the National Development Plan (NDP).

The Regional Assembly's RSES also aims to develop a sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient regional economy. Key to delivering this vision is ensuring the region develops a strong and diverse economic base and with immediate challenges such as COVID-19, Brexit, Just Transition and potential vulnerabilities for Ireland's enterprise base.

Alignment of the economic principles of the RSES and Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) is critical to underpin the achievement of national strategic outcomes at the regional and local level and give regional support for the implementation of actions identified through the REP. This is also of key relevance for EU cohesion funding in Ireland for the period 2021-2027 and the development of priorities under the ERDF 2021-2027 Programme. The Regional Assembly has an enhanced role in the management of this programme which will have a focus on smart cities and a smart region, lower carbon emissions, climate resilience and urban regeneration, themes that support priorities and actions under the REP.

The Eastern and Midlands regional Assembly RSES can be found here: [EMRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy](#)



5.4 Local Authorities – Local Economic and Community Plans

Local Authorities are the key agents of government responsible for local and community development at local level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 strengthened the role of Local Authorities towards economic, social and community development.

The Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) has statutory responsibility for the LECPs overall and additional responsibility for the Local Community Development Committees who are charged with the development and the delivery of the Community elements of the LECP. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) have statutory responsibility for the Economic elements of the LECP. The local authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of the economic elements of the LECP through the relevant Strategic Policy Committee.

The purpose of the community elements of the LECP is to promote local and community development and to ensure the coordination of relevant public funded local and community development actions in a way that reduces duplication, targets available resources where they are most needed and maximises benefits for communities. The focus of the community elements of the LECP should be on the social and economic issues that have relevance and can be addressed at a community level.

The development of the economic elements of the LECP is part of the wider role of economic development in local government. Revised guidelines on the development of LECPs to assist with the development of local area plans were published in November 2021.

As the framework for the economic and community development of the local authority area, the LECP is also the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit.





Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee

Chair Regional Enterprise Plan:
Owen Brennan, Executive Chairman, Devenish
Programme Manager:
Conor Sweeney
Membership of the Committee:
Kildare County Council
Meath County Council
Wicklow County Council
Kildare Local Enterprise Office
Meath Local Enterprise Office
Wicklow Local Enterprise Office
Enterprise Ireland
IDA Ireland
Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly
Regional Skills Forum: Mid-East Region
Kildare & Wicklow Education & Training Board
Louth & Meath Education & Training Board
Fáilte Ireland
InterTrade Ireland
Ibec
Skillnet Ireland
Maynooth University
IT Carlow
Meath Enterprise
County Kildare Chamber
County Meath Chamber
Wicklow Chamber
Enterprise Champions
Eastern & Midlands Climate Action Regional Office
Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment
Department of Rural and Community Development
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



Appendix 2: Mid-East Regional Statistical Snapshot

Constituent counties	Kildare, Meath, Wicklow			
Mid-East Population	559,973 ¹			
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment	360,100 ²			
ILO Participation Rate	66.3% ³			
ILO Unemployment Rate	6.2% ⁴			
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male)	194,000 ⁵			
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female)	166,100 ⁶			
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2015 ⁷ – Q3 2021	Q1 2015	Q3 2021		
	294,600	360,100		
Actual Increase in Employment between from Q1 2015 – Q3 2021	22.2%			
Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2015 – Q3 2021	65,500			
Persons on Live Register in the Mid-East at 01/12/2021	41,386 ⁸			
Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 07/12/2021 in the Mid-East	6,780 ⁹			
Unemployment blackspots ¹⁰	3 ¹¹			
Irish-owned Companies – Total Employment in the Mid-East, 2015-2020 ¹²		2015	2020	Change between 2015-2020
	Jobs:	23,273	26,034	+2,761
Foreign-owned Companies – Total Employment in the Mid-East, 2015-2020 ¹³		2015	2020	Change between 2015-2020
	Jobs:	18,870	19,859	+989

1. 2016 CSO Census

2. Q3 CSO Labour Force Survey (Mid-East)

3. Q3 CSO Labour Force Survey (Mid-East)

4. Q3 CSO Labour Force Survey (Mid-East)

5. Q3 CSO Labour Force Survey (Mid-East)

6. Q3 CSO Labour Force Survey (Mid-East)

7. Launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs

8. CSO Live Register

9. <https://www.gov.ie>

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

11. Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Kildare (1), Meath (1) & Wicklow (1)

12. Annual Employment Survey 2020

13. Annual Employment Survey 2020



Appendix 3: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development

Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is responsible for the development of new markets and the promotion of Irish food, drink and horticulture, reporting to the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine. The agency's mandate covers trade development, promotion, quality programmes, information provision and marketing support especially for export markets. Bord Bia operates in thirteen overseas locations. Its Origin Green programme is the only sustainability programme in the world that operates on a national scale, uniting government, the private sector and food producers.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

BIM is the state agency with responsibility for developing the Irish sea-fishing and aquaculture industries. BIM's mission is to lead the sustainable development of a competitive, market-led, innovative and quality-driven Irish seafood industry, maximising the returns to industry stakeholders and the socio-economic contribution to communities in coastal regions in particular. BIM is focused on expanding the volume, quality and value of output from the Irish seafood industry. It provides a range of advisory, financial, technical and training services to all sectors of the Irish seafood industry. BIM's Strategy 2013-2017 is an action plan that aims to deliver 1,200 jobs and €1bn seafood sales by building scale and enhancing competitiveness in the Irish seafood sector.

InterTradelreland

InterTradelreland's mission is to support businesses, through innovation and trade initiatives, to take advantage of North/South co-operative opportunities to improve capability and drive competitiveness, jobs and growth. InterTradelreland helps small businesses through a strong mix of funding support, business intelligence and meaningful contacts. It supports companies not only with funding, but also with specialist expertise and introductions.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

Science Foundation Ireland is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research, operating under the auspices of DBEI. SFI invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths. SFI has supported the establishment of 17 National Research Centres, aligned with the research priority areas set out in Ireland's research prioritisation exercise (which is currently being refreshed). SFI plays a key role in developing international relationships in the research and innovation domain. It is instrumental in raising Ireland's profile and visibility as a location of research excellence in international markets, thus strengthening Ireland's attractiveness for overseas investment.

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

The purpose of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is to play a leading role in transforming Ireland into a society based on sustainable energy structures, technologies and practices. SEAI provides a range of programmes and services to homes, businesses, schools and communities. It is a key actor in providing research and advice to Government on sustainable energy policy, including renewables and energy efficiency.

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement in 1999. It has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development, promotion and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the Body are the Shannon-erne Waterway, the Shannon, the Erne Navigation, the Barrow Navigation, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, and the Royal Canal.



Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland was established in 1999 and is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills. The primary objective of Skillnet Ireland is to increase participation in enterprise training by companies. Skillnet Ireland fosters an enterprise led approach to workforce development. The process of determining training needs and coordinating the delivery of training, is primarily owned by the enterprise groups engaged with Skillnet Ireland. Skillnet Ireland operates under a joint investment model, part-funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in our learning networks. Encouraging enterprise to lead the process in this way helps ensure that programmes delivered through Skillnet Ireland are highly relevant to the needs of industry. This approach also enables cohesive enterprise networking and the flexibility to respond to ever-changing skills demands through both formal and informal learning. Through 65 plus Skillnet Learning Networks, Skillnet Ireland allocates funding to groups of companies in the same industry sector (or region) and with similar training needs, so they can deliver subsidised training for their teams. Skillnet Ireland also plays a key role in supporting and enabling Skillnet funded groups to reach their full potential.



Appendix 4: Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021–2025

Introduction

Our Rural Future-Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland for decades.

The vision of the policy is for a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development, which is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and which recognises the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment.

The policy contains more than 150 commitments for delivery across the whole-of-Government for both short-term recovery and longer-term development. It has a five-year timeframe, with updates on delivery provided by a series of Progress Reports. Annual work programmes allow for the review and revision of priorities contained in the measures for delivery.

Policy Objectives

The policy aims to bring about improved opportunities and a better quality of life for people who live and work in rural areas, through balanced regional development, benefitting individuals, families, communities and businesses.

We want to see more people living and working in rural Ireland, rural towns as vibrant hubs for commercial and social activity, reduced regional income disparities, improved access to public services such as transport links, rural Ireland benefitting from the transition to a more sustainable future and rural communities – especially young people – having an active role in shaping their future.

Funding streams

The level of activity across Government in recent months highlights delivery of the Policy's ambition. The Government's commitment to rural Ireland is also evidenced in the unprecedented capital investment of €850m provided under the revised *National Development Plan* for rural development projects to 2025, across a range of areas such as remote working facilities, rural regeneration projects and outdoor amenities. This includes huge levels of support for important projects under the Department of Rural and Community Development's (DRCD) Rural Development Investment Programme.

DRCD supports include:

- Revitalisation of rural town centres through the €1bn Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Investment of €220m through the LEADER Programme.
- Provision of funding for other programmes such as the Small-Scale Rural Projects (CLÁR), Town and Village Renewal, Local Improvement Scheme for non-public roads, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Connected Hubs Fund.



Appendix 5: Regional Enterprise Development Funding

Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) supports the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can enable and sustain enterprise and employment growth in the regions. Under the RETS and the three calls of the REDF to date, the Mid-East has secured nearly €9m in funding for 5 enterprise projects.

Projects approved for Mid-East Region

Projects approved award	County	Project description
Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG	Wicklow	Enterprise Hub for specialised and customised, sector specific business supports for the Irish screen content creation sector.
Kildare Community Network (MERITS)	Kildare	Co-working space to cluster Irish and international new-technology companies and provide mentorship and support (MERITS)
Boyne Valley Food Innovation District DAC	Meath	Food enterprise incubation centre and smart specialization collaborative for food and drink SMEs to commercialise and scale.
UCD Nova DAC	Kildare	Ag Tech Innovation Hub for the creation and expansion of knowledge intensive businesses.
Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) (formerly National Association of Community Enterprises)	Nationwide	Representative body of over 270 community enterprise centres. Its primary role is to support and develop the interests of community enterprise centres on a national basis.
Total Mid-East REDF and RETS Funding		€8,954,561



Appendix 6: Methodology

The process to develop these Regional Enterprise Plans involved the following steps:

January 2021	A round of initial consultations with key stakeholders was undertaken by the Department including the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees, Agency representatives, Programme Managers, and other key organisations represented on the Regional Steering Committees. The bilateral discussions focused on what worked/didn't work well over the period of the outgoing Regional Enterprise Plans.
February-March 2021	In February 2021 the Tánaiste wrote to the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees formally setting out the Department's intention to develop new Plans to 2024.
February-May 2021	The Tánaiste and Ministers of State formally launched the commencement of the process to develop Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 with meetings of the nine Regional Steering Committees in virtual sessions around the country. Each Committee established a Project Delivery Team for the process, led by the Steering Committee chairperson.
March-May 2021	Each of the Project Delivery Teams met to review the outgoing Regional Plans and considered future thematic areas of focus and agreed an approach for a formal stakeholder consultation with the wider Steering Committee members and other relevant stakeholders.
May-August 2021	An online facilitated Stakeholder Consultation event was held in eight of the nine regions; with a series of bilateral stakeholder engagements and focus group discussions undertaken in the South-East Region. Participants considered topics including: enterprise resilience, smart specialisation, placemaking, transition-climate, digitalisation.
July-October 2021	The Project Delivery Teams re-grouped to consider the consultation outcomes and further develop emerging themes into Strategic Objectives and to identify suitable actions for delivery in the period to 2024.
November-December 2021	The Draft Final Regional Enterprise Plans were signed off by the Project Delivery Teams and Steering Committees.
February 2022	Memo for Government considered by Cabinet and noted the Department's intention to publish the nine Regional Enterprise Plans.



An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

23 Sráid Chill Dara, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 TD30

23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2, D02 TD30

T +353 (0)1 631 2121, 0818 302 121

www.enterprise.gov.ie

www.gov.ie

info@enterprise.gov.ie

An initiative of the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment
gov.ie



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland