



Kilkenny County
Enterprise Board

Strategic Plan 2008 – 2013



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Foreword



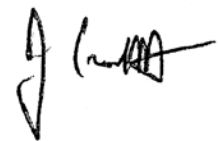
I am delighted as Chairman of the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board to present this Strategic Plan, which has been developed in consultation with our stakeholders, in particular our clients.

Since its establishment in 1993, the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has built solid foundations as the first point of contact for small business, providing a broad range of supports to entrepreneurs.

The Board is now entering a new and challenging environment. This strategy sets out our vision going forward. The plan is divided into two parts. Part one comprises three sections relating to the Backdrop to the Strategic Plan, and deals with the role of the County and City Enterprise Boards, the policy and economic background in which the Board operates and profiles the local economy of County Kilkenny. Part two of the plan is divided into two sections, with the first outlining the strategic objectives and actions to be undertaken in delivering the strategy; while the second section deals with the implementation, monitoring and review of the plan.

I believe the strategy is ambitious and that it reflects national enterprise policy and regional priorities. It is client centred, focused on supporting enterprise growth and addressing the development needs of small business. In particular the strategy takes account of the necessity for the indigenous sector to play an even greater role in driving the economy. I believe this strategy will support a greater number of entrepreneurs to start, develop and grow their businesses over the course of the next 5 years.

I look forward to working with my fellow Board members and the executives of the Board in delivering the strategy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Crockett'.

Joe Crockett
Chairman
Kilkenny County Enterprise Board.



PART 1: Setting the Context – Backdrop to the Strategic Plan

Section 1: The County and City Enterprise Boards

1.1 Establishment

County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) were established by the Government in 1993 to fill a gap in the support services to small businesses at a time of poor economic conditions - in particular high unemployment rates. The Enterprise Boards were given a clear enterprise and job creation role and were to be responsible for business areas not already covered by state development agencies.

Formal provision for the establishment of the Enterprise Boards was provided for in the Industrial Development Act, 1995. Operating Agreements were subsequently put in place between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) and the network of Enterprise Boards.

1.2 Funding

The network is co-funded by the national exchequer and the EU. The different sources of funding since the establishment of the Boards have been provided as follows:

- For the period 1994-1999, through the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD);
- For the period 2000-2006, through the Micro-Enterprise Sub-Measure of the Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan (NDP); and
- For the period 2007-2013, through the Regional Operational Programmes of the NDP.

1.3 Co-ordination

Since their inception, the national network of County and City Enterprise Boards have been managed and coordinated by the Local Enterprise Section within DETE. This role has now been transferred to a recently established Central Co-ordination Unit (CCU), which has been established within Enterprise Ireland (EI). The Local Enterprise Section will now focus on policy matters relating to the CEBs, and has been renamed the Micro-Enterprise Policy Unit (MEPU).

1.4 Kilkenny County Enterprise Board Organisational Structure

The Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is a company limited by guarantee and is an independent legal entity in most respects, while operating within the terms of an Operating Agreement with, and implementing overall policies, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is dependent upon funding from the Department.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board could not operate without the willing participation and voluntary input of individuals drawn from the public and private sectors that make up its Board and Evaluation Committee.

The Board is currently chaired by Mr. Joe Crockett, Kilkenny City and County Manager, and comprises of 15 Directors drawn from the main organisations with a role and remit for enterprise development in County Kilkenny. The Board of Directors as at 31st July, 2008 are contained in Appendix 1.

The Board has the services of a specialist Evaluation Committee to advise on project assessments and to make recommendations with respect to the allocation of financial assistance. The membership of the Evaluation Committee as at 31st July, 2008 is contained in Appendix 1.

The Board has a current full-time staff complement of five executives namely: Chief Executive Officer; Business Analyst; Enterprise Supports Officer; Project Executive; and an Office Manager. The Board from time to time also contracts additional staff on a fixed term or project basis to assist in the delivery of projects and programmes. It is not envisaged that the Board will increase its full-time staff complement during the course of this strategic plan. The executive staff, as at 31st July, 2008, are listed in Appendix 1.

Section 1: The County and City Enterprise Boards

1.5 Strategic Plan 2002-2007

Since it was established in 1993, Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has emerged as the ‘first-point-of-contact’ for start-up and expanding businesses in County Kilkenny.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board delivers a wide range of supports and services to start-up and established business owners, while nurturing the development of a supportive environment for enterprise in the County. During the period of the last strategic plan (2002-2007 inclusive), the County Enterprise Board:

- **Provided business advice, information** and developed client relationships with over 3,000 existing and intending entrepreneurs;
- Committed almost **€2.3 Million in financial assistance** to over 200 business start-up and expansion projects, which have the potential to create over 360 new jobs at a cost per job of just over €6,400 (Table 1);
- **Supported community enterprise initiatives** around the County, such as community enterprise centres that provide much needed workspace for intending and growing enterprises in local communities, and have initiated partnership models for local economic development initiatives in towns around the County (e.g. in Castlecomer and Callan);
- Provided 27 **Start Your Own Business** Training Programmes covering all aspects of setting-up and running a business, with 458 people having participated. Approximately half of those participating went on to set-up in business;
- Delivered 250 **Enterprise and Management Development Training** Programmes, with just under 4,700 people participating. These have ranged from Sales and Marketing Workshops to Financial Training and Business Planning, as well as training for entrepreneurs in compliance issues (e.g. Health and Safety; Taxation; Food Hygiene etc.). The Board also organised and delivered 37 Seminars and Information Sessions for entrepreneurs on a wide variety of topics from E-procurement to Innovation;

- Facilitated almost 650 **Mentoring assignments** with entrepreneurs at various stages of business development who required professional advice and assistance in addressing a wide range of business issues;
- Played an active part in **fostering an enterprise culture** throughout the County, especially in second-level schools, through initiatives such as the Student Enterprise Awards, with approximately 350 students now participating each year;
- **Levered additional resources** for enterprise and economic development initiatives in County Kilkenny from other national and EU programmes (for example Tech Check and Interreg, among others) and been instrumental in initiating other enterprise support projects in conjunction with local and regional partners (for example the National Centre for Creativity in Kilkenny City, and the Local Development Model in Callan).

Table 1: Jobs Assisted by Kilkenny County Enterprise Board 2002-2007 (inclusive)

Year	No. of Jobs Created*	(€) Approvals	(€) Cost Per Job
2002	74	447,927	6,053
2003	43	285,288	6,635
2004	60	341,100	5,685
2005	60	466,473	7,774
2006	58	425,370	7,334
2007	68	366,569	5,391
Totals	363	2,332,727	6,426

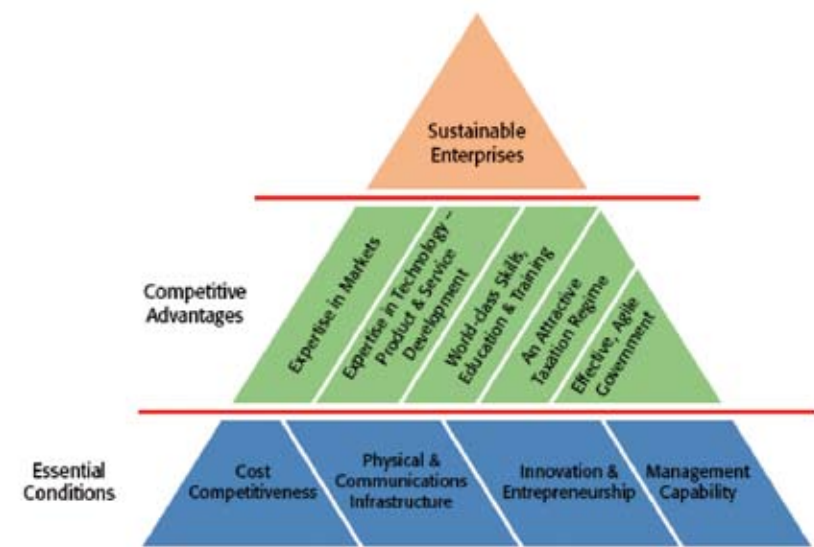
* Full-Time Job Equivalents where 2 P/T jobs equate to 1 F/T job.

Section 2: Policy and Economic Background

2.1 Policy Framework

The Report of the Enterprise Strategy Group¹ identified essential framework conditions and competitive advantages needed to increase the number of sustainable enterprises in Ireland (Figure1). The Report recognised that the “County and City Enterprise Boards play a valuable role in fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing the business environment at local level,” and in so doing they are helping to create some of the essential conditions, and are assisting small business in their locality to develop competitive advantages. This role is articulated within the strategy of the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board.

Figure 1: Strategy for Sustainable Enterprise in Ireland



Source: Ahead of the Curve- Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy – Report of the Enterprise Strategy Group, July 2004.

1. ‘Ahead of the Curve, Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy’ 2004

The Report of the Small Business Forum² highlighted the economic impact of the small business sector. Having grown in number by 50% over the last ten years, there are just over a quarter of a million small businesses (i.e. employing less than 50 people) in Ireland. They account for 97% of all businesses operating in the country.

The Enterprise Boards in particular focus on micro enterprises that employ ten or less. The great majority (92%) of all businesses in the country fall into this category and they account for over 520,000 employees (36% of the total³). They provide regionally distributed employment, deliver a range of local services, and contribute to the economic, social and cultural life of the entire population.

The Small Business Forum Report is very clear about the growing contribution that small businesses make to the Irish economy:

“In the years ahead, as Ireland moves towards a knowledge-based economy, the importance of the small business sector will increase, and the vitality and dynamism of the sector must be supported, in order to ensure continued economic growth and high living standards throughout the country.”

The development of the strength and breadth of the small business sector will be critical if Ireland is to sustain and build on the prosperity it has achieved in recent years. There will be a need to foster the emergence of significant numbers of sustainable, highly productive, new Irish businesses. The particular focus will be on those businesses that have the potential to grow, are highly innovative, embrace and develop new technologies, and have an aspiration to export.

A recent Forfás report sets out a vision for a dynamic entrepreneurial society which it believes is achievable:⁴

“Ireland will be characterised by a strong entrepreneurial culture, recognised for the innovative quality of its entrepreneurs, and acknowledged by entrepreneurs as a world class environment in which to start and grow a business.”

2. *Small Business is Big Business*, The Report of the Small Business Forum, May 2006
3. *Small Business is Big Business*, The Report of the Small Business Forum, May 2006
4. *Towards Developing an Entrepreneurship Policy for Ireland*, Forfás, September 2007

Section 2: Policy and Economic Background

In this regard, the national network of County and City Enterprise Boards will continue to perform a critical role in providing the broad range of supports necessary to nurture entrepreneurs and to sustain and develop a thriving small business sector.

In accordance with the directions of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Enterprise Boards will increasingly focus on supporting enterprises with the potential to grow and to contribute to increased economic activity at local, regional and national level. This focus on strengthening client businesses and supporting them to realise their growth potential is reflected in the strategy of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board.

2.2 Economic Backdrop

The Irish economy has changed dramatically since the early 1990s, and its sustained growth over the last fifteen years has created a context that is strongly supportive of new and developing businesses. The significant slowdown in the growth of the economy in the past 12 months, however, poses new challenges.

The latest ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary (QEC), published in June 2008⁵, indicates that this year the Irish economy will experience a recession for the first time since 1983. The ESRI predicts a return to net emigration in 2009 (for the first time since the early 1990's).

The economy is forecast to contract by circa 0.4% in 2008 (compared to growth of around 4.5% in 2007.) The main causes of the slowdown are attributed to the downturn in the construction sector and the housing market; the slowing of the US economy; the appreciation of the euro against the US dollar; declining tax revenues; and the increasing price of oil.

The ESRI also predicts that the unemployment rate will climb from a current level of around 4.8% to 6% by the end of 2008, before increasing further to over 7% by the end of 2009. The rate of inflation is also expected to rise to in excess of 4.5% in 2008 before abating to around 3% during 2009.

The onset of the recession is also reflected in the public finances. From an overall budget surplus of €5.2 billion in 2006, the Government is expected to incur a deficit of €7.4 billion by the end of 2009. At this level, the budget deficit is likely to breach the limit imposed by the EU Stability and Growth Pact (i.e. 3% of GDP). This will inevitably mean a tightening of the public finances in the short term at least, which could have adverse implications upon the funding to be allocated from the national exchequer to the national network of County and City Enterprise Boards.

The ESRI is more optimistic, however, in its *Medium Term Review*⁶, suggesting that the economy has the potential to grow at around 3.75% a year over the coming decade, despite the short-term difficulties.

The ESRI suggests that if the appropriate policies are put in place, the Irish economy should recover quite rapidly once the current global economic slowdown ends. In particular, the ESRI highlights the positive contribution that the internationally traded services sector, especially in financial services, is expected to make to the economy and to employment creation in the future.

The latest report from the CSO⁷ while confirming a slowdown in the rate of growth in employment (particularly among men), and an increase in unemployment (most noticeably in the construction sector), highlights the fact that employment in the financial and other business services sectors is already increasing rapidly (at more than 10% year on year), and accounted for almost half of all new jobs created in 2007.

While foreign direct investment (FDI) has been a major growth engine of the Irish economy in recent times and will continue to be an important driver in the future, there is general agreement that entrepreneurship and a dynamic enterprise sector must assume greater importance in sustaining and driving growth in the future.⁸

2.3 The Environment for Small Business

The Report of the Small Business Forum identified a broad range of challenges facing small business in Ireland. At present, these include:

5. Quarterly Economic Commentary, Summer 2008, ESRI Macroeconomic Forecasting Series, Alan Barrett, Ide Kearney and Martin O'Brien, ESRI, March 2008

6. Medium Term Review 2008-2015, No. 11, ESRI Macroeconomic Forecasting Series, Fitzgerald, John et al., ESRI, May 2008

7. The ESRI QEC estimates that 24,000 new jobs will be created in 2009. This forecast is based largely on the expectation that growth in internationally traded services will continue to increase at a high rate.

8. The annual growth rate in the first quarter of 2008 was 2.6% compared to a rate of growth of 3.8% in the same quarter last year: Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 1 2008, CSO, 5 June 2008.

Section 2: Policy and Economic Background

Access to information: there is no single comprehensive information resource from which entrepreneurs can access information relating to starting-up, developing and growing a business.

Access to finance: small businesses continue to report difficulties in gaining access to appropriate levels of finance for start-up and growth. This difficulty is likely to be more pronounced in the short term, as a result of the current credit crisis that has developed within the banking sector.

Infrastructure: The growth of the economy over the past ten years has placed huge strains on communications, energy, transport and social infrastructure, which have an adverse impact on the performance and growth of businesses.

Innovation: small businesses have particular difficulty in accessing, absorbing and exploiting new knowledge to create innovative products and services.

Management capability: entrepreneurs often do not place enough emphasis on developing management capability, usually because of time or cost constraints, or because the available training programmes are not perceived to be relevant.

Regulatory burden: small businesses are experiencing an ever increasing burden of doing business (e.g. ensuring compliance with environmental, fiscal and employment law).

The challenges outlined above are by no means exhaustive. It would also be incorrect to suggest that all of these challenges are experienced by all owner managers all of the time. The extent and impact varies with the nature and circumstances of individual businesses. The majority of small businesses undoubtedly face a range of issues that adversely affect their ability to start, to survive, and to grow.

Local entrepreneurs, clients of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board, who are all interested in growing their businesses, were brought together as a focus group of client stakeholders as part of the strategic planning process. Their views on the challenges they faced echoed many of the general points identified in the Report of the Small Business Forum. They also emphasised issues around competitiveness and difficulties for a small business in recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled people (Table 2).



Table 2: Main Challenges Facing Small Growing Businesses in County Kilkenny

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rising cost base (e.g. fuel and transport costs; cost of raw materials)- Competition from imports- Downturn in the economy- Extended Payment terms taken by customers (particularly within the construction industry)- Marketing and sales.- Maintaining sales.- Securing sales in overseas markets (exporting for the first time)- Securing finance to expand- Credit control- Developing a management support team, policies and procedures- Time management and HR issues- Difficulty in finding skilled workers- Accessing support for growth- Government ‘form-filling’.
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The challenge for Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is to provide an appropriate range of supports and help to create a more conducive environment, which facilitates the creation and development of micro-enterprises and assists owner-managers to overcome the obstacles they face, so that they can grow their businesses to their full potential.

2.4 Entrepreneurship

The wide ranging benefits of entrepreneurship have been accepted and it is now high on the economic and policy agenda. Entrepreneurship has been recognised as crucial in assisting Ireland to meet a number of key challenges:⁹

9. Towards Developing an Entrepreneurship Policy for Ireland, Forfás, September 2007

Section 2: Policy and Economic Background

The challenge to:

- Sustain growth
- Deepen competitive advantage
- Strengthen the enterprise base
- Create vibrant regional development
- Achieve of social inclusivity

The current level of entrepreneurial activity in Ireland is seen to provide a very good starting point from which the country can progress to join the ranks of the elite group of the most entrepreneurial nations in the world.

The environment for entrepreneurship in Ireland is generally perceived to be positive –

- **Demographic advantages:** Aspects of the demographic profile, namely population growth, inward migration, and a comparatively young population, contribute to a relatively high level of entrepreneurial activity.
- **Supportive culture:** Widespread culture and social norms, which are supportive of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are combined with very positive personal contexts of individuals that are strong predictors of entrepreneurial engagement.
- **Economic growth:** a sustained period of economic growth and buoyant consumer demand has helped to create an environment that has been highly conducive to new enterprise creation.

As a result, Ireland is to the fore in Europe in terms of the relative number within its population that are either at an advanced stage of setting up a new business or have recently done so.¹⁰

The challenge to Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is to build on these general strengths recognising where weaknesses exist, i.e. - accessing informal investment, and to further improve the entrepreneurial environment so as to encourage more entrepreneurs to be attracted to set up innovative new businesses, with an aspiration for growth, within the County.

10. It should be pointed out, however, that Europe is not particularly entrepreneurial and that Ireland is some way behind the most entrepreneurial of the OECD countries, such as the US, Australia and New Zealand in terms of the proportion of its population that are engaged in actively planning and setting up new businesses. Source: Various Irish reports based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) research.

Section 3: Profile of County Kilkenny

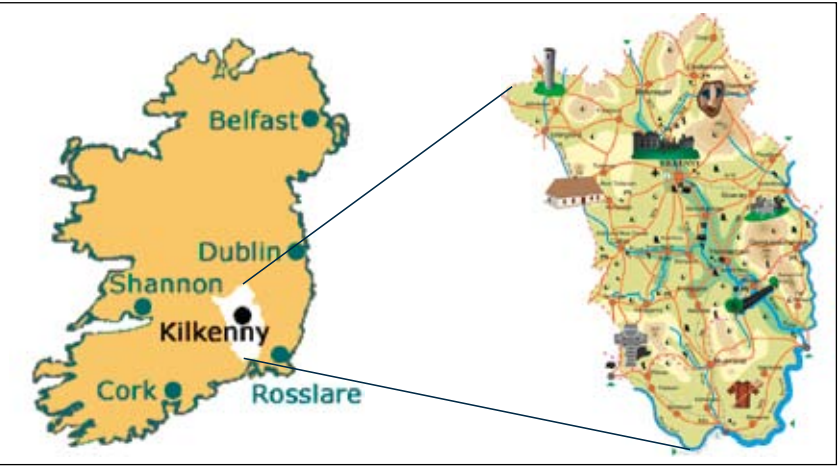
3.1 Location, Geography and Access

County Kilkenny is a medium-sized inland county covering just over 2,000 square kilometres (800 square miles), and has direct access to the Irish Sea via Belview Port on the River Suir and via New Ross on the River Barrow. Kilkenny County is strategically located within the southern half of the country and is recognised as a very attractive place in which to live and work.

Kilkenny City is the largest town in the county and dominates the local economy. It is one of the nine ‘hubs’ designated by the Government within the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS). As a hub, Kilkenny City is to play two important associated roles: firstly, as supporter of Gateway growth, and secondly, as a driver for local sub-regional development¹¹. The City is in close proximity to Dublin (71 miles) and other major urban centres of Cork (91 miles), Limerick (69 miles) and Waterford (30 miles). Kilkenny is also close to Shannon International Airport (97 miles) and Rosslare Europort (66 miles) (Figure 1). Because of its central location, Kilkenny City acts as the hub of a hinterland with a population close to 180,000 within a 60-minute drive (ESRI, 2000).

The River Nore runs through the City and bisects the County on a north/south axis. The Rivers Barrow and Suir are natural boundaries to the east and south of the County respectively.

Figure 1: Location Context



11. National Spatial Strategy for Ireland 2002-2020, 2002.

Section 3: Profile of County Kilkenny



The relative proximity of towns and villages to the north of the County to Dublin, such as Castlecomer and Paulstown has seen them develop as commuter towns of the capital, while many of the villages in the south of the County (e.g. Glenmore, Slieverue, Mooncoin, Piltown and Fiddown) have developed as commuter towns of Waterford City.

Kilkenny has an extensive road network, with over 3,000 kilometres across all categories of road, of which just 214 kilometres (or circa 7%) are national roads. There are five national primary (N8; N9; N10; N24; N25) and 3 national secondary routes (N76; N77; N78) traversing the County. The new M8 motorway/dual carriageway extension from Dublin to Waterford will improve access to Dublin and Waterford even further. The Carlow to Waterford section of the M8 through County Kilkenny will be built in 2 sections and the current situation is as follows: the Carlow-Knocktopher section (circa 40 kilometres in length) is at tender stage and scheduled to commence in 2008; and the Knocktopher-Waterford section (circa 24 kilometres in length) is under construction and due to open in 2009.

3.2 Population and Settlement Pattern

County Kilkenny had a population of just over 87,500 in 2006, an increase of 9% since the 2002 Census, more or less on par with the increase country wide (at 8%). The County accounts for one in five (or circa 19%) of the population of the south-east and is the second largest local authority area after Wexford County in the south-east (CSO, 2006).

The population density of the County is circa 42 persons per square kilometre, compared to 49 persons and 60 persons per square kilometre for the south east and the State, respectively. The County has a high percentage of its population (at circa 70%) living in rural areas (second highest in Leinster) and is the eighth most rural nationally.

This level of rurality and relatively low population density has resulted in a very distinctive settlement pattern, distinguished on the one hand by a large urban centre, namely Kilkenny City (with a population of circa 22,000), and on the other by well-dispersed small towns, villages and townlands (all towns outside of Kilkenny City have populations of less than 2,500 people).

Ferrybank DED, on the outskirts of Waterford City experienced the largest percentage increase in population (63%) between 2002 and 2006, reflecting the encroachment that has taken place in that part of the County, as a result of the expansion of the regional gateway during the course of the last decade.

Table 3: Population of Kilkenny City and County

Area	Population 2006
Kilkenny Borough and Environs (City Area)	22,179
Kilkenny County	87,558

Source: CSO, 2006.

3.3 Labour Force and Employment

The Labour Force in County Kilkenny currently stands at circa 43,000 (CSO, 2006). The percentage of people employed in farming (at 4%), while decreasing, is still at twice the national average, reflecting the importance of agriculture to the local economy. The County also has slightly higher numbers employed in manufacturing and construction jobs (at 23% combined) compared to the State (at 21% combined) (Table 3).

The continuing retraction in agriculture and traditional manufacturing, along with the cyclical downturn currently being experienced in the construction industry increases the need to provide alternative sources of employment for these sections of the Labour Force in the future.

Area	Farming	Manufacturing	Construction	Clerical & Admin	Comm & Trans	Sales & Commerce	Prof, Tech & Health	Other
Kilkenny	8%	13%	10%	15%	5%	13%	16%	11%
State	4%	12%	9%	18%	6%	14%	16%	11%

Source: CSO, 2006.

Section 3: Profile of County Kilkenny



The number unemployed in the south-east¹² in 2007 was circa 11,400 (CSO, 2007), which represents an unemployment rate of 4.8%. As at the end of July 2008, there were 3,425 people on the live register in County Kilkenny. This represents an increase of circa 24% since July 2007.¹³

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has developed good links with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and also with the community based partnership companies in the county, and there is an effective reciprocal referral system in place. The local FAS office also retains a skills database of all those registered with them and currently looking for work.

The participation rate in the labour force in County Kilkenny (at 62.6%) has been steadily increasing in recent years and is on a par with the national average (at 62.5%). The low level of female participation (at 52.4%) compared to the male participation rate (at 72.8%), raises issues such as the lack of affordable and accessible childcare facilities as inhibiting factors.¹⁴ The Kilkenny County Enterprise Board, through its Childcare Enterprise Policy has been actively involved in supporting the establishment of childcare facilities across the county. The Board reviews this policy on an annual basis.

3.4 Local Economy

With approximately 2,600 non-agricultural businesses in County Kilkenny¹⁵, and only six companies employing more than 250 people, the county is not over reliant on a small number of large industries for employment, but rather depends upon a rich diversity of mainly indigenous enterprises across the full spectrum of industry sectors.

The following sectors are particularly important (especially in terms of employment) to the economy of the county:

Tourism: Tourism is a major revenue generator for the county estimated at approximately €100 Million per annum, and Kilkenny City is a thriving tourist base, accommodating over 200,000 tourists each year. There are a number of well established festivals which boost the tourism season, including the Pan Celtic Festival - a celebration of all things Irish; 'Rhythm and Roots' Festival, which hosts international stars of the bluegrass and country music scenes; the Cat Laughs

Comedy Festival, now established beside Montreaux, Montreal and Edinburgh as one of the top international comedy festivals; the Source Festival - an outdoor music festival which has featured Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart and Paul Simon in the past; the Kilkenny Arts Festival, which features the best of visual art, street performance and classical music; and the Savour Kilkenny Food Festival which showcases the produce of local food producers.

Food Production and Processing: Glanbia plc is a leading international dairy foods and nutritional ingredients Group, and is the largest cheese producer in Europe. The company has its headquarters in Kilkenny and employs almost 700 people throughout the county, making it the largest employer by far. Glanbia has developed a R&D facility in Kilkenny, which employs over 50 research professionals. There are a number of other much smaller food producers spread throughout the county. However, relative to its size, and despite the high level of primary agricultural production, the county has comparatively few value-added food producers.

Engineering: Businesses specialising in engineering products and services are a major component of the local economy. Kilkenny Engineering Products Ltd was a tremendous seedbed for the development of many engineering companies that have emerged throughout the county since the early 1980s. Kilkenny Products was set-up as a local community based enterprise in the 1950s to help counter unemployment at the time. Today engineering in Kilkenny embraces a wide range of activities in many different engineering sectors from fine precision engineering products distributed worldwide through large steel stockholders to small mechanical and tooling engineering services.

Creative Arts and Industries: Kilkenny has traditionally been associated with creative and artistic endeavours, and indeed is branded as the 'Creative Heart of Ireland'. As the base for the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) in the 1960's, 70's and 80's, the workshops pioneered a cross-disciplinary approach to design, with craft, graphic and product designers all working in the same organisation. That approach developed an international reputation for KDW and attracted designers from many different countries to work in a centre of excellence for product and craft design. KDW has spawned a cluster of creative industries and services, including craft, music and art and more recently graphic design, film, multi-media, animation and ICT development. There are over 80 registered craft producers in the county.

12. Disaggregated unemployment level figures are not available at county level.
13. While the Live Register series is primarily an administrative count and not a specific measure of unemployment, one of its main uses/purposes is as a short-term trend indicator of Unemployment. The series also offers users data at a detailed geographic level, i.e. down as far as county and even local office level. It includes part-time workers (those who work up to three days a week), seasonal

and casual workers entitled to Jobseekers Benefit or Allowance. Unemployment is measured by the Quarterly National Household. Source: CSO
14. Source: CSO 2006.
15. Source: CEB Database, 2008

Section 3: Profile of County Kilkenny



Retail Centre: There are over 300 retail outlets in Kilkenny City.¹⁶ A huge proportion of these are independent traders, specialist boutiques and fashion stores. Kilkenny's medieval network of streets and lanes offer an attractive mix of traditional shops selling a range of indigenous products. The range of shopping is well in excess of most other towns of a similar size and population.

Services Centre: Kilkenny City currently acts as an administration centre for a number of state and semi-state agencies including the regional headquarters of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Health Service Executive (HSE); the national headquarters of the Crafts Council of Ireland (CCOI), Patents Office and The Heritage Council. Furthermore, it was announced that the headquarters for the Arts Council is to be relocated to Kilkenny, as part of the Government's decentralisation policy. Almost 1,000 people are also currently employed in the financial services and call centres located in Kilkenny. These include State Street, the world's leading provider of funds administration to institutional investors, VHI Healthcare and Bank of Ireland 365 Credit Card Services.

3.5 Quality of Life

Set in an agricultural heartland, County Kilkenny is rich in natural beauty and in addition to being a popular tourist destination, it has developed a strong reputation as an attractive place in which to live and work. This has proved to be a major influencing factor in attracting both inward investment and workers to the county in the past.

Kilkenny City is rich in historic and archaeological treasures. In the 17th Century it was a centre of government. Today it offers a unique selection of historic sites and a unique streetscape and historical architecture, which have combined to give Kilkenny the title of medieval capital of Ireland. Kilkenny Civic Trust has been responsible for the restoration of many of the City's historic buildings, including Butler House, the Kilkenny Design Centre and Rothe House. These buildings together with the imposing Kilkenny Castle contribute significantly to the heritage ethos of the City.

Outside of the main cities of Dublin, Galway and Cork, house property values in County Kilkenny and in particular Kilkenny City have always been a little above the rest of the country, reflecting its popularity/demand as a desirable location in which to live.

The county is served by a good primary, secondary and vocational education system. While there is a limited third level presence, there are currently 300 students enrolled (mainly on part-time programmes) with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth outreach campus based at St Kieran's College, and the National College of Ireland has also developed an outreach facility at Kilkenny College, offering part-time certificate and diploma level programmes.

The enhancement and development of third and fourth level education delivery into Kilkenny is a priority issue for the economic future of the county. The County Enterprise Board is proactively involved, in conjunction with the Kilkenny County Council through the County Development Board, in initiating actions to stimulate activity in this area.

Kilkenny is also well served by a very active community and voluntary sector, as well as a broad range of sporting organisations and activities including GAA, golf, soccer, rugby, athletics, boxing, walking, cycling, fishing, equestrian sports, horse-racing, greyhound racing, among others. The county is perhaps best known in sporting terms for its prowess in hurling, having accumulated 31 All-Ireland Senior Titles to date (more than any other county)

¹⁶ Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce, 2007



PART 2: Making a Difference – Delivering the Strategy

Section 4: The Strategy

4.1 Introduction

The strategic plan for Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has been developed following extensive consultation with a broad range of clients and other stakeholders and has been prepared by the executive team of the County Enterprise Board, with guidance and direction from the Board, and with the support of Paula Fitzsimons, Fitzsimons Consulting.

Its purpose is to act as a guide for the organisation in carrying out its role and responsibilities and consequently it reflects national enterprise policy and regional priorities. It is intended to be client centred, focused on supporting enterprise growth and development needs, and actively contributing to a dynamic local economy.

It takes account of the more challenging economic environment and the necessity for the indigenous sector to play an even more important role in supporting economic development and growth.

The Mission sets out the guiding principles of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board and is the touchstone against which success is ultimately measured. This is further broken down into five high level objectives. For each objective, associated initiatives have been developed and operational targets have been devised to assess progress towards their achievement.

4.2 Mission

The strategic mission of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is to foster a vibrant enterprise culture throughout the county, while actively supporting the start-up, development and growth of locally based small businesses, in particular those with a potential to grow, in a manner that maximises the cooperation with partner organisations in the public and private sector.

Successful delivery of the strategy in County Kilkenny over the next 5 years would manifest itself in many ways including:

- The recognition of the county as an excellent place in which to set-up and do business;
- The creation of a stronger culture of enterprise development throughout all sections of society from within local schools through to the wider community;
- Facilitating the collaboration between all stakeholders in enterprise development activities;
- Emphasising the importance of entrepreneurs becoming more readily aware of and accessing the supports available to them;
- Assisting in the development of a more positive attitude and disposition towards entrepreneurs;
- Development of a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, with better access to information, advice, financial and non-financial supports;
- Encouragement of a greater number of local people to set -up in business;
- Assisting more small businesses to identify and overcome obstacles to their continued development;
- Increased profiling and championing of entrepreneurs in the local media;
- Rewarding business success through facilitating participation in awards such as the National Enterprise Awards;
- Development of best practice in the provision and delivery of enterprise supports; to local businesses maximising their growth potential;
- Encouragement of even greater networking, co-operating and sharing of experiences between entrepreneurs;

4.3 Objectives

The strategic objectives identified to help achieve the mission are set out below:

1. Fostering a spirit of enterprise

- To contribute to a dynamic environment that is supportive of entrepreneurs, their new enterprises and the development and growth of existing businesses in the county.

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2. Supporting new enterprises

- To appropriately support and encourage entrepreneurs to create new enterprises within County Kilkenny, particularly those with the potential to grow and develop. Enterprises which fit the EI classification of a high potential start-up (HPSU) will be transferred to EI for support.

3. Enhancing existing enterprises

- To address the needs of existing enterprises and to enhance their competitiveness, innovation and management capability, in addition to supporting those owner managers who have an aspiration to grow their businesses to achieve the full potential of their enterprises.

4. Harnessing the potential of partnerships

- To collaborate with other agencies and organisations in a spirit of partnership for the good of enterprise and entrepreneurs in the county.

5. Delivering excellent service

- To provide an excellent level of service to all who contact with or avail of services provided by the County Enterprise Board.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board intends to be innovative in its approach to establishing new initiatives to achieve the objectives set out above. The initiatives described below are intended to assist in the achievement of these objectives.

All interventions will be weighted against the potential outcomes. Accordingly, **resources will be targeted at actions which have the potential to achieve the greatest returns.** For example where a business, regardless of its stage of development, is identified as having a potential for growth, it will be prioritised for support.

In formulating the initiatives designed to achieve the strategic goals set out above, Kilkenny County Enterprise Board assessed each in terms of its implementation feasibility, its acceptability to stakeholders and its suitability to achieve the stated objectives. In each instance, the initiative, when run over the course of a year, will be reviewed against the objective set for it and its

continuance or otherwise will be decided upon in light of its progress towards the achievement of that objective and on the feedback received from clients with regard to their perception of its value. Not all of these initiatives will be equally successful. Hence, the importance of feedback mechanisms which allow informed judgements to be made about the use of scarce resources.

To encourage the development of enterprise activities throughout the county, the Enterprise Board executive team will strive to ensure that implementation of the initiatives set out below is not confined to certain geographic areas, but rather is implemented throughout County Kilkenny.

The aim is to achieve the five strategic objectives, while managing available resources in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

4.4 Fostering a Spirit of Enterprise

Objective: *To contribute to a dynamic environment that is supportive of entrepreneurs and their new enterprises and the development and growth of existing businesses in the county*

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action.¹⁷ Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will continue to strive to cultivate an extremely positive attitude towards the establishment of a culture of entrepreneurship generally, at the same time creating a supportive environment for owner managers of new and established businesses in the County.

While the Enterprise Board has a critical role to play in this regard, it cannot be achieved without 'buy-in' from a wide range of other stakeholders to ensure that County Kilkenny commands a reputation as being a great place in which to start and do business.

The ultimate measure of success of initiatives taken to foster a pervasive entrepreneurial climate and the provision of a supportive environment for businesses in County Kilkenny will manifest in the number of those inspired and supported to plan, start, and grow sustainable new businesses in the county. At present there is no mechanism available to track the progress of these in their entirety. Accordingly, operational targets will be placed against each of the actions outlined below as indicative measures of their impact.

17. European Commission "Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets" 2008.

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Foster enterprise in second level schools

The important role of education in promoting entrepreneurial attitudes is now widely recognised. Entrepreneurship education should aim to foster entrepreneurial behaviours such as creative problem solving, initiative taking, etc.

The Student Enterprise Awards Scheme is a national enterprise education programme for secondary school students aimed at fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, through the practical experience of setting up and running a mini-business.

The Scheme is now well established in second level schools, particularly with transition year students. While it must be recognised that the school curriculum does not 'formally' facilitate the Scheme, it is nevertheless intended to foster the high level of participation that has been developed. In the 2007-2008 academic year, all second level schools in County Kilkenny participated in the Awards for the first time. The Enterprise Board intends to continue to contract a Project Worker to co-ordinate and deliver the Student Enterprise Awards in second level schools.

In order to support teachers (especially those involved with transition year students) to participate in the Awards, and to further improve the quality of projects being developed by students, it is intended to make available the 'Idea Generation Workshops' developed by the County Enterprise Board to all schools participating in the Student Enterprise Awards. The Workshops will be delivered by the Project Worker and/or other professionals in central locations to large groups of students from a number of schools, as well as 'in-school' to smaller groups.

In May of each year, the County Enterprise Board, in conjunction with teachers, will review the experience of participating in the Student Enterprise Awards. This review will play an important part in the planning and delivery of the Awards in the following academic year. Consideration will also be given to how best to involve students in this review process.

The County Enterprise Board will also continue to promote the Enterprise Encounter Initiative in second level schools. Enterprise Encounter provides an opportunity for small groups of senior students to plan, organise and make once-off investigative visits to local entrepreneurs to see close-up what it is like to run a small business.

The Enterprise Board will continue to promote and make available the Enterprise Encounter Resource Pack and will facilitate its introduction to those schools that are interested in using the initiative, especially in filling the gap that exists between the conclusion of the Student Enterprise Award scheme (in early Spring) and the end of the academic year.

The County Enterprise Board will also promote the 'Small Business Game' initiative, which is a new online interactive, educational game, where second level students run their own virtual sports retail store. The initiative, which has been running successfully in promoting enterprise in a number of other countries, gives students an opportunity to: learn what it is like to manage a small business; learn what works in business - and what doesn't work: as well as experiment with different strategies and tactics to see the impact of these decisions on the business.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will be ready to take advantage of other opportunities for enterprise education initiatives that might arise.

Foster creativity

Recent reports from a number of groups, including the Enterprise Strategy Group (2004) and the Small Business Forum (2006) have highlighted the need for increased creativity and innovation in Irish businesses - by nature soft skills that are difficult to quantify. Businesses are increasingly realising that they have to become increasingly innovative to survive.

The County Enterprise Board supports the initiative to establish a 'Creativity Centre' in Kilkenny, as a place where people (and in particular intending and existing entrepreneurs) can go to learn how they can adopt more creative approaches. The proposed Creativity Centre is to be a centre of excellence for the research, understanding and promotion of creative thinking techniques within the community, education, business and public sector interests in Ireland. The Board believe that Kilkenny – the creative heart of Ireland – is the ideal location for such a facility.

The Board has successfully applied (in 2008) for pilot funding from the County Enterprise Board Central Co-ordination Unit to deliver 'Enterprise Imagination'. This pilot has been developed in conjunction with the Creativity Centre, and is aimed at giving students the tools and techniques to

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unblock their creative thinking process, and to give them the self-confidence to imagine, identify, develop and realise an idea. A real life business, namely Cartoon Saloon, is actively involved in the pilot for this scheme.

Champion enterprise and local entrepreneurs

Research clearly indicates that role models have a powerful influence in shaping individuals' openness to entrepreneurial opportunity and active engagement in entrepreneurship. Accordingly, Kilkenny County Enterprise Board recognises the important role that the media plays in fostering positive cultural and social norms about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship through the manner and frequency with which they feature stories about successful entrepreneurs.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will facilitate the media in learning about the successes of local entrepreneurs and to celebrate their achievements by continuing to champion the achievements of clients through case studies in the local media. These local success stories can raise awareness of enterprise, as well as encourage and inspire potential entrepreneurs (particularly young people), when they see that success can be achieved by people in their own communities.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board, in conjunction with Carlow County Enterprise Board, will continue to sponsor the 'Business Show' on local radio (KCLR96FM), as a means of showcasing good examples of entrepreneurship, profiling local businesses (e.g. Enterprise Board clients) and highlighting key business issues. Acting in cooperation, the two Enterprise Boards will proactively engage with the producers of the show to agree content for each programme. The main aim will be to have the show directly associated with the Enterprise Boards, while at the same time raising the profile of local entrepreneurs and bringing their achievements to a wider audience in the county.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will continue to work with the local media to promote business and enterprise topics. In particular, the County Enterprise Board will aim to develop regular columns on enterprise and entrepreneurship in the local press, and to respond to the growing interest in this area, with case studies and business topics in an interesting and informative manner for general readership. The Enterprise Board will also respond to requests from the



national media for editorial and/or examples of local success stories.

The County Enterprise Board will also provide regular editorial content to the local media in an interesting and informative fashion, including for example bi-annual news bulletins containing performance statements.¹⁸ In this and other ways the County Enterprise Board is committed to ensuring that local editors and appropriate journalists are fully briefed on the role and function of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board in a manner that it of interest to them.

The role of the media in communicating information to the general public about the supports available for aspiring and established entrepreneurs is also crucial and advertisements in the local media have been a key tool in alerting potential participants to planned workshops, events and enterprise training programmes organised and delivered by Kilkenny County Enterprise Board. They also have the additional benefit of keeping the profile of the Enterprise Board and its available supports to the forefront of local people's minds. While the cost of maintaining the profile of the Board in this manner is significant, it is nevertheless considered to be a necessary expense, and therefore appropriate to continue to advertise at the current levels in the local media.¹⁹

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will encourage clients, as appropriate, to enter the many enterprise award competitions that currently exist in Ireland. Participation in various competitions can be a greatly rewarding and inspiring experience for entrepreneurs.

In particular, the Enterprise Board will continue to promote the National Enterprise Awards, sponsored by the national network of County and City Enterprise Boards. The National Enterprise Awards provide an opportunity to showcase the 'best' of local enterprises supported by the Enterprise Boards nationally. Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will continue to identify those among its clients most suitable for participation in the Awards each year, and will seek to maximise the local publicity attaching to their participation as role models of successful local enterprises that may inspire others.

The South East Spirit of Enterprise Week has proven to be a very successful means of championing enterprise and entrepreneurship throughout the region. The Enterprise Board will continue to participate in this initiative (currently held every October) and will take the lead locally in the

¹⁸. Making available, for example, information regarding the number of business projects supported, the value of financial investments made in these projects, the potential number of jobs to be created by the businesses supported, the number of people participating in entrepreneurial and capability development supports delivered by the Board, among other matters.

¹⁹. It should be noted that a cut in advertising expenditure in 2007 had a direct adverse impact upon uptake and participation rates in County Enterprise Board programmes.

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organisation and delivery of a series of focused events, in partnership with other local agencies and business networks.²⁰

A celebration will be held as part of Enterprise Week each year to mark the achievement of those who have set up a new business in the county in the previous year. Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will also consider how best to participate in the inaugural 'EU SME Week'²¹ and also the Global Entrepreneurship Week.²²

Develop an active presence in local communities

The staff of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will convene clinics at regular intervals in the main towns and villages outside of Kilkenny City, as a means of increasing awareness of and improving access to the support services of the Board throughout the county. These clinics will be organised in conjunction with local community groups to maximise their associated reach and awareness. It is also intended to bring the Enterprise Bus²³ into different parts of the county outside of the city, thereby raising awareness of the Enterprise Board more widely.

The staff will also be available, as appropriate, to give presentations to agencies, organisations, business networks, local communities and voluntary groups throughout the county on the role and remit of the Board and upon the support services available. This is acknowledged as an effective way to promote the services of the Board.

Strengthen links with key stakeholder group

While Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has emerged as the principal point of contact for small business locally, it is still the case, albeit in a limited number of cases, that some of the frontline access points (e.g. accountancy practices, banks, credit unions, social welfare offices, etc.), with which intending and existing entrepreneurs interface are not always inclined to refer them to or make them aware of the support services available from the Enterprise Board.

This can result in prospective clients missing opportunities to avail of support at an early stage. In this regard, the Enterprise Board will further step up its efforts to promote its presence as a 'first stop shop' and also the services it provides by strengthening links and enhancing communication channels with key influencers and stakeholders throughout the county. This will include bi-annual

enterprise news bulletins containing updates of supports, performance outputs of the Board, case studies of clients supported, etc. These news bulletins will be posted to the County Enterprise Board website, circulated to the local media and also circulated to clients by e-mail.

Enterprise Board staff will also host briefing updates and/or focus group workshop sessions with key stakeholder groups on at least an annual basis, to ensure that they are fully aware of what is on offer, and also that they are better placed to act as 'ambassadors' of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board. These sessions will also present an opportunity for two-way communication, so that the staff of the Enterprise Board are kept up to date with the offerings available from and/or issues arising amongst stakeholder groups from an enterprise perspective.

Foster a Spirit of Enterprise:

Targets

- Sponsor delivery of the Student Enterprise Awards (SEA). While recognising that participation in the Awards is on an entirely voluntary basis, it is intended to achieve:
 - At least 80% participation rate per annum in the Senior Category of the Awards among second level schools in the county offering transition year;
 - At least 400 students participating at Senior Category Level per annum;
 - At least 2 schools in the 2009/2010 academic year participating at the Junior and Intermediate Categories of the Awards, and encourage at least 2 more schools to participate in each Category by 2013.
- Sponsor Business Show on local radio.
- Provide editorial content to local media for a regular Enterprise Column.
- Organise an Enterprise Week each year.
- Enter a client business in the National Enterprise Awards Competition each year.
- Publish at least two 'Enterprise News' bulletins per annum.
- Deliver at least ten Enterprise Clinics per annum, with 80 people attending.
- Host Stakeholder Group Workshop each year.

20. Such as Kilkenny Chamber, Kilkenny Business Club, Kilkenny Business Women's Network, FAS, among others.

21. To be held in May 2009.

22. The Global Entrepreneurship Week takes place each November.

23. The Enterprise Bus is a pilot initiative.

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These targets represent a new way of working for the executives of the Enterprise Board and reflect the underlining theme of this plan with its focus on supporting development and growth. They are considered ambitious targets and will be reviewed at the end of 2009 and amended, if considered necessary.

4.5 Supporting New Enterprises

Objective: *To provide appropriate supports to assist entrepreneurs create new enterprises within County Kilkenny, particularly those with the potential to grow and develop.*

First Stop Shop Service

Information plays a key role in helping entrepreneurs at each stage of business development from start-up through to the growth of their business. The need for good relevant and timely information is central to the success of any business. The information needs of entrepreneurs cover the full spectrum from the basic mechanics involved in establishing a business through to market and financial information.

The Enterprise Board will strive to enhance its First Stop Shop service offering and will continue to provide a business information, advice and referral service to all those in the county thinking of setting up a new business. The Board will send out the message – “Are you thinking of starting a business – then your first port of call is to contact the County Enterprise Board.”

The First Stop Shop service will comprise of the following:

- Basic information and advice over the telephone and from the office, as well as professional advice from experts on the Board’s mentor panel;
- ‘Business advisory session’ provided by Enterprise Board staff;
- On-line information resource via the Board’s website;



- Printed brochures and leaflets; and
- A signposting and referral service.

Provision of relevant information

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will provide practical and relevant business information to those thinking of starting a new business. As they typically are under time and capacity constraints, entrepreneurs often do not have the time to start searching through the wide range of available sources in order to locate the information that is relevant to their specific business operation. This can be cause for a great deal of frustration.

While information is currently available on the Enterprise Board website to anyone interested in starting a business, it will be modified to make it easier for those starting a new business to access relevant information and will include a more comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s), and a broader range of case studies of the financial and other supports available from the Board.

The Enterprise Board will also make available printed guides and leaflets on *Thinking of Starting a New Business* and *Starting Your Own Business*, to complement the material available on the web site. Detailed brochures on specific areas of interest to start-ups, such as financial planning, sales and marketing, will also be made available. These guides and leaflets will be made freely available from the offices of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board.

Business Advisory Sessions

Those thinking of starting a new business who contact the office of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board by telephone will be assured of individual attention appropriate to their needs. Callers will be encouraged to avail of a business advisory session, as appropriate, with an Enterprise Board executive to discuss their needs further. In this way fledgling entrepreneurs can have the benefit of someone with whom to discuss their concept in confidence.

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The staff of the Enterprise Board will aim to draft a list of follow-up actions with all clients availing of this service (e.g. participation in enterprise training, availing of mentoring support, applying for financial assistance, etc.) This may include referral or signposting entrepreneurs to other agencies deemed more appropriate to provide support to them. Enterprise Board staff will follow-up with clients subsequently to monitor progress. The new Enterprise Clinics will make it easier for prospective clients from outside Kilkenny City to avail of a business advisory session.

Start Your Own Business Training Programmes

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will continue to offer Start Your Own Business training Programmes at regular intervals throughout the year for the pre-start-up and start-up entrepreneur. These training programmes give participants an introduction to all of the main issues encountered when starting up and running a business from researching and planning their idea through to preparing financial projections.

The great majority of new enterprises start small and remain small. In many instances this reflects a lifestyle choice made by the entrepreneur. In other circumstances the entrepreneur may wish to grow the business, but the original concept and strategic positioning of the new venture becomes a limiting factor, as it does not easily lend itself to be scaled. To minimise instances of this kind, it is intended that participants on the Start Your Own Business Programmes and/or are being advised by Enterprise Board executives, will be encouraged to be more innovative in their original concept, in order to introduce greater developmental potential from the outset. Those contemplating and setting up new businesses will also be encouraged to incorporate appropriate ICT systems and supports into their business from the outset.

Enterprise Board executives will follow-up with all those who complete Start Your Own Business Programme training within six months to ascertain their current status, and whether they require further assistance to develop their proposal. Mentors will also be made available to participants as an integral part of the Start Your Own Business Programme, and as an additional source of support to early stage entrepreneurs who seek to meet the challenges involved in starting a new business.



Mentoring and Mentor Advice Clinics

The Board will continue to operate a Mentor Programme. The aim of this service is to provide entrepreneurs with a temporary business advisor to help them identify and overcome obstacles in their development. The Board has access to an extensive panel of experienced business advisors who act as a confidential sounding board by listening, advising and suggesting solutions to problems encountered by entrepreneurs. (Full details of the Board's Mentor Programme are available on the website www.kceb.ie).

A panel of mentors will also be made available to run specialist clinics for start-up clients at regular intervals throughout the year. The focus in these mentor clinics will be on relevant specific issues such as accessing finance, becoming an employer, marketing and promotion, among other topics.

Regular advice clinics will also continue to be offered by executives from the South East Business Innovation Centre (SEBIC) to appropriate start-up clients who would benefit from their advice and guidance.

Suitable further referrals

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has excellent links with the third level institutes in the region, in particular executives involved in the delivery of the Enterprise Platform Programmes in the Institute of Technology, Carlow and in the Waterford Institute of Technology. These institutes are an excellent resource for entrepreneurs in the region. Entrepreneurs deemed suitable will be signposted to the Enterprise Platform Programmes (EPP) run by both Institutes.

Start-ups deemed to 'fit' the criteria of a High Potential Start Up (HPSU), will be signposted to Enterprise Ireland for support.²⁴ The national network of County Enterprise Boards is in the process of finalising a national agreement with Enterprise Ireland. This includes protocols for co-operation, communication and the transfer of clients. County Enterprise Board executives will meet with EI executives in the region on at least an annual basis to proactively identify clients with the potential for transfer.

24. A 'high potential start up' is defined as a company which is:

- Based on technological innovation;
- Likely to achieve significant growth in 3 years (sales of €1.0m per annum and employment of 10 or more)
- Export oriented

- Ideally, led by an experienced team, with a mixture of technical and commercial competencies

Included in the definition of HPSU are early stage, product led R&D companies, with equivalent sales and employment potential, following successful completion of a defined pre-commercialisation phase.

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The potential of the Seed Capital Scheme (SCS), as a means of providing early stage finance to qualifying projects has not been fully exploited. The County Enterprise Board executives will promote awareness of the SCS to intending entrepreneurs, as appropriate, and also to accountants and other advisors in the private sector who provide services to start-ups.

Enterprise and Capability Training Development Programmes

In addition to the Start Your Own Business Programmes, the Enterprise Board will deliver enterprise and capability development training to start-ups. This will cover functional topics such as Sales and Marketing, Time Management, Financial Planning, Costing and Pricing, Book-keeping, Computerised Accounts, among other topics. The Programmes will be delivered in group workshops to facilitate experiential learning and networking, and will be run mainly in the evenings and at weekends. Most of the programmes will contain 1-1 mentor/counselling sessions as an integral part of the delivery, so as to ensure that participants are maximising their learning and use of the advice being imparted in the workshops.

These training programmes will form the core schedule of training to be offered by the Enterprise Board in the spring and autumn each year. Entrepreneurs will be encouraged to choose from the 'menu' of enterprise and capability development training programmes on the schedule, according to their needs. All programmes will be run at the most accessible times and venues.

Each programme will specify/prioritise measurable objectives that participants can expect to achieve from their participation. Each programme will be evaluated, according to the evaluation process devised by the Board following the strategic review of its enterprise and capability supports in 2006. The schedule of programmes to be included in the core schedule will be agreed following an analysis of the evaluation process, feedback received from clients and according to demand.

Linking those starting businesses with each other

Networks present an ideal mechanism to help entrepreneurs with peer to peer learning, sharing of experiences, discuss issues of common concern, redress the isolation that many may experience, and provide a forum for advice and ongoing support. Accordingly, Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will facilitate and encourage the establishment of a network of entrepreneurs who have recently started a business (i.e. within the past 3 years) within the county.

Provide financial assistance to eligible start-up enterprises

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will continue to provide financial assistance to eligible enterprises, which are identified as having the potential to grow and which require funding to enable them to start. Financial assistance will be considered on a selective basis and as part of a broader 'package' of support to start-ups.²⁵

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will provide financial assistance as appropriate and within the guidelines as set out by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The financial instruments currently available from Kilkenny County Enterprise Board²⁶ include the following:

- **Feasibility Study Grants:** to assist entrepreneurs assess the viability of project proposals. The County Enterprise Board will be particularly interested in assisting innovative projects that have the potential to grow and/or enhance the local economy.²⁷
- **Employment Grants:** to help offset the costs of going self-employed for the first time and/or of employing new staff.²⁸
- **Capital Grants:** towards the cost of purchasing plant and equipment necessary for manufacturing, building and other eligible costs associated with a project.

It should be noted that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment specify that:

- No more than 25% of the financial assistance approved each year can be awarded to local service based enterprises; and
- At least 30% of the total financial assistance awarded each year must be refundable.

25. For example in conjunction with other supports such as the Start Your Own Business Programme, enterprise and capability development training and mentoring support.

26. Full details of the financial instruments are available on the Enterprise Board's website www.kceb.ie

27. It should be noted that no more than 10% of the Financial Assistance approved by Kilkenny County Enterprise Board each year will be in form of Feasibility Study Grants.

28. It should be noted that no more than 25% of the Financial Assistance approved by Kilkenny County Enterprise Board each year can be in form of Employment Grants.

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Facilitating opportunity identification in key sectors

The Enterprise Board, in partnership with other agencies as appropriate, will host themed information workshops around the opportunities available in particular sectors (e.g. food, creative industries, etc.). These workshops will be used as an introduction to those who may be considering starting a new business in these particular sectors.

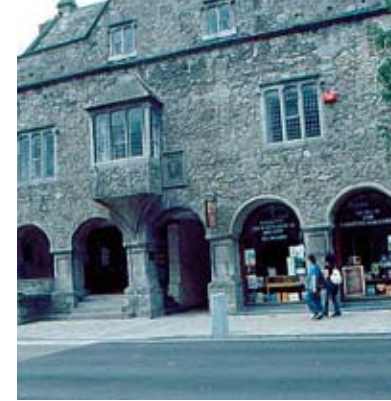
The Enterprise Board will also (in conjunction with other agencies) investigate the potential for small business start-ups in some sectors as part of a pump-prime initiative. These will include:

- Food

County Kilkenny has a rich farming tradition and the county and its hinterland is well positioned to produce the natural ingredients for a range of food products. Moreover, the research centre in Glanbia is a great resource of expertise and willing support in this regard. However, the number of high value added food enterprises, that have been started in the county is relatively low. There are a range of factors contributing to this, including the relatively high start-up costs and regulatory environment facing entrepreneurs focused on the food sector. This is an issue that the Enterprise Board in conjunction with other partner organisations, most notably BNS LEADER, aims to investigate and address, with a view to stimulating a greater number of food enterprises in the future.

There is the potential to explore with Glanbia the possibility of spinning out research from its R&D Facility in Kilkenny, which the company itself has decided not to pursue as not being core to its development priorities. Such research could become the foundation for new enterprises or as a means of new product diversification for existing food producing small companies in the county.

The brewing experience of skilled workers in Smithwick's may also present entrepreneurial possibilities for a new micro brewery or for a cross over into food through pro-biotic foods, which have a related technology base.



- Craft and Tourism

In many instances, crafts people do not wish to start new enterprises that do not have significant growth aspirations, yet their presence enriches the well developed craft cluster and the attractiveness of the county to tourists. Accordingly, recognising the tradition of craft related enterprises and its many benefits to the county, the Enterprise Board will continue to provide a variety of supports to craft and tourist related enterprises, in partnership with other agencies such as the Crafts Council of Ireland, which has its headquarters in Kilkenny.

The Enterprise Board will also facilitate the establishment of a network of craft workers in the county, as a means to facilitate co-operation, peer to peer learning, etc.

Foster a spirit of enterprise among workers being made redundant

Where the need arises, the Enterprise Board will work with employers and workers to foster a spirit of enterprise among those being made redundant and will offer a range of practical supports to those who might wish to pursue an alternative enterprise career. For example, following the announcement by Diageo of its intention to close the Smithwick's plant in Kilkenny City by 2013, and also the impending closure of Galmoy Mines in the north of the county, the Enterprise Board will work in partnership with other agencies to provide supports to those workers facing redundancy who are interested in pursuing self-employment opportunities.

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Supporting New Enterprises:

Targets

- Deliver at least 4 Start Your Own Business Programmes per annum, with a maximum total of 80 people participating.
- Deliver at least 100 business advisory sessions per annum to new start-up entrepreneurs.
- At least 50 start-up entrepreneurs availing of mentoring support or mentor advisory clinics.
- At least 50 start-up entrepreneurs participating in Enterprise and Capability Development Training
- At least 40 new businesses will be started each year with the active support of the Enterprise Board. Of these:
 - at least 10 will receive financial support;
 - at least 10 will become employers within two years;
 - at least 15 will have a woman among its owner managers.

These targets represent a new way of working for the executives of the County Enterprise Board and reflect the underlining theme of this plan with its focus on supporting development and growth. They are considered ambitious targets and will be reviewed at the end of 2009 and amended, if considered necessary.

4.6 Enhancing Existing Enterprises

Objective: *To address the needs of existing enterprises, to enhance their competitiveness, innovation and management capability and, where an aspiration for growth exists, to work in partnership with the company to support its growth and development.*

The focus will be on capability building among existing owner managers, on enhancing productivity and innovation, and on the development of export potential. In particular, the Enterprise Board will direct its resources to those enterprises with a clear aspiration for growth. To support the achievement of this objective, the full range of appropriate supports will be available to qualifying businesses.

First Stop Shop

The Enterprise Board will provide a comprehensive business information, advice and referral service to owner managers in the county who wish to strengthen their existing businesses through improvements in productivity, management capability, innovativeness and exports. Executives will be available to discuss development and growth issues with entrepreneurs and to respond appropriately to their needs.

Those thinking of developing or growing an existing business who contact the office of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board by telephone will be assured of individual attention appropriate to their needs. Callers will be encouraged to avail of a business advisory session, as appropriate, with an Enterprise Board executive to discuss their needs further. In this way established entrepreneurs can have the benefit of someone with whom to discuss their development and growth issues in confidence.

The staff of the Enterprise Board will aim to draft a list of appropriate follow-up actions with all clients availing of this service (e.g. participation in enterprise training, availing of mentoring support, applying for financial assistance, etc.). This may include referral or signposting entrepreneurs to other agencies deemed more appropriate to provide support to them. Enterprise Board staff will follow-up with clients subsequently to monitor progress.

Assist clients with a clear aspiration for growth

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will support those owner managers who have an aspiration to grow their businesses, to achieve the full potential of their enterprises. The executive team of the Enterprise Board intends to take an increasingly developmental approach to supporting the existing base of client enterprises in the county, particularly those that have the desire and potential to grow.

County Enterprise Board executives will actively seek to identify existing businesses with growth and/or export potential and will work in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and other agencies as appropriate to assist these businesses to grow and develop. When they meet the appropriate

Section 4: The Strategy

criteria, these client companies will be transferred to Enterprise Ireland. The transfer of client companies to EI will be marked appropriately.

The executives of the County Enterprise Board will work closely with the Regional Director and other executives of Enterprise Ireland, as appropriate, to gain access to a range of expertise, advice and support which may be available to suitable clients of the Enterprise Board.

The Enterprise Board recognises that different supports are needed at different stages of the 'life cycle' of business. Future training provision will take into account and specifically target the different stages. For example, different developmental challenges face a business that has grown to employing five or more people than one that has remained smaller. Businesses that are entering a growth phase may require short intensive management development training combined with one to one on-going mentoring/coaching. Suitable supports of this nature will be provided by the County Enterprise Board as appropriate.

The challenge for a growing business is often to make the transition from being operationally focused to being able to manage the business as it grows. Strategic mentoring support is designed to facilitate this type of capacity building in businesses at this stage of development and will continue to be provided.

Where a business with growth potential requires funding to enable that growth to take place, the Board will consider suitable financial intervention to companies in the manufacturing and internationally traded service sectors. As appropriate, businesses with export aspirations will be supported to participate in export support programmes, and/or to research potential new markets and to participate in trade missions.

Senior executives of Kilkenny County Enterprise Board intend to foster ongoing relationships with a greater number of existing clients, to assess their growth and development potential and needs.

The Enterprise Board executives will assist client companies to undertake a structured assessment of 'where they are now?' and 'where they want to be?' Clients will be subsequently signposted to supports offered by the County Enterprise Board and/or other agencies, depending upon the outcome of the assessment.

In the first instance, the County Enterprise Board executives will focus on existing clients who are already on the Board's 'Annual Employment Survey' database.²⁹ There are currently circa 450 companies listed on the database.

The County Enterprise Board will also host an annual review workshop with companies financially assisted by the Board to assess their progress in achieving their ambitions, and to ascertain what further assistance they need to enhance their enterprises.

Develop companies for transfer to Enterprise Ireland

One of the fundamental goals of the County Enterprise Board is to move a significant number of clients up the value chain. The County Enterprise Board is also committed to growing companies of high potential for transfer to Enterprise Ireland for support. Significant successes have been achieved in this regard since the Board was formed in 1993.

The Chief Executive of the County Enterprise Board and the Regional Director of Enterprise Ireland will review the client base of the County Enterprise Board at least once a year to identify clients who have the potential to become clients of Enterprise Ireland, and to benefit from the more extensive range of supports available from that development agency.

In the first instance those client companies whose development makes them suitable candidate clients of Enterprise Ireland will be transferred, and Enterprise Board executives will liaise with the clients concerned to inform them of the process and to discuss the implications and 'logistics' involved in transfer. In cases where the clients' business demonstrates growth potential but is not yet at a stage suitable for transfer to Enterprise Ireland, the executives of the Enterprise Board will work in partnership with Enterprise Ireland executives to support the company's further development and growth.

29. Only companies in receipt of Financial Assistance (other than a Feasibility Study Grant) from the County Enterprise Board are listed on the Annual Employment Survey database.

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Support companies to export

Despite the opportunities brought by globalisation and in particular the enlarged single European market, only 8% of small businesses within the EU are involved in exports.³⁰

To further encourage small businesses in the county to develop new markets, small businesses will be identified and supported to develop exports each year, some of which will be exporters for the first time. The Enterprise Board will work with Enterprise Ireland at regional level in relation to export initiatives and in preparing Enterprise Board clients for export.

The national network of County and City Enterprise Boards is currently in discussions with Enterprise Ireland with a view to developing a pilot 'First Time Exporters' Programme, which it is envisaged will be adapted from the Enterprise Ireland 'First Flight Programme' and delivered at a regional level. For those companies that are already exporting, the objective will be to support them in their efforts to further expand their sales in export markets.

Mentoring and Mentor Advice Clinics

The panel of mentors will also continue to be made available to assist owner-managers of existing businesses.

The Board will also organise Mentor Advice Clinics at regular intervals throughout the year. The focus in these mentor clinics will be on relevant specific issues for owner-managers of existing businesses, such as accessing finance, becoming an employer, marketing and promotion, among other topics.

Regular advice clinics will also continue to be offered by executives from the South East Business Innovation Centre (SEBIC) to appropriate clients of existing businesses who would benefit from their advice and guidance.

³⁰ EU Observatory of SMEs 2008.



Enhance Management Capability

Owning and managing a small business can be a lonely experience. In the course of any one day, the entrepreneur might have to make decisions as an accountant, a marketing person, a sales person, a HR manager, a buyer and many more functions. However, entrepreneurs very often need to acquire the necessary skills to perform these management functions for the effective operation of their business. Developing management capability is also a prerequisite to innovation and growth, as well as ensuring the long-term survival of small business.

Provision of high quality management training has been a core activity of the Enterprise Board since its inception. Real benefits have accrued from this activity, as small business promoters have been equipped to adapt to modern business practices and to the challenges they face in a rapidly changing business environment.

The Enterprise Board will continue to deliver programmes aimed at developing appropriate management practices and processes in small businesses, concentrating on building the capability of local firms to engage in competitive strategies leading to greater innovation and growth.

The Enterprise Board will provide the following core Programmes:

- **Management Development Programme:** The Board has successfully delivered a number of Management Development Programmes over the course of the past 10 years, and will continue to make these available to companies who could benefit from participation in this structured developmental initiative. The Management Development Programme is typically a more intensive training programme, running over a period of up to 12 months. Delivery comprises of a combination of group workshops of up to 20 owner-managers and one-to-one sessions with professional advisors. The main objective is to help entrepreneurs with an aspiration to grow their businesses to strengthen their capabilities in a combination of management functions, such as strategic planning, HR, production, marketing and finance, while at the same time facilitating experiential learning and networking between entrepreneurs. The Board will aim to continue to organise and deliver Management Development Programmes on an inter-county basis with neighbouring Boards, as a means to encouraging regional networking.

Section 4: The Strategy



- **Strategic Mentoring Programme:** The Board introduced the strategic mentoring programme in 2007 and the feedback from clients availing of the service to date has been very positive. This programme is targeted at owner-managers of existing businesses who have successfully developed past the start up phase and now want to improve the way that they do business, and put in place a strategic plan to help them do so. The offering will be made available to companies that have the potential to benefit.

The above Programmes will complement the core Enterprise and Capability Development training programmes. Where appropriate, County Enterprise Board staff will signpost clients to the FAS Competency Development Programme. The Board will also continue to make available mainstream Mentoring support to owner managers who encounter specific developmental challenges. The Board will also pilot group mentoring clinics, specifically aimed at addressing the common needs of growing businesses.

Businesses will also be proactively encouraged to make better use of ICT as a means of improving productivity.) Client companies will be encouraged to avail of the Tech Check Initiative, which is aimed at providing expert independent advice to small business owners on the most effective use of existing technology use, as well as practical suggestions for its appropriate development in their business (full details of Tech Check are available on the website www.kceb.ie).

Provide financial support to enterprises with potential to grow

Where a business with growth potential requires funding to enable that growth to take place, the County Enterprise Board will consider suitable financial intervention to companies in the manufacturing and internationally traded sectors. Financial assistance will be considered as part of a broader 'package' of support.

Enhance Existing Enterprise:

Targets

- Undertake at least 40 structured assessments per annum of existing clients listed on the Annual Employment Survey Database.
- Deliver at least 100 business advisory sessions per annum to existing entrepreneurs.
- At least 420 owner-managers of existing businesses will participate in enterprise and capability development training (of which at least 50% will be women).
- At least 150 owner-managers of existing businesses will avail of mentoring support or mentor advisory clinics.
- Host an annual review workshop of clients who have previously benefited from financial support.
- Support at least 30 businesses each year to strengthen their management capability, enhance their innovation and increase their competitiveness. Of these:
 - at least 12 will receive financial support;
 - at least 10 will participate in management development programmes;
 - at least 12 will participate in strategic mentoring; and
 - at least 10 will have a woman among its owner managers.
- Target at least 4 client companies per annum to begin exporting.
- Target at least 4 existing exporters for assistance to further develop export markets.
- Target at least 3 client companies per annum for transfer to Enterprise Ireland.

These targets represent a new way of working for the executives of the County Enterprise Board and reflect the underlining theme of this plan with its focus on supporting development and growth. They are considered ambitious targets and will be reviewed at the end of 2009 and amended, if considered necessary.

Section 4: The Strategy



4.7 Harnessing the Potential of Partnerships

Objective: *To work with other agencies and organisations in a spirit of partnership for the good of enterprise and entrepreneurs in the county.*

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board has developed excellent working relations with all of the state and local development bodies operating in County Kilkenny. The County Enterprise Board will focus on developing even stronger strategic partnerships with a range of organisations and agencies in order to maximise the effective delivery of its strategy. These include in particular Enterprise Ireland, FAS, the Kilkenny Local Authorities, BNS LEADER, the neighbouring Institutes of Technology, NUI Maynooth, the Creativity Centre, the Crafts Council of Ireland, Kilkenny Chamber, South East Business Innovation Centre, South East Regional Authority and local secondary schools.

The national network of County and City Enterprise Boards is currently in the process of drafting national agreements with the other main enterprise development agencies, in particular Enterprise Ireland and LEADER. These will form the basis for local and/or regional partnerships and co-operation.

The County Enterprise Board will also build relationships with larger Irish and multinational enterprises from the private sector and seek innovative ways in which these can be of assistance to smaller local businesses.

The County Enterprise Board will hold exchange of information briefing sessions with the financial institutions and other advisers to ensure that each is fully aware of the supports available for small and start-up businesses and to explore means of best working together for the benefit of new and established businesses in the county.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is part of a network of 35 County and City Enterprise Boards, and will continue to play an active part in this network so as to identify initiatives taken by other Boards that would be suitable for adoption in County Kilkenny. The Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will also participate in national initiatives organised by the network, such as the National Women's Enterprise Day, the Student Enterprise Awards and the National Enterprise Awards.

The County Enterprise Board will also work (in conjunction with the South East Regional Authority and others) to identify and lever appropriate sources of EU funding for the benefit of enterprise and local economic development.

4.8 Delivering Excellent Service

Objective: *To provide an excellent level of service to all who come into contact with the County Enterprise Board.*

The Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will at all times strive to give clients an efficient, professional and quality service in a prompt fashion. Staff will ensure that clients are fully informed of all services available from the Board, and will facilitate access to these services. Clients can expect in all their dealings with the County Enterprise Board, that they will be treated in a courteous, confidential and helpful manner.

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board and its executive team endeavours at all times to provide an excellent level of service to all with whom they come into contact. The Board is an ISO accredited organisation, and the audit system is customer focused. The Board also has in place a client charter to which it will continue to adhere.

Those contacting the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will find all their dealings with the Board characterised by courtesy and helpfulness. All queries will be dealt with in a speedy and efficient manner, and full and accurate information will be supplied in simple language in relation to any query that may be raised.

All information, both personal and business, will be dealt with in total confidence. The emphasis will be placed upon what the Board can do for its clients.

The emphasis in the promotion of the Board's supports will be less on the provision of finance (which is only available to enterprises within eligible sectors), but rather more on the provision of information, advice, enterprise and management development supports which can be made available to all small businesses.

Section 4: The Strategy

In all circumstances, where a person is being referred to another agency or organisation, the person will be directed to the correct organisation and, where possible, will be given a contact name as well as a telephone number. In this way, signposting will be both accurate and helpful. Similarly, other organisations with which the County Enterprise Board has dealings will be encouraged to adopt this approach so that a more seamless service is made available.

The executives of the County Enterprise Board will constantly seek to improve the quality of the information given to those thinking of starting or further developing a business in the county.

The existing website (www.kceb.ie) will be reviewed against the criteria of client friendliness and usefulness. Ease of navigation around the site will be checked and amendments will be made as necessary. The content of the site will be further improved to better meet the information needs of new and developing businesses.

Certain documentation must be submitted to the County Enterprise Board by those who are seeking its assistance, particularly those seeking financial support. Every effort will be taken, however, to minimize these requirements, to make the application process as easy as possible, and to fully inform clients as to what is required and the manner in which the information should be presented. To this end, simple guides will continue to be made available to those applying to the County Enterprise Board for financial assistance.

The Board executives will be mindful of the need to ensure that real and quantifiable benefits flow to entrepreneurs and their companies as a result of their interaction with the County Enterprise Board.

A partnership approach will be taken with key external suppliers of services such as trainers and business mentors, to ensure that the ethos and customer service approach of the County Enterprise Board is fully reflected in all outsourced services.

Section 5: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

5.1 Provision of the Necessary Structure and Resources

To successfully implement the strategy, the County Enterprise Board must continually develop and reposition to effectively meet the needs of its clients. Indeed, this mirrors the change that small businesses must undergo in order to survive in an increasingly competitive environment.

The County Enterprise Board has a dedicated staff fully committed to delivering the strategy. It is intended to review the current role and responsibilities of the staff within the context of the objectives set out in the strategy. In particular, there will be a redistribution of functions between staff involved in delivering actions and supports aimed at 'start-ups' and those aimed at 'enhancing existing enterprises'. This shift in roles will begin in the final quarter of 2008 and the transition will be fully in place by the end of the first quarter 2009.

This new approach will enable the Board to offer a more streamlined service to clients and to be more responsive to their needs.

- **The Chief Executive** will have primary responsibility for the successful implementation of all aspects of the strategic plan. In particular, the Chief Executive will be responsible for harnessing the potential of partnerships (Objective 4) with other agencies; ensuring that the Board delivers an excellent service (Objective 5); developing measures to raise the profile of the Board; monitoring client satisfaction with the supports offered by the Board; and identifying and nurturing clients for transfer to Enterprise Ireland. The Chief Executive, will each year prepare an Operational Plan to deliver the strategic objectives for Board approval; present Progress Reports upon implementation of this plan; and make recommendations to the Board on adjustments that may need to be made to the plan to reflect demand, availability of scarce resources, value for money, and also the relevance and effectiveness of actions. There will therefore be in-built flexibility to adapt the strategy as appropriate. The Chief Executive will design and develop an effective Client Relationship Management (CRM) system tailored to meet the needs of clients.

Section 5: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

- **The Business Analyst** will have primary responsibility for the delivery of the County Enterprise Board's supports to businesses that are more than two years in existence, with particular focus on enhancing their management capability, improving their competitiveness and strengthening their innovative capacity (Objective 3). The Business Analyst will encourage owner managers to embrace a growth agenda and those businesses that have an aspiration for growth will be supported to achieve their full potential. The Business Analyst will initiate the design of an effective 'diagnostics tool' appropriate to measuring and benchmarking the performance of client companies. The Business Analyst will also identify and target businesses that wish to increase their sales through exports.
- **The Enterprise Supports Officer** will primarily concentrate on developing a culture of entrepreneurship in the county, raising awareness of entrepreneurship as a possible career option not only for those still in education but also for those already in employment or thinking of returning to the labour force (Objective 1); and supporting those wishing to establish new businesses in the county, particularly those with an aspiration for growth (Objective 2).
- **The Project Executive** will be primarily responsible for initiating local economic development projects, in particular pilot initiatives (e.g. development of community enterprise initiatives; facilitating the establishment of small business networks in the towns outside of Kilkenny City; and co-ordinating the delivery of EU funded enterprise projects with which the Board may be involved).
- **The Office Manager** will continue as the Board's first point of contact, and will assist the Chief Executive in efforts to raise the profile of the Board. The Office Manager will also assist the Chief Executive in the design of an effective CRM System for the Board. The Office Manager will provide administrative support and back-up to the other members of the executive team, and will also be primarily responsible for updating, maintaining and assisting with the introduction of improvements to the Performance Management System (PMS).

Teamwork is a core principle of the executives of the County Enterprise Board and colleagues work to support each other as the need arises. Accordingly, while the restructuring reflects certain

divisions of responsibility for the efficient delivery of the strategy, the executives are committed to working in a flexible manner as required.

The executives in carrying out their responsibilities will do so in a manner that delivers an excellent service to its clients and that puts the needs and aspirations of clients at the centre of their focus.

The Board from time to time may contract staff on a fixed term or project basis to assist in the delivery of the strategic objectives. It is not envisaged however, that the Board will increase its full-time staff complement during the course of this strategic plan.

It is intended to continue to contract professional expertise in the delivery of training, mentoring and management development services. Enhanced evaluation systems, which have been recently introduced, will facilitate the analysis of the learning taking place through these interventions, the degree of transfer of the skills/knowledge into the business and impact on the business against stated objectives at the outset.

The range and extent of activities, services provided and the degree of financial interventions proposed within the strategy are limited by the resources to be made available to the Board. In particular, the successful implementation of the strategy is dependent upon receipt of adequate financial resources. The strategy is predicated on the assumption that there will be no diminution (in real terms after allowing for inflationary pressures) of the average total annual budget allocation received by the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board for the period 2005 - 2007 from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (i.e. circa €1 Million per annum). If more resources were made available, increased levels of activity would be possible.

5.2 Evaluation/Feedback Mechanisms

The executive will report to the Board on achievement towards targets by the end of the second quarter (mid-year review) and again in the final quarter (annual review) each year of the operation of the strategy.

The nature of the targets proposed in this strategic plan is new to Kilkenny County Enterprise

Section 5: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Board and it is difficult to assess their appropriateness at this point. They are intended to be client focused, action oriented, achievable, but stretch goals that will motivate and direct the focus of the executives. Accordingly, the targets set out in the plan will be reviewed at the end of 2009 to assess their suitability.

It is intended that improved evaluation mechanisms will be introduced to monitor the impact of all the County Enterprise Board's interventions and to assess their benefit to all clients and their businesses.

Each of the strategic actions set out in the plan, when run over the course of a year, will be reviewed against the objectives set and its continuance or otherwise will be decided upon in light of its progress towards the achievement of that objective, and upon the feedback received from clients with regard to their perception of its value. It is acknowledged that all actions may not be equally successful.

In circumstances in which initiatives proposed in this plan are not proving effective they will be discontinued.

The follow-up by County Enterprise Board staff with clients who have participated in business advisory sessions, training, mentoring or have received financial support will be improved. For example, County Enterprise Board executives will follow-up with all those who complete Start Your Own Business programme training within six months to ascertain their current status, and whether they require further assistance to develop their proposal.

5.3 An Appropriate Client Report Management System

The Performance Monitoring System (PMS) is the required means by which the activities of the County Enterprise Board are reported to the Department through the Central Coordination Unit (CCU). This system does not provide, however, a management information system for the executives of the County Enterprise Board that is appropriate to the needs of their clients. In this regard it is currently being reviewed by the CCU.



The County Enterprise Board will develop a simple but effective Client Relationship Management (CRM) system that fully captures client information from first contact and allows the County Enterprise Board to tailor its assistance appropriately to the needs of its individual clients.

5.4 An Organisation Dedicated to Continuous Improvement

Just as it encourages its clients in this regard, the Kilkenny County Enterprise Board will itself be dedicated to continuous improvement through learning and development.

The Board will also seek to continue the maintenance of its ISO accreditation.

By developing feedback and evaluation mechanisms, the County Enterprise Board will learn from the relative success of its various activities. By listening closely to its clients, it will learn how to be more responsive to their needs in a way that adds real value to their activities.

The County Enterprise Board will also actively seek to learn from its partner organisations within the county, and from other County Enterprise Boards with regard to what initiatives have proven to be successful for them in fostering entrepreneurship and in supporting the development and growth of micro enterprises.

The County Enterprise Board will look to Enterprise Ireland for assistance in developing the sectoral knowledge of its executives and in adding to their knowledge of the most appropriate manner by which to increase the potential of its client companies.

In short, the County Enterprise Board and its executives will be open to learning from any source - local, national, European and international - that it believes can assist the organisation's ability to achieve its strategic objectives in an effective and efficient manner.

5.5 Providing a Supportive Environment within the County

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board is fully committed to playing a full role in creating a supportive environment for enterprise creation and development within the county. The County Enterprise

Section 5: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Board recognises, however, that a broad number of other stakeholders have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the necessary environment exists, which is conducive to enterprise development.

The County Enterprise Board through its representation on the County Development Board, and through all other means at its disposal, will continue to highlight the key issues arising and needs of enterprise development within the county so that a more supportive environment can be provided.

The executives of the County Enterprise Board will continue to work in a spirit of partnership with neighbouring County Enterprise Boards and with other public and private agencies and organisations and that are committed to the development of County Kilkenny and the enterprises in its midst.



Appendix 1

Kilkenny County Enterprise Board Organisational Structure (as at 31st July, 2008)

Board Members:

- Joe Crockett (Chairman – Kilkenny City and County Manager)
- Cllr Matt Doran (Local Authority Nominee)
- Cllr Malcolm Noonan (Local Authority Nominee)
- Cllr Martin Brett (Local Authority Nominee)
- Cllr Tom Maher (Local Authority Nominee)
- Phil Funchion (Irish Congress of Trade Unions)
- Alison McGrath (Kilkenny Chamber Rep)
- Yvonne Moriarty (Noreside Resources Nominee)
- Declan Rice (BNS LEADER Nominee)
- Declan Murphy (Failte Ireland Nominee)
- Des Shanley (FAS Nominee)
- Martin Doyle (Enterprise Ireland Rep)
- Christy Hayes (IBEC Nominee)
- James Hennessy (Farming Rep)

Evaluation Committee Members:

- Aidan McGrath (Enterprise Ireland Executive)
- Phillip O'Neill (Director of Services, Kilkenny County Council)
- John Dempsey (Head of Finance, Kilkenny County Council)
- Eilis Gough (Business Person)
- Gabrielle Carroll (BNS LEADER Executive)
- Claire Lawton (St Canice's Credit Union, Kilkenny)
- Christy Earley (Bank Manager)

Executive Staff

- Chief Executive (Sean McKeown)
- Business Analyst (Fiona Deegan)
- Enterprise Supports Officer (Des Doyle)
- Project Executive (Catherine Crosse)
- Office Manager (Ailish Scott)



Kilkenny County
Enterprise Board

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