



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

MIDLANDS



An initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

**Regional Enterprise Plan
to 2020**

MIDLANDS

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Minister's Foreword

Realising the enterprise and jobs potential in all of the regions and thereby reducing disparities between regions continues to be a priority of this Government. We remain committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 percent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

In the Midlands, the 2015-2017 Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) set out 125 actions to support job creation and accelerated economic recovery. At the end of that period, more than 108 actions were completed or substantially progressed, and more than 19,100 jobs have been created in the region. With an unemployment rate currently at 7.1 percent much has been achieved, yet more needs to be done to reduce the gap relative to the State average.

This *Regional Enterprise Plan* (REP) for the Midlands aims to build on the strong progress achieved under the RAPJ initiative towards our 2020 ambition. Under the refreshed approach, I have placed a renewed emphasis on collaboration and delivery of measurable actions. I have also stressed additionality and have asked the Regional Committees to bring forward and elevate ideas that, through collaborative working, complement and add value to the core work of the enterprise agencies and other bodies. The Plan is therefore deliberately selective and 'bottom-up' in terms of its strategic objectives and not intended to be a comprehensive regional enterprise strategy in its own right.

I have been very pleased to note that in preparing this REP, the Midlands Regional Implementation Committee (along with the other eight Regional Committees nationally) has engaged in a regionally co-ordinated manner on important considerations to do with strengthening productivity, driving job creation, and supporting enterprise resilience in their region. These include: diversifying the regional economy, building on place-specific strengths, regional brand development, business clustering and ecosystem strengthening initiatives to support new business creation and investment.

I look forward to seeing a further strengthening of the collaborative mindset that has grown in the Midlands and in each region, bringing together Local Authorities, the enterprise agencies, higher and further education institutions, Local Enterprise Offices, the business community, and others, to work towards a better future for their region.

As we look towards 2020, it is clear that the context for enterprise development in Ireland has changed. Unemployment levels in all regions are now at more stable levels, but we have some new challenges; the forthcoming departure of the UK from the European Union will have far reaching impacts as yet not fully known; while our competitiveness is challenged by a tightening labour market and unrealised productivity potential, especially in our Irish-owned SMEs.

My Department's *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* has oriented our enterprise policy towards building resilience in our enterprise base so that our

businesses and our economy more generally can withstand new challenges and realise sustained growth and employment creation for the longer-term. Together with the Department of the Taoiseach, we are defining a whole of Government *Future Jobs Ireland* agenda that will give effect to that policy focus, with key actions to drive productivity growth and innovation, build enterprise resilience, increase participation in the labour force, and enable businesses to transition to a low carbon economy context. In addition, through *Project Ireland 2040* we will make sustained investments in place-making so that Ireland remains an attractive place to live, work and invest over the longer term.

Every region has a part to play in realising sustained enterprise and economic performance; and no region should lag behind their potential. This refreshed Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, one of nine regional plans, sees the RAPJs evolve to a more strategic, focused approach, in line with and complementing these policy developments at the national level. Through the established mechanism of the Regional Steering Committee, these Plans will be maintained as “live” agendas so that new ideas and collaborative initiatives can be propagated and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

Under my Department’s €60 million competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) the Midlands has already secured more than €3.4 million across four projects that will enhance the region’s potential for enterprise growth and job creation. Guided by this new Regional Enterprise Plan, the region is well positioned to compete for further competitive calls, including the REDF, on a rolling basis, as part of the further roll-out of *Project Ireland 2040*.

I want to commend the work of the Implementation Committee under the previous chairmanship of Mr Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive, Westmeath County Council, for their work on the roll out of the first RAPJ for the Midland Region. I welcome the new focus and energy embodied in this refreshed Plan for the region and recognise the extensive collective reflection and effort that has gone in

to its production, and I wish the region well in delivering it under the chairmanship of Dr Anne Cusack, Managing Director of Critical Healthcare.

My Department will continue to work closely with you as you implement the agenda set out and seek to realise the potential that you have recognised. I look forward to engaging with you over the coming months and supporting you in your endeavours.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Humphreys".

Heather Humphreys TD

*Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation
February 2019*

Chair's Introduction

As Chair of the Midlands Regional Steering Committee, it gives me great pleasure to mark the publication of the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the Midlands. This Plan reflects the strong collaborative ethos within the Midlands region, with agencies and business interests working together for the greater economic benefit of the entire community.

The Midlands RAPJ, under the Chair of Mr Pat Gallagher, recorded growth in jobs of 19,100 over 2015-2018 period. This is a significant achievement for the region, and indeed for the Implementation Committee, but we now find ourselves in a changed economic landscape, where we must build resilience for our region. In the current international climate, it is imperative that new businesses and new business models continue to grow in numbers and quality in Ireland so that new jobs are created. We must prepare for Brexit and seize the opportunities presented by Bord na Móna's announcement to accelerate its decarbonisation plans as it extends its core business sectors within the Midlands region. The recently established Bord na Móna Regional Transition Team will strive to alleviate the concerns of affected communities and seek to develop the skills needed to serve emerging sectoral employment opportunities in the region, whilst providing supports in terms of skills development, engagement with other employers in the region and indeed support the Government's entrepreneurship policy and SME development.

This Regional Enterprise Plan is based on seven strategic objectives, which will build on the strengths of the region. The objectives will be achieved through a suite of defined actions, assigned to a lead body and/or partnership of

agencies and businesses operating in the region. Through the development and implementation of these actions, the region will seek to deliver on its assigned targets, to bring the unemployment rate within one percent of the State average and increase labour force participation rates within the region.

The Government, through Project Ireland 2040, has a number of competitive funds to which the regional agencies and businesses will develop and submit collaborative proposals to deliver the defined actions and targets assigned.

I wish to thank and acknowledge the significant contribution of my colleagues in the Steering Committee to the development of the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the Midlands and to thank them for their commitment to the region.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Business, Regional Enterprise and Innovation for their commitment to the Midlands and Enterprise Plan initiative.



Dr Anne Cusack
Managing Director, Critical Healthcare

*Chair
Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*

1 Policy Context

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) is one of nine such Plans that have emerged from a process to refresh and refocus the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) initiative which originally focused on the 2015-2017/8 period. The purpose of the refresh and refocus was to further build on the positive regional collaboration fostered by the RAPJs over the period to 2020, taking account of the changed and improved economic circumstances nationally, the emergence of new challenges to enterprise development and competitiveness both domestically and internationally in origin, including Brexit, and the persistence of uneven economic progress across the regions in Ireland - as of Q3 2018 there were three regions with rates of unemployment more than one percent above the State average of six percent, including the Midlands Region (at 7.1 percent¹).

The REPs provide perspective and ideas from the 'ground-up'. They are informed by an understanding of unique local strengths and assets and have the potential to enable more effective translation of national policy into regional and local impact². They focus on leveraging the added value from regional and local actors working collaboratively, and in so doing, they aim to complement and build on the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, the LEOs and the wider range of State Bodies directly involved in supporting enterprise development in the regions (see Chapter 3 on Enterprise Agency and LEO activities and Appendix 4). As a result, the Plans are focused on a suite of selected priority objectives requiring a collaborative regional effort and are not meant to be comprehensive economic development

strategies on their own. The Regional Steering Committees will oversee these Plans as "live" agendas. Through them new ideas and collaborative initiatives can be propagated and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

The REPs are an integral part of the broader policy system aimed at driving economic growth and sustaining better standards of living throughout Ireland. As a 'bottom-up' initiative, the Plans complement national level policies and programmes emanating from the 'top-down' (see Figure 1) and in particular, there is strong alignment with Ireland's national enterprise policy, *Enterprise 2025 Renewed*.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed aims to embed resilience in our enterprises, contributing to strong economic performance over the longer term, through a number of key policy priorities. These include:

- An increased emphasis on developing our Irish owned enterprises – enhancing productivity and delivering quality jobs – and helping companies to navigate Brexit;
- exploiting the potential offered by collaboration and clustering within our distinctive foreign and Irish owned enterprise mix;
- placing a spotlight on innovation (including disruptive technologies) and talent development, so that more enterprises are developing new products, services and solutions, and are more competitive internationally;

1 Midlands 7.1% | Mid-West 7.2% | South-East 8.6%

2 Appendix 2 contains a brief regional profile and statistical snapshot of the Midlands

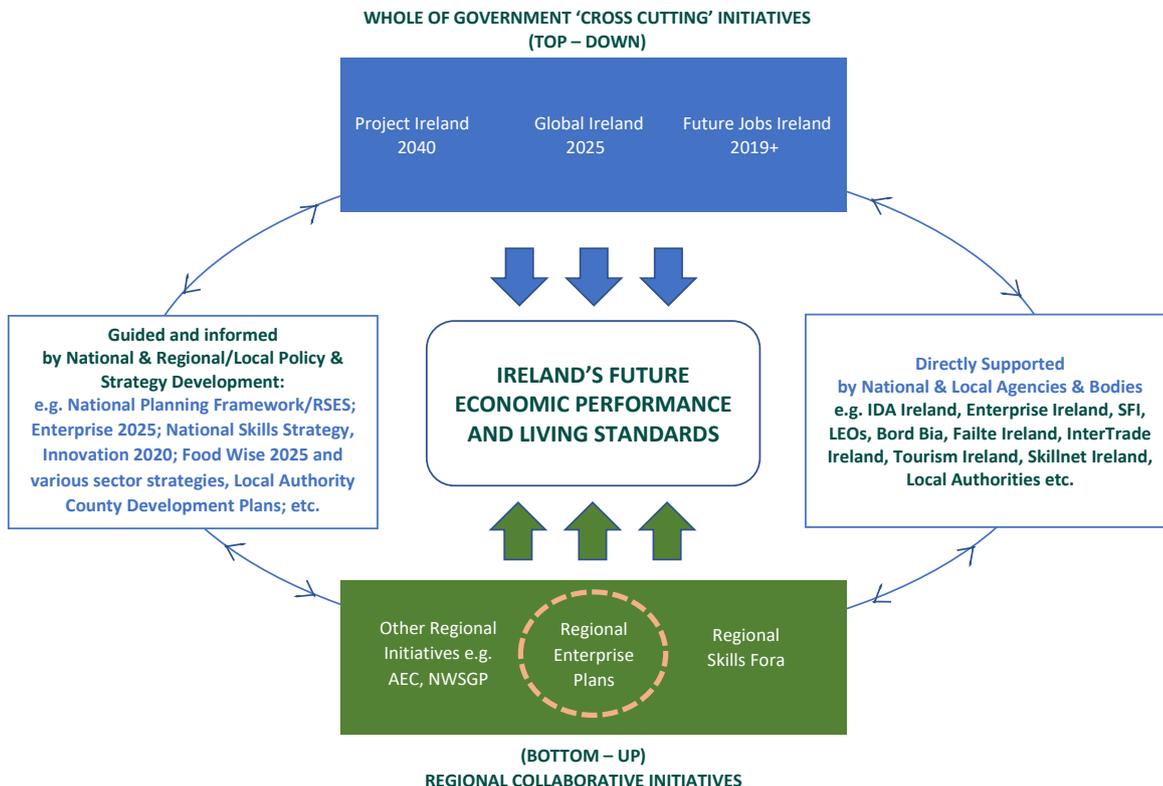
- realising the full potential of our regions
 - developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work; and
- raising Ireland’s visibility internationally, protecting Ireland’s reputation, and providing opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global Footprint 2025 initiative.

At the national level, the recently launched Future Jobs Ireland 2019 initiative will, as part of a multiannual framework, give effect to national enterprise policy objectives and leverage a ‘whole of Government’ approach so that all policy levers at the national level, relevant to job creation and labour force participation, talent development, enterprise growth, innovation and competitiveness, and transition to a low carbon economy, are engaged on an agenda that will prepare for Ireland’s future enterprise and economic needs. The coming together of public and private sector stakeholders to set regional strategic objectives for enterprise

development under these refreshed Regional Enterprise Plans will have an important role to play in the realisation of *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* and the ongoing *Future Jobs Ireland* agenda.

The REPs also have a strong role to play in the context of *Project Ireland 2040*, and more specifically in the implementation of the National Planning Framework and its constituent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) at NUTS 2 (Regional Assembly) level. The refresh of the Regional Action Plans has informed and will continue to inform the implementation of these future planning strategies for Ireland (see Appendix 5 on Project Ireland 2040 for further details). The RSESs will be key to addressing longer term strategic planning and infrastructural requirements that will be needed to unlock the potential in all regions recognised in the REPs. The diversification of rural economies is an important objective of Project Ireland 2040, and this objective can also be supported through the Regional Enterprise Plans.

Figure 1





2 Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Leverage opportunities in Big Data & Data Analytics from iLOFAR



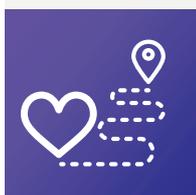
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Position and support the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work, and invest in



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7:

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy

CONTEXT

The Midlands has a proud history of energy production and transmission going back decades. Bord na Móna has harvested the peatlands of the region since the 1930's and has provided significant levels of employment as well as being at the core of many Midlands communities. In total, Bord na Móna provides approximately 2,000 direct jobs and supports an additional 2,000 indirect jobs.

Under its “Brown to Green” strategy, Bord na Móna aims to accelerate the development of renewable energy assets to support national climate and energy policy targets as well as accelerating investment in higher-value recycling and resource recovery business. This will align the company with national and EU de-carbonisation policies. Bord na Móna is also assessing the potential for new business developments such as land-based aquaculture, energy parks and the production of high value herb products on its cutaway lands.

The challenges arising from such transitions will inevitably involve redundancies in the Midlands. The Government has committed that all relevant State supports will be available to the employees impacted by Bord na Móna's announcement. The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan is calibrated to support and add-value to the work of the Regional Transition Team that has been established in relation to the redeployment and retraining of staff as well as the transition to renewable energy.

Notwithstanding the challenges of a transition away from traditional peat businesses, there are considerable opportunities at hand in the process of becoming a leading supplier of renewable and sustainable products and services. The Climate Action Fund is one of four funds established under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040. The fund will support initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has responsibility for implementing the fund, which will have an allocation of at least €500 million over the period to 2027.

Ireland's response to climate change – as articulated in the National Mitigation Plan (July 2017) – is a crucial step in enabling transition in what will be a long journey with many different and complex elements to consider along the way. The National Mitigation Plan details the changes that decarbonisation will bring – in particular through better regulation and energy efficiency. The Midlands is ambitious in committing to playing its part by developing a “Low-Carbon Town” Model for use throughout the region.

VISION TO 2020

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan will lead by example by fostering collaboration to help to take on the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change and the transition to a low carbon economy, with the Midlands Region recognised for its innovation and diversity in renewables, and a network of low carbon towns.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Support the actions of the Regional Transition Team to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the acceleration of decarbonisation by Bord na Móna, including the submission of funding applications to Project Ireland 2040 funding schemes.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Actions agreed and roadmap developed Q2 2019
- Identification of projects / training programmes for funding proposals
- Funding proposals submitted to appropriate funds streams 2019-2020

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Midlands Local Authorities, ETBs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional LEOs, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, AIT, Dept of Social Protection, Chambers of Commerce, Partnership Companies

Action 2:

Support the development and designation of Portlaoise as a “Low Carbon Town”. The pilot project of Portlaoise as a low carbon town will be managed by Laois County Council, which was successful in securing funding under the first call of the Urban Regeneration Development Fund. This pilot project will serve as a roadmap for the development and rollout of similar low carbon initiatives in county towns of Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

Portlaoise recognised as a low carbon town through the implementation of a suite of initiatives/range of technologies deployed that serve as demonstrators for other towns.
Other towns in the region implementing a suite of low carbon initiatives having secured funding supports.

Responsibility: Laois County Council, in partnership with SEAI, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), Downtown Portlaoise, ESB Networks, Midland Energy Agency and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. Further roll-out initiated by Longford, Westmeath and Offaly Local Authorities

Action 3:

Develop and implement County Climate Change Adaptation Strategies including the identification of regional actions and economic opportunities.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019 - 2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy Published by the Local Authorities in the Region
- Host an idea generation ‘boot camp’ to explore and develop new initiatives arising from the transition to a low-carbon economy in the Region as an initial step
- Number of funding applications submitted to Project Ireland 2040 funding schemes.

Responsibility: Midlands Sub Regional Adaptation Steering Group, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, Local Authority Climate Adaptation Teams, Midland Energy Agency, SEAI, and Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)

Action 4:

Complete a feasibility study into the development of an energy park at a Bord na Móna cutaway peatland site.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured:

Completion of the study and development of actions to be taken.

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Local Authorities

Action 5:

Complete a feasibility study into the potential for aquaculture on Bord na Móna cutaway Peatlands.

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2020

How will delivery be measured:

Technical and market assessment plus financial viability study completed and development of actions to be taken.

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, BIM, Bord Bia

Action 6:

Complete a study into the potential to produce herb products on Bord na Móna cutaway Peatlands.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

Measures: Completion of the Study and development of actions to be taken.

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, Enterprise Ireland

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR

CONTEXT

In a rapidly changing international economic and technological environment, remaining at the cutting edge of these changes is crucial to maintain Ireland's growth and international competitiveness. The speed of adoption of technological advances is seeing the emergence of new global business models, products, markets, sectors and activities as well as disrupting ways of working and impacting on skills needs. All of these are being driven by big data and data analytics.

The Government's recent statement on The Role of Data Centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy highlights the requirement for a plan led approach to promote regional options for data centre investment. The Midlands is well placed to be a lead region in this sector given its history of energy production, grid infrastructure and the availability of large areas of land such as cutaway peatlands.

Birr Castle in the Midlands is home to I-LOFAR, the Irish addition to an international network of state-of-the-art telescopes used to observe the universe in unprecedented detail at low radio frequencies. It allows Irish astrophysical research to be integrated into one of the most sophisticated telescopes on the planet. This facility allows Irish researchers and students access to a facility involved in some of the most ground-breaking and advanced research projects in modern astronomy, including projects in big-bang cosmology, deep extragalactic surveys, cosmic magnetism, cosmic rays, solar physics and space weather. Its location in the Midlands draws on the rich astronomical heritage of Birr Castle Gardens & Science Centre, going back to 1845.

Big data and data analytics provide immense potential for research, development, education and innovation in Science, Technology, Research, Arts and Maths (STREAM). Having secured funding under the second round of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, it is intended to establish a STREAM Creative Suite in Birr to capitalise on the opportunities iLOFAR presents to provide a central location and space, where academics and researchers affiliated with the international LOFAR network can work collaboratively with software developers and data analysts from companies operating in the Midlands Region. These companies will have the opportunity to use the STREAM Creative Suite – either through regular hot desk usage or through the establishment of a base there. The STREAM Creative Suite will facilitate the development of networks and collaboration between Irish and international scientists at the cutting edge of Data Analytical research and is highly innovative. It will foster best practice learning, cross-sectoral collaboration, including film & image processing, and will enable companies in the Midlands compete at an international level.

VISION TO 2020

Through the harnessing of big data and data analytics opportunities afforded by the presence of iLOFAR in Birr, STREAM Creative Suite and Birr will be recognised globally as a best practice model to develop innovation and advances in the STREAM fields.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Establish STREAM Creative Suite in Birr

Services will include: hot desk facilities and office space, IT training facilities and training, industry focused events, and industry-led research projects (undergraduate and post-graduate). Connecting STREAM Creative Suite with Athlone Institute of Technology, Irish Manufacturing Research Centre (IMR) in Mullingar and co-working facilities throughout the region will create a new and dynamic hub for research and economic development in the Midlands. It will harness cutting edge research, advanced manufacturing, industry led training initiatives, enterprising start-ups and investment throughout the Midland Region.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2019 – Q4 2020 (and ongoing)

How will delivery be measured:

- STREAM Creative Suite will be occupant ready by the end of Q4 2019.
- Launch event for STREAM Creative Suite
- Number of people trained
- Collaborative projects developed
- Number of national and international events held

Responsibility: Offaly Design & Innovation CLG, Offaly Local Authority, LEO Offaly, iLOFAR Consortium, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Skillnet Ireland

Action 2:

Networking with Regional / National Bodies

Connect the Birr Creative Suite with AIT, IMR Mullingar and regional Business Innovation Hubs to create a formal network of linked e-Hubs to leverage economies of scale in research, advanced manufacturing, collaboration, training and funding applications.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured: Formal network of linked e-Hubs established.

Responsibility: Offaly Design & Innovation CLG Network of Innovation Hubs, Midlands Local Authorities, Midlands LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, IMR, AIT.

Action 3:

Identify sites that are suitable for data centre development and complete a feasibility study and planning designations

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

Measures: Completion of study and identification of follow-up actions.

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, working with REP Steering Committee

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Position and support the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence

CONTEXT

Manufacturing plays a crucial role in the Irish economy. Manufacturing is a driver of innovation and technological advance, provides employment across a broad range of skills levels, and generates additional indirect jobs throughout the economy.

The manufacturing sector is a key employer in the Midlands, only surpassed by the wholesale/retail and health/social work sectors. The vast majority of agency supported employment in the region is in the manufacturing sector with over a third of these employed in the food processing sector. Irish owned manufacturing companies based in the region span a range of sectors including food, engineering, plastics, life sciences, cleantech, electronic, and paper, print and packaging.

Building on the region's demonstrated capabilities in manufacturing processes and technologies as demonstrated by the expertise of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) in this area, along with the Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) facility, there is an opportunity to position the Midlands as a centre of excellence for the development and adoption of advanced manufacturing processes and technologies in Ireland.

AIT plays a central role in the Midlands' economic development through its education, research, innovation and enterprise programmes. Meeting the skills needs and increasing the innovative capacity of companies and entrepreneurs in the region – including in the manufacturing sector - will be key to driving enterprise development, competitive advantage and jobs growth in the period 2018-2020.

AIT delivers a range of academic/training programmes in advanced manufacturing while its research and development strengths include its Enterprise Ireland funded APT Applied Polymer and COMAND Connected Media Technology Gateways and its partnerships in the SFI funded CONFIRM Smart Manufacturing, AMBER Advanced Materials, SSPC Pharmaceutical and CÚRAM Medical Device Centres.

In addition, manufacturing in the Midlands was greatly boosted by the awarding of funding under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) in late 2017 to expand IMR in Mullingar and develop core competences in collaborative robotics and virtual reality. This enhances the region's position at the forefront of next generation manufacturing technologies which will drive industry innovation, competitiveness and enhance regional capability in Industry 4.0. The IMR Mullingar research centre provides an essential resource which will help increase manufacturing efficiency and productivity for many companies all over Ireland.

The Midlands can develop a region-wide, coordinated approach to advanced manufacturing, enabling deeper links with Institutes of Technology, Universities, IMR Mullingar, STREAM Creative Suite, LEOs and the research and business communities in supporting regional jobs growth.

Central to this will be the development of a new 'Midlands Technology Campus' on an AIT site – as a concerted infrastructural response towards building regional competitiveness and innovation capacity in the region. Through extensive collaboration between AIT, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the LEOs and the four Local Authorities, the feasibility of this multi-partner initiative will be explored and developed.

The Midlands Technology Campus will have the potential to support knowledge intensive enterprise and industry in the region – building skills and capabilities in companies, providing a dynamic industry-focused R&D environment, industry access to specialised equipment, conference facilities, and incubation facilities supporting early-stage FDI companies and second-stage indigenous companies.

VISION TO 2020

Develop a Midland region-wide, coordinated approach to manufacturing, enabling deeper links with Institutes of Technology, Universities, IMR Mullingar, STREAM Creative Suite, LEOs and the research and business communities in supporting regional jobs growth.

AIT, in partnership with the four Local Authorities, LEOs, enterprise agencies and other regional stakeholders will have explored feasibility and progressed plans for the development of the multi-partner Midlands Technology Campus.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Promote and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019.

How will delivery be measured: Plan developed, and implementation commenced, alignment with emerging governance models at the national level

Responsibility: Regional Steering Committee, working through relevant regional stakeholders, including AIT, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Authorities, LEOs, Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR), and in collaboration with industry.

Action 2:

Complete feasibility study and concept development for a Midlands Technology Campus at AIT

Timeframe for delivery: End of Q4 2019.

How will delivery be measured: Concept developed, feasibility completed and plans in progression.

Responsibility: AIT, working with regional stakeholders, including enterprise agencies, IMR, industry.

Action 3:

As part of the Skills for Growth and EXPLORE initiatives the Regional Skills Forum (RSF) will assist local manufacturing enterprises to identify and address their skills needs so as to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skills needs have been identified, the RSF will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019.

How will delivery be measured: Number of enterprises audited (see also Strategic Objective 7)

Responsibility: RSF, and partners including EI, IDA, ETB, IMR, Skillnet Ireland and DEASP

Action 4:

Build on the success of the Regional Engenuity Programme through further roll-out.

Timeframe for delivery: 2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Additional jobs created in programme companies
- Number of companies participating in the programme
- Numbers trained in Lean Efficiency Management, Quality & Operations
- Number of Technical Assistance for Micro Grants awarded

Responsibility: LEOs, Regional Skills Forum, Skillnet Ireland & ETBs

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work, and invest in

CONTEXT

The Midlands is unique in its central location in Ireland bordering five other regions, with excellent connectivity and natural amenities on its doorstep. There is a strong recognition that more must be done for the region to capitalise on its selling points to help encourage more businesses to set up in the Midlands and to promote the collective value proposition of the region as a place to live, work and invest in.

Quality of life continues to be a key driver in attracting investment to a region alongside access to talent, infrastructure, and education. The Midlands offers an attractive location to live and work which combines the best aspects of town and rural living with ease of access to the cities of Dublin and Galway. Under the National Planning Framework, Athlone has been identified as having a key regional driving role in the Midlands. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands region will set out a strategic development framework for the region, leading with the key role of Athlone.

The Midlands is viewed as an 'affordable' location in which to live and commute to employment in the Greater Dublin Area. The region will develop a 'reverse commute' proposition for 'Team Midlands' to 'pitch' to large employers within the Greater Dublin Area and Galway where companies deliberately locate back office services in the region or permit staff to avail of co-working / remote working space in the region on occasion. This policy could be concentrated on those Midland towns on the Rail Network or on the National Primary routes to allow for ease of access.

VISION TO 2020

The Midlands is recognised as a location of choice in which to live, work, invest, and visit. All agencies and businesses operating within the region utilise the MidlandsIreland.ie platform to promote the region and ensure continued success and impact of MidlandsIreland.ie. and 'Team Midlands' in securing additional investment and economic activity within the region.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Develop, resource and deliver a digital marketing strategy for the region, building on the work already undertaken to develop MidlandsIreland.ie

This will encompass website, social media and audio-visual material for use domestically and internationally highlighting the attractiveness of the Midlands as a place to live, work, study and invest.

Timeframe for delivery: Q1 2020

Strategy and action led marketing campaign in place by Q1 2020. The delivery of this action is subject to securing the necessary financial and human resources. To help achieve this all key regional stakeholders will be asked to commit to this vehicle as a shared regional marketing approach.

How will delivery be measured:

- All stakeholders agree on a memorandum of understanding to facilitate the successful development and implementation of this action
- Publication of Marketing Strategy
- Promotional and marketing material of Local Authorities and State Agencies aligned to ensure consistency of message.
- Roll out of marketing campaigns
- Analytics from social media channels
- Additional investment in the region
- Companies reporting positive feedback on attracting and retaining staff in the region
- Proactive engagement with industry series of events and testimonials used to promote the region

Responsibility: Local Authorities, State Agencies, local industry and other regional partners.

Action 2:**Regional Network of Remote Working Hubs**

Establish and market a network of 'remote working' hubs and enterprise landing space in the region that will form the basis of a value proposition to be developed and presented to companies in Dublin, Galway and elsewhere interested in second sites/remote working sites in the Midlands Region. Advance the formation of proposals for the development of new hubs as appropriate.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Audit existing remote working and co-working spaces, incubation facilities and enterprise centres in the region.
- Collaborative projects developed and funding applications submitted under Project Ireland 2040 funding stream calls.

Responsibility: Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, AIT

Action 3:

Development of County and Regional data sets to support value proposition for the Region

Timeframe for delivery: 2019

How will delivery be measured: Relevant datasets identified, hosted and managed centrally, as agreed by the Steering Committee

Responsibility: Secretariat for Regional Enterprise Plan, Midland Local Authorities, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, AIT, ETBs

Action 4:

Identify, scope, develop and promote available greenfield and brownfield sites as potential enterprise landing spaces.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Delivery of approved projects under the first calls of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
- Identification of projects for future calls under Project Ireland 2040 funding streams

Responsibility: Local Authorities, LCDCs, LEOs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Chambers of Commerce, Ibec

Action 5:

Identify the cultural assets and creative resources that can be used to help improve places that the region's citizens view as important to community living and daily experiences

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Delivery of public realm and cultural quarter projects across the region which were successful in the first calls of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and other schemes (eg Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme)
- Identification of future projects that may be eligible for calls under Project Ireland 2040 and other funding streams
- Number and value of successful projects allocated funding each year

Responsibility: Local Authorities, LEOs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Chambers of Commerce, Ibec

Action 6:**Team Midlands**

Strengthen collaboration and alignment around regional promotion by establishing 'Team Midlands', comprising regional stakeholders including Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and private sector representatives. Team Midlands will ensure that up to date information and relevant testimonies are readily available, better aligned and coordinated, and capable of being mobilised efficiently, such that a robust value proposition for the region is presented to companies considering investing in the region in support of the enterprise agencies.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019 - 2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Team Midlands in place
- Activities supported by relevant datasets, marketing materials, case studies.

Responsibility: Regional Steering Committee, working with LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, AIT, ETBs, Regional Skills Forum, Ibec and others.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit

CONTEXT

The Midlands Region has much to offer in tourism, from both a land based and water-based perspective, natural heritage, archaeology, architecture, festivals and food. In 2017, the Midlands attracted 218,000 overseas tourists and 422,000 from Ireland, spending a combined €156 million.

The Midlands Region straddles both the Ireland's Ancient East and the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brands, both of which provide strong and compelling propositions for visitors considering a holiday in the region. While the region has some popular visitor attractions and a number of significant assets with relatively untapped potential, such as the River Shannon and its lakes, the key challenges it faces over the coming years are to raise its profile as a visitor destination and to ensure the development of strong clusters of attractions and activities for the visitor to see and do, and to increase its share of visitor overnights.

Funding to develop tourism clusters will be sought, linking the attractions and activities that are in close proximity to each other in a coherently marketed and developed way. This will directly increase dwell time by providing enough for a visitor to do, enticing them to stay longer and spend more. The four Local Authorities will work in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland to develop and implement the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon which is currently being prepared. The region also needs to ensure that it creates strong, marketable content so that the Midlands is represented well in the wider Fáilte Ireland digital ecosystem.

Water based visitors can enjoy the River Shannon, the Grand and Royal Canals, the River Barrow and the numerous lakes throughout the region which offer opportunities for outdoor activities and pursuits including boating, angling, canoeing, cycling, horse-riding, walking and wildlife watching. The wetland areas of Lough Boora Discovery Park, Corlea Amenity Park, Abbeyleix Bog, and the Slieve Bloom Environmental Park present an innovative way for tourists to interact with the unique landscape of the peatlands.

The amount of lands in public ownership within the Midland Region presents a unique opportunity to develop visitor experiences along the waterways and cycle tracks through the development of the Shannon Wilderness Park, the development of Blueways and Greenways on the Royal, Grand Canals and the Barrow valley, linking to Derrycastle Lakes & Trails, the Shannon Pilgrim Way and the completion of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail, the Midlands Cycling destination project and the many walking trails.

The development and roll out of the National Cycle Network, including the phase from Athlone and Mullingar, which will link Dublin and Galway affords many opportunities to link with and develop complementary strategic corridors and routes to the South and North of the region. The benefits that trails can bring to the area in which they are situated is evidenced by the success of the Great Western Greenway, the Waterford Greenway and similar projects around the country. These benefits are not just confined to jobs created and sustained through the construction of the trails, but extend to the spend on food, drink and accommodation by those using the trails.

Blueways and Greenways provide a range of recreational leisure activities such as walking, cycling, canoeing, fishing and cruising all linked by the waterways and cycle tracks to local towns and villages. The development of the Blueway and Greenway networks will allow local businesses to capitalise on an increase in demand for transport, equipment hire, accommodation, and entertainment.

The Local Authorities of Longford, Offaly, Westmeath and Roscommon are working with Waterways Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Services, Fáilte Ireland and Bord na Móna to capitalise on the region's unique environmental assets, wetlands and habitats in respect of emerging blueways and greenways networks with the Shannon Corridor and Lough Ree and the islands at its core to establish a Shannon Wildness Corridor.

A project identified by the Steering Group overseeing the Shannon Wildness Corridor, is to develop a Pilgrim Way, guided by the River Shannon to explore the journeys undertaken by pilgrims seeking education and inspiration, with Clonmacnoise as a dominant feature.

In addition, there is a range of strong heritage and cultural attractions, some of which – like Clonmacnoise – are already performing well for day visits. These, when clustered with the range of activities that are currently on offer and can be developed over the course of this action plan, provide the solutions to the challenges faced by the region, such as increasing visitor overnights. Fáilte Ireland have already underway the development of the Tales of Two Worlds VEDP (Visitor Experience Development Plan) a key focus for local authorities, state agencies e.g. OPW and the tourism industry will be the implementation of this plan in 2019 and 2020. The plan, which has been created by public and private sector working together to unlock the potential of the area, focuses on delivering brilliant visitor experiences under the signature themes of the plan. Fáilte Ireland will continue to invest in the plan and coordinate the shared objectives to grow the value of tourism 28% by 2020.

The attractiveness of the Midlands as a place to visit and stay in has been greatly boosted by the opening of Center Parcs in Longford. Center Parcs has invested €233m in Longford Forest on a 400-acre site which will create approximately 750 jobs during the construction phase and is due to open during the summer of 2019. Once open, the resort expects to employ up to 1,000 people in permanent jobs. This investment is a demonstration of the great potential that exists in Midlands tourism.

The Midland Region Enterprise Plan will support the delivery of these tourism development opportunities by fostering a collaborative approach that brings together the various stakeholders to work together to advance their objectives.

VISION TO 2020

Based on the Government's People, Place and Policy 2025, the region will see increased visitor numbers, increase in jobs and revenue and the development of new and existing products to improve the visitor experience. Fáilte Ireland has established a Regional Tourism Co-ordination Steering Group for each of its regional experience brands (Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands) which have set a clear vision and strategy for the development of tourism in the region and will track progress towards the goals that have been set.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

The Regional Tourism and Heritage Officer Network will identify collaborative projects for development under Project Ireland 2040 funding streams, in support of the Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands propositions

Timeframe for delivery: 2019-2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Submission of proposals
- Securing funds to implement collaborative projects
- Fáilte Ireland will continue to offer a range of enterprise supports to ensure that tourism businesses maximize the potential of both Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Fáilte will have additional tourism business supports on offer in 2019-2020:
 - (a) Business Operational Excellence
 - (b) Sales Skills and Marketing Excellence
 - (c) Brexit Response Programme
 - (d) Fáilte Ireland Accredited Service Excellence

Responsibility: Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland and other State Agencies

Action 2:

Support Fáilte Ireland in the delivery of and implementation of visitor experience development plans (VEDP's) under Irelands Ancient East and Irelands Hidden Heartlands brands. The first plan, 'Tale of Two worlds' has been created by public and private sector working together. The plan focuses Delivery of the County Tourism Action Plans by the Local Authorities. Fáilte Ireland will work with local authorities on agreed county specific tourism projects for Ireland's Ancient East & Ireland's Hidden Heartlands

How will delivery be measured:

- Publication of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan
- Completion of County Tourism Actions Plans
- New product development
- Implementation of the actions identified in the Tale of Two Worlds VEDP.

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

Action 3:

Complete a study into the potential to develop Lough Boora Discovery Park into an Eco Tourism destination of national and international significance

Timeframe for delivery: December 2019

How will delivery be measured:

- Completion of Study and identification of actions

Responsibility: Bord na Móna, Offaly County Council

Action 4:

Development and roll out of the Slieve Bloom Brand

The brand will be used by the local business communities to promote the Slieve Bloom area for rural retreats, walks and mountain biking.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020.

How will delivery be measured: Local Authorities

Responsibility: Laois and Offaly Local Authorities, Local Partnership Companies, Coillte, Communities of the Slieve Bloom

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

6

Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands

CONTEXT

The Midlands Region identifies with a strong tradition in food production, reflected in its landscape, culture, customs and economy. This is acknowledged by the many producers from the region receiving awards from Blas na hÉireann, the Irish Foods Writers Guild, EuroToques Ireland and many more recognised for sustainably produced foods with Origin Green status from Bord Bia.

Over the last number of years Enterprise Ireland, Regional LEOs, Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Bord Bia have worked together on various initiatives to support the food artisan producers operating in the region.

Building on work previously undertaken, the region will develop a Regional Strategy for Food & Drink to support artisan micro and small food producers operating in the region, this includes the identification and challenges arising from Brexit, whilst also harnessing and aligning the local produce offering to the Fáilte Ireland tourism marketing propositions operating in the Midland Region.

VISION TO 2020

The Midlands that continues to be renowned for the quality and diversity of its local produce that can build on the collective strengths and opportunities for sustainable growth.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020**Action 1:**

Develop a Regional Food Strategy to identify areas for cross-county collaboration, including the development and linking of food hubs and support for food producers, including artisan.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured: Regional Food Strategy completed, launched and implementation underway.

Responsibility: Bord Bia, LEOs, Local Authorities, Regional Rep from Hotel Federation and EuroToques, Regional Food Producers, AIT, Skillsnets, The Kitchens Mountmellick, Ferbane Food Campus

Action 2:

Develop the Midlands as a food and drink destination, capitalising on its local food and drink offerings and develop a Regional Food Story with Fáilte Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland's Food Strategy 2018 – 2023 outlines the activities that will be undertaken to ensure that our food offering delivers on visitor's expectations and preferences and harnesses on the commercial opportunities available.

Fáilte Ireland will work with key stakeholders in the Midlands to;

- Support the availability of great Irish food and drink experiences and seek to collaborate with relevant agencies to underpin the quality and sustainable practices of the Irish food and drink sector.
- Enhance the capability of Irish food & beverage operators to deliver a world class offering that is consistent and profitable.

Intensify our efforts to ensure Irish food and drink features more prominently in marketing and sales efforts. In 2019 a new initiative; Month of Food (working title) will be launched.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Regional Food Story
- Update Regional Food Producers Directory

Responsibility: Fáilte Ireland, Bord Bia, LEOs, Local Authorities

Action 3:

Establish a food learning network between food hubs, education providers, hospitality sector in the region to capture/identify best practice, share expertise, and fill gaps in provision through collaboration.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured:

- Secure funding to support the development of Network of Regional Food Hubs
- Develop a range of collaborative learning projects for roll-out to enterprises in the region.

Responsibility: LEOs, Local Authorities, AIT, The Kitchens Mountmellick, Fermbane Food Campus, Bord Bia

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

7

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements

CONTEXT

Talent is the key business differentiator and asset for the twenty-first century and the global competition for talent is becoming more apparent. The Midlands' ability to continue to grow and attract investment will be dependent on readily available talent and highly skilled workers. The National Skills Strategy 2025 sets out an ambitious plan to ensure the development of a skills supply that is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our people, society and the economy. The skills supply needs to be appropriately configured so that it can be responsive and adaptable to the needs of enterprise in the Midlands region. Considerable work is ongoing to address these needs, in particular through the Midlands Regional Skills Forum. The Midlands Region Enterprise Plan will support and add-value to work that is currently ongoing while also seeking to identify and drive new initiatives through increased collaboration.

Sustained access to the right talent and skills is crucial for the region to attract and retain investment. Skills demand has intensified in sectors such as construction, the digital economy, and manufacturing as well as others. It is crucial that anticipated shortages and/or upskilling requirements are identified well in advance so that a response can be developed and mobilised to ensure that businesses in the Midlands region can continue to perform and grow.

Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the network of nine Regional Skills Fora has been created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions.

The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development. The innovative structure of the Fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers. The work of the Fora through facilitation and engagement will contribute to better outcomes for learners and support enterprise development.

The Fora provide a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system; provide more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development, greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system; and enhancement of progression routes for learners. The Fora also provide a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment roles and opportunities for career progression in their sectors.

VISION TO 2020

Present a clear picture of the wealth of talent that exists in the Midlands that is available and willing to work within the region, and thereby serving as a very useful element in showing the attractiveness of investment in the Midlands by indigenous or foreign sources.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

As part of the skills for Growth initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured: Number of enterprises audited.

Responsibility: RSF, and partners including EI, IDA Ireland, ETB, and DEASP

Action 2:

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

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured: Number of participants

Responsibility: ETB, Regional Skills Forum.

Action 3:

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

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2019

How will delivery be measured: Number of successful applications.

Responsibility: RSF, HEIs.

Action 4:

Support all actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required.

Timeframe for delivery: Ongoing

How will delivery be measured: Customer feedback

Responsibility: RSF

Action 5:

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

Timeframe for delivery: Ongoing

How will delivery be measured: Increased number of engagements

Responsibility: RSF and other stakeholders.

3 Enterprise Agency and LEO activities in the Midlands to 2020

In order to achieve the 2020 employment targets and maintain strong regional enterprise and job creation performance, the Strategic Objectives and collaborative actions identified for the Midlands are set alongside and complement the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

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

This section provides an overview of these activities in the Midlands to 2020, including their ongoing support for the installed base of companies in the region as well as the range of supports and initiatives that they are undertaking to foster and attract new enterprise development and investment for the region.

The contributions and remit of other relevant agencies and bodies in the Midlands are outlined in Appendix 4.

Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland supports companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. At the centre of the agency's strategy, *Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 - 2020*, are strategic targets focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

The 5,000 manufacturing and internationally traded services companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland.

Reflecting the strength of the Irish economy and of global markets in 2018, Enterprise Ireland client companies reported strong employment performance. Enterprise Ireland's 2018 employment survey reported:

- the highest employment in the 20 year history of the agency with 215,207 people employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies;
- the successful number of net jobs created which saw 9,119 new jobs created after losses are taken into account, with over 60 percent of these outside Dublin;
- the lowest number of job losses since 1998; and
- employment growth across all regions.

Enterprise Ireland is working with client companies through a network of market and sector advisers from ten offices located throughout the country. This network enables the agency to connect and collaborate at a local level with enterprise development partners to assist in driving the multiagency response required to promote regional development. Enterprise Ireland engages with established client companies through teams of sectoral focused development advisors using a company led diagnostic approach which is used to establish clients' business needs. Based on this, the agency can tailor a support package to the company's growth potential based on their ambition, capability and need. A support package focuses, where relevant, on six business pillars (Innovation, Finance, Operations, Sales and Marketing, People and Organisational Development). Enterprise Ireland actively works with established clients throughout the country on an one-on-one basis to deliver this client engagement model.

The EI Corporate Strategy "Build Scale Expand Reach 2017 - 2020" places the regions at the core of economic growth in Ireland. The strategy sets ambitious targets to sustain 200,000 existing jobs and to create 60,000 new jobs nationally by 2020.

EI's Regional Plan 2019 builds on this Strategy. It is a plan which identifies "National Initiatives" that are impactful and will develop regions of scale.

The plan entails a vision that is ambitious and proposes a number of new initiatives which will have significant impact on economic development in the regions. The plan is founded on four core objectives:

- To maximise growth of Enterprise Ireland Clients in the regions
- To strengthen Regional Infrastructure to maximise future growth of Irish Enterprise in the Regions
- To support Entrepreneurship in the Regions
- Work in collaboration to deliver Regional Growth

EI's overall vision for the region is:

"All regions growing optimally, based on their innate and unique strengths and capabilities, sustaining and creating regional jobs and thereby, maximizing the contribution made by each region to economic growth & national prosperity".

Enterprise Ireland in the Midlands

- In 2018, 12,349 people were employed across 247 Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the Midlands region.
- EI supports all sectors with success deriving from sectors such as manufacturing of wood and wood products, manufacturing of food and beverages, and mining and quarrying activities.
- Enterprise Ireland has co-funded, with local enterprise development groups, 157 Community Enterprise Centres across the country including 14 in the Midlands. These centres provide space in a supportive environment for budding entrepreneurs and serve to help the development of entrepreneurship locally.
- Enterprise Ireland, in partnership with the Institutes of Technology, has established a nationwide network of 15 Technology Gateways which deliver technology solutions for Irish industry close to their market needs and are open to all sizes of companies. Athlone IT hosts two of these Gateways - APT and COMAND. A number of technology research centres such as SUNAT are also based in the region.
- Enterprise Ireland has funded the establishment of a national network of business innovation centres and specialist bio-incubation facilities across the Higher Education Sector. The Midlands Innovation & Research Centre (MIRC) is located in Athlone Institute of Technology
- EI supports and collaborates with Athlone IT through Innovation supports such as the Commercialisation Fund, Innovation Partnerships and Innovation Vouchers.

Local Enterprise Offices

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in every county are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own businesses. In the first instance, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant State supports. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEOs can offer grant aid to microenterprises in manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which have the potential to develop into strong export entities, in addition to 'soft' supports in the form of training, a mentor to work with the business proposer, or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

In line with the Regional emphasis of the LEOs, the results from the Annual Employment Survey 2017 show that 7,135 gross jobs were created of which 5,775 were outside Dublin or 81 percent. A total of 3,760 net jobs were created of which 3,051 were outside Dublin or 81.2 percent.

The Midlands is served by its Local Enterprise Offices in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath, which are co-located with the Local Authorities. In 2017, the LEOs operating the Midlands supported an additional 372 jobs from 2016 (total of 4,214 jobs) and the establishment of 8 new companies, bringing the total number of companies supported by the LEOs in the Midlands to 819.

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland is the State's inward investment promotion agency. The mission of the agency is to partner with multi-national companies to win and develop foreign direct investment, providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland.

IDA's current strategy, *Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*, sets out ambitious targets to support the delivery of its mission to win and develop Foreign Direct Investment in Ireland. These include:

- Win 900 new investments for Ireland
- Support clients in creating 80,000 new jobs
- Grow market share and help maximise the impact of FDI investments
- Focus on greater balanced regional development

Regional development is a key pillar of IDA's strategy. For the first time, ambitious investment targets have been set for each region. IDA is targeting a minimum 30% to 40% increase in the number of investments for each region outside Dublin. These investments are a combination of new name investments, expansions from existing overseas companies in Ireland and R&D investments. To deliver on these ambitious targets IDA Ireland has;

- Worked with public bodies and the private sector on the Regional Enterprise Plans
- Worked with existing clients to retain and strengthen their presence in each region
- Increased Global Business Services and High-Tech Manufacturing investments
- Aligned IDA business sectors with regional strengths to develop sectoral ecosystems
- Work more closely with EI and its client companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the region through the Global Sourcing Program
- Delivered property solutions in designated regional locations
- Increased IDA Ireland's regional footprint to adequately support the regional strategy

2019 represents the final year of IDA's current Strategy "Winning 2015-2019". In implementing the strategy, IDA Ireland has shown a clear determination to showcase the many benefits that are to be found for companies locating in regions. Significant gains have been made in deepening and growing FDI outside Ireland's main cities. To date, 407 regional investments have been won and 27,000 net jobs have been added on the ground in regional locations. A total of 58% of all IDA client supported jobs are now located in the regions

with every region of the country experiencing employment gains in 2018. In addition to direct employment and skills transfer, IDA Ireland's client companies have a hugely positive effect on the local economy with over eight jobs being created for every 10 jobs in an FDI company. A total of 50% of the €5.7bn in annual capital expenditure by IDA client companies occurs outside of Dublin. These investments have been won despite the demographical challenges that exist and international trends of greater urbanisation.

IDA Ireland is committed to playing its part in the economic development of Ireland's regions. However, winning investments is a challenge and will require a continued collaborative effort by all national and regional stakeholders.

Regional locations must continuously demonstrate the capability to deliver on a number of exacting criteria which generally inform the location decisions of multinationals.

An assessment of investments delivered for regions since 2015, would confirm the strategic importance of key criteria in actually influencing the investment decision;

- Critical mass in population
- The ability to attract and develop appropriate skills
- The presence of Third Level Institutes
- The existence of clusters of companies in specific industry sector
- Regional Infrastructure
- Regional Place Making Strategies
- Availability of high spec standard Manufacturing & Commercial Office Properties

To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy and the attraction of investments into different parts of the country, a €150m property investment plan was announced in 2015. IDA Ireland's approach of developing strategic sites and developing advanced buildings has proven to be hugely successful. In 2019, IDA Ireland will continue its building programme with the design and construction underway of advanced buildings

in Sligo, Dundalk, Athlone, Waterford, Galway, Monaghan and Limerick.

Over the course of 2019, IDA Ireland will be developing the agency's new five-year strategy. This strategy will take account of the changing nature of work and the impact of technology on specific sectors. Profound changes are occurring in the world of work and this is already reflected in the jobs being created by the IDA Ireland client base. We can see an increasing complexity in the roles being created, technology skills becoming ubiquitous across roles, increasing demand for business professionals and a fall in the number of low-skilled jobs including back office support and basic manufacturing. This transition is likely to impact the nature and type of roles across the Regions of Ireland.

Building on the success achieved to date, IDA will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the Regions to realise the economic potential and ambition of Ireland's regions under the Regional Enterprise Plans.

IDA Ireland in the Midlands Region

The Midlands includes the counties of Westmeath, Longford, Offaly and Laois. There are 42 IDA supported companies in the Midlands, employing 5,720 people in total at the end of 2018. This employment figure represents a 14% increase on 2017. The Midlands was the highest performing Region in terms of FDI employment growth in Ireland during 2018. The Region has been successful over a number of years in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI), with employment levels in IDA client companies increasing every year since 2011.

The region has an impressive range of companies across all industry sectors, with particular strengths in Life Sciences, Technology, Global Business Services, International Financial Services and Engineering. Significant 'new name' investments in recent years in both services and manufacturing include Aerie Pharmaceutical, Neueda Technologies (both based in Athlone), SkOUT Secure Intelligence in Portlaoise and Red Seal Cups in Longford. The largest new name project has been Centre Parcs, which is a €233m development in Ballymahon,

Co. Longford that will see 1,000 people employed when fully operational in 2019.

There is a thriving, dynamic and innovative enterprise base in the region. The existing FDI base of client companies continues to perform well in terms of their operational sustainability, job retention and ongoing transformation. Expansions of scale from the existing client base over recent years included projects from Ericsson and NPD in Athlone, Abbott in Longford and Avery Denison in Longford. The existing FDI base of companies enjoy strong collaborative links with the Athlone Institute of Technology and the presence of a third level Institute of scale has been key to the development of region.

The availability of appropriate property solutions continues to be a strategic asset supporting the winning of FDI. To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019, a €150m property investment plan was announced in February 2015. This investment focus is on the building of Advance Building Solutions (ABS), infrastructure investment in a number of Utility Intensive Strategic site solutions and the upgrade of Business and Technology Parks within IDA's national portfolio. IDA's property investment programme for the Midlands included the construction of an Advance Building Solution (ABS) in the Athlone Business & Technology Park, which facilitated Aerie Pharmaceutical in establishing a new ophthalmic production facility and the creation of 50 high jobs.

Across the region IDA Ireland has a portfolio of Business & Technology Parks available to support IDA and EI client companies. These flagship Business Parks in key locations in Athlone, Mullingar, Tullamore & Portlaoise have been designed and landscaped to a high standard and are occupied by many high-end manufacturing and international services clients with capacity to facilitate and accommodate new international investment. IDA also works closely with the private sector to encourage and market appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions suitable for FDI clients.

IDA's focus over the coming two years and beyond is to build on the strengths and competencies of the region with a particular focus on high value manufacturing, services and research and development opportunities across a number of established clusters in Life Sciences, Technology, and Global Business Services. Emerging technology trends have and will continue to create new opportunities across the region in areas such as data analytics, smart manufacturing, cybersecurity and new approaches to working such as home working and hub working.

IDA Ireland will continue to work closely with existing clients to retain and strengthen their presence through continued company transformation as well as pursuing new areas of opportunity for clients companies. IDA will also continue to work closely with Enterprise Ireland and its indigenous base of companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the region.

Enhanced collaboration will be needed to align the efforts of all stakeholders and service providers to ensure that the Midlands continues to meet the needs of overseas companies. The delivery of necessary infrastructure and property solutions, fostering the continued development and growth of a skilled workforce and the continued development of the place-making of the region are pre-requisites to winning continued FDI investment. Such collaboration can act as a catalyst to attracting new companies and talent to the Midlands.

The Midlands is very well positioned to continue to attract new FDI investment and grow employment in existing companies and IDA Ireland will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the region to achieve this objective under the Regional Enterprise Plan.

4 Implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan

The consultation process to refresh and refocus the original Regional Action Plans was enhanced by an understanding amongst stakeholders of the importance of ownership, collaboration, and the definition and delivery of specific measurable actions in the new Plans that could add value to the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, LEOs and other relevant bodies involved in supporting enterprise development. These priorities are reflected in the implementation structure for the new Regional Enterprise Plans.

The existing Regional Implementation Committee construct will be maintained for each region but will be renamed as a 'Regional Steering Committee'. Each Committee will continue to be chaired by a senior figure from the private sector who has been appointed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

- Oversee and drive delivery of the REP.
- Agree an annual work programme for the Committee based on the Plan.
- Nominate and secure 'Champions' to support delivery of the Strategic Objectives.
- Agree key milestones and metrics for delivery of each actions.
- Oversee the formation of working groups as necessary to drive implementation of actions.
- Explore and propagate new ideas and opportunities for collaborative projects, and funding.

- Provide a forum for the sharing of updates and information by members on key enterprise development initiatives including those set out by the Agencies and LEOs in this Plan and other pertinent updates (incl. REDF, RSES, Project Ireland 2040 etc.).
- Oversee, contribute to and sign off (through the Chair) on annual Progress Reports to DBEI.

Full details of the composition of the Steering Committee is contained in Appendix 1.

The Chairperson will convene at least three meetings of the Steering Committee per year and will present a progress update on their Plan to the Minister at an annual meeting of all Chairpersons in the second half of 2019. This meeting will provide a fora for the Chairs to share good practice and identify potential areas for inter-regional co-operation. The Chairperson will also lead the Committee in the preparation of two progress reports to be submitted to the Department at the end of 2019 (mid-term) and end of 2020 (final report).

It is intended that each Steering Committee will oversee the formation of smaller working groups to drive delivery of actions or groups of actions in the REP. Working Groups will convene as frequently as is required and will report on progress to the Chairperson and the Steering Committee on a regular basis. They will also provide input to the annual progress reports in relation to their action(s).

Each region has the resource of a Programme Manager/Secretariat which has been provided through the Local Authorities. The Programme Manager/Secretariat will support the Chairperson and the Steering Committee in the coordination and delivery of the Plan and will be the primary operational point of contact with DBEI.

The Final Progress Reports for the Regional Action Plans for Jobs 2015-2017/8 provide a closing status in relation to all actions in these original reports and can be found on the Department's website at www.dbei.ie. The original Plans continue to be a useful resource for the REPs going forward as an input to the rolling work agenda for the initiative.

Finally, DBEI will be responsible for the oversight and coordination of all REPs at a national level. The Department will provide ongoing advice, guidance and support to the Chairpersons, Programme Managers/Secretariat and Steering Committees.

Targets for the Midlands Region to 2020

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 set out two core outcomes for achievement in each region by the end of 2020:

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

Utilising new data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS)³, the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the Midlands region during the 2015-2017 lifetime of the original Regional Action Plans and up to Q3 2018 is outlined in Table 1.

While the Midlands had already achieved an employment growth rate at the upper end of the 2020 target at the beginning of 2018, unemployment in the region was still more than two percentage points above the State average⁴. Since then, the Midlands unemployment rate has seen further improvement to 7.1 percent, which is now just outside the 2020 target. For a further statistical analysis of the region's performance see Appendix 2.

The focus for the Midlands over the period to 2020 is to sustain the momentum of employment growth achieved since 2015 and to reduce unemployment levels further to more closely match the national average to at least within one percentage point. The strategic objectives and actions in this Plan, along with the core activities of the various Agencies and Bodies involved in supporting enterprise development nationally and regionally over the coming two-year period will support this.

Behind the headline employment growth performance are two further important considerations for the Midlands region:

- i) to ensure that a greater number of people both work and live in the Midlands; and
- ii) to see an improvement in labour force participation, especially amongst females, towards the national average.

Latest figures on commuting from the Midlands (Census 2016) suggests that 23,827 people are leaving the region to work, school or college daily. The Midlands currently has a labour force participation rate of 58.8 percent, compared to a national average of 62.6 percent. Both of these statistics indicate that there is capacity for increased investment and economic activity in the Midlands and will be monitored as part of the Regional Enterprise Plan.

3 In 2018, the CSO introduced a new quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) to replace the original Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), which incorporated a new survey methodology and applied new NUTS 3 regional administrative boundaries used by Eurostat.

4 Midlands Unemployment Rate at 8%, Q1 2018 – State Unemployment Rate at 5.7%, Q1 2018, Source CSO Labour Force Survey

Table 1

	Numbers Employed				Unemployment Rate	
	Q1 2015	Q3 2018	Change Q1 2015 to Q3 2018	Growth Q1 2015 to Q3 2018	Q1 2015	Q3 2018
Midlands	108,100	127,200	19,100	17.7%	14.9%	7.1%
State	2,014,400	2,273,200	258,800	12.8%	10.5%	6.0%

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q3 2018

Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee

Organisations represented on the Midlands Regional Steering Committee⁵

Chair of the Midlands Committee:

Dr. Anne Cusack,
Managing Director, Critical Healthcare

Membership of the Committee

Enterprise Champions (to be confirmed)	Coillte
Laois County Council	Teagasc
Longford County Council	Waterways Ireland
Offaly County Council	Ibec
Westmeath County Council	Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation
Enterprise Ireland	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
IDA Ireland	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Local Enterprise Office Laois	Department of Rural and Community Development
Local Enterprise Office Longford	
Local Enterprise Office Offaly	
Local Enterprise Office Westmeath	
Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly	
Regional Skills Forum – Midland Region	
Laois & Offaly Education & Training Board	
Longford & Westmeath Education & Training Board	
Athlone Institute of Technology	
Fáilte Ireland	
InterTrade Ireland	
Bord Bia	
Bord Na Móna	

Programme Management:

Sarah Morgan

⁵ The existing Implementation Committees will be renamed 'Steering Committees'

Appendix 2: Brief profile and statistical snapshot - Midlands

Constituent counties	Laois, Longford, Offaly & Westmeath	
Regional Population & change (1996-2016)	205,542 (1996): 292,301 (2016) increase of 86,759	
GVA ⁶ per person 2000 and 2015	€15,988: €22,320	
Total in employment	127,200 ⁷	
Labour Force Participation rate	58.8 % ⁸	
Unemployment rate	7.1% ⁹	
Unemployment blackspots ¹⁰	4 ¹¹	
Percentage employed in Manufacturing: Services: Public sector	16%: 9%: 27%	
Educated to third level in Midlands: State	34%: 45%	
Third Level Students (full-time & part-time)	4,525 ¹²	
Number of enterprises ¹³ (micro: small: medium: large) (2016)	11,587: 594: 101: 9	
Number of Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups ¹⁴ (HPSUs) Midlands: State (2017)	0: 90	
EI supported employment & no. client Companies 2016 - 2017	2016	2017
	Jobs: 11,865	Jobs: 12,465
	Companies: 269	Companies: 288
IDA supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	2016	2017
	Jobs: 4,280	Jobs: 4,327
	Companies: 30	Companies: 34
LEO supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	2016	2017
	Jobs: 3,842	Jobs: 4,214
	Companies: 811	Companies: 819
Number of LEO Priming Grants ¹⁵ Midlands: State (2017)	19: 294	

6 Gross Value Added (GVA) is the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

7 Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q3 2018

8 Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q3 2018

9 Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q3 2018

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

11 Unemployment blackspots in the region: Longford (3) & Westmeath (1).

12 Athlone Institute of Technology (4,525) CSO

13 A **Small Enterprise** is defined as: an enterprise that has fewer than 50 employees and has either an annual turnover and/or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €10m: A **Medium Sized Enterprise** is defined as: an enterprise that has between 50 employees and 249 employees and has either an annual turnover not exceeding €50m or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €43m: A **Large Enterprise** is defined as: an enterprise that employs greater than 250 employees, has either an annual turnover of greater than €50m or an annual balance sheet of greater than €43m

14 HPSUs are start-up businesses with the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale on international markets and the potential to create 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 years of starting up.

15 A Priming Grant is a business start-up grant, available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up.

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan will build on the existing strengths and opportunities in the region while also fostering greater collaboration and delivering added value to the corporate strategies of the various bodies and organisations mandated to support enterprise development.

The region possesses a number of key strengths that support enterprise development and economic growth. These include:

- A strong indigenous non-food manufacturing base
- A vibrant food manufacturing base
- An emerging internationally traded service sector
- A strong base in the Green Economy with the presence of Bord Na Móna, Coillte and ESB
- Significant tourism assets which can be developed in a more integrated way in the context of the brand experience “Ireland’s Ancient East” and “Hidden Heartlands”

A dynamic region, centrally located in the heart of Ireland, with unparalleled national interconnectivity. It is the national corridor for road and rail infrastructure within one hour of Dublin and Galway. The Region has good access to a number of international airports and ports to serve European and global markets.

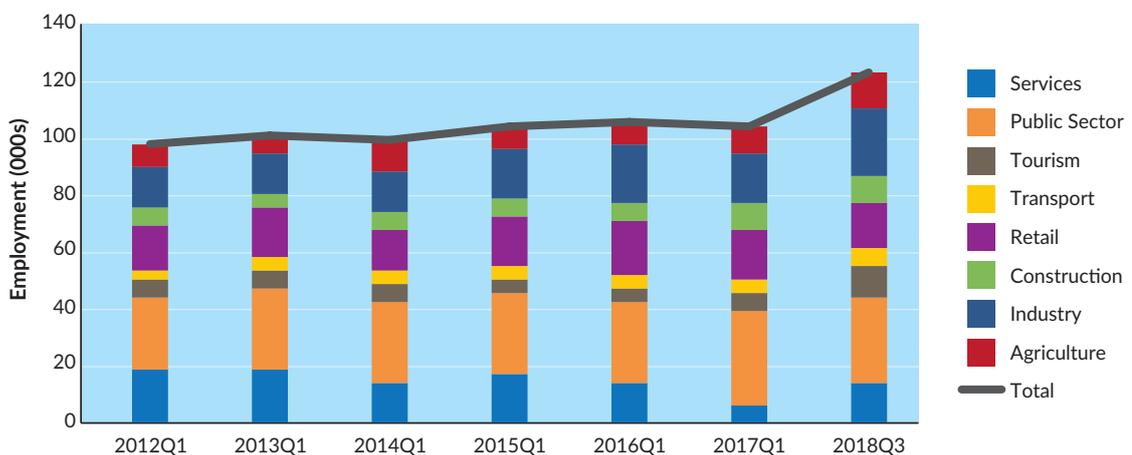
Furthermore, it is a significant catchment area with access to a highly qualified workforce and a diverse range of graduates and postgraduates across all disciplines.

In Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) it has an innovative IoT, serving R&D needs of both indigenous and multinational industry, with strategic research institutes and close links to Universities and other Institutes of Technology. The region also has a number of Business and Technology Parks designed to international standards. There is also a strong tradition collaboration between public bodies in the region. In addition, the Midlands can boast a rich quality of life, clean environment, and unique heritage that is valued and safeguarded. It has significant natural amenities and heritage to offer a unique visitor experience.

Employment trends

In Q3 2018 there were 127,200 people employed in the Midlands Region. Over the period Q1 2015 to Q3 2018, employment overall has grown by 17 percent with an additional 19,100 more employed. The structure of the sectoral employment has changed little over that period, with some adjustments evident. Figure 1 shows the employment figures from Q1 2012 to Q3 of 2018.

Figure 1. Midlands Employment Growth 2012-2018 (CSO)



Services

Employment in the Services sector, including the Public sector, has increased from 69,800 in 2012 to 82,700 in Q3 2018 and the sector currently accounts for 65 percent of all employment in the Midlands. This highlights the contribution of services to employment in the Midlands. There are currently 82,700 people working in the Services Sector and within the broad Services sector, the combined areas of Public Administration/Defence, Human Health/Social Work and the Education sector account for 29,600 of those employed in the Midlands which represents 35 percent of all Services employment and 23 percent of the total employment in the region, which is similar to other regions.

Retail/Wholesale

Retail and Wholesale which forms a significant part of the Services sector is the largest private sector employer in the country, with particular significance for regional towns and villages. Employment in the sector in Ireland is regionally dispersed with approximately 70 percent employed outside Dublin; 15,600 people are employed in the sector in the Midland region.

Industry/Manufacturing

Employment in the Industry/Manufacturing sector has also increased over the period Q1 2012 to Q3 2018 with nearly 9,000 more employed in the Sector. Manufacturing still retains a proportionately larger share of total regional employment (18 percent) compared to the national figure of 12.5 percent, reflecting the strength of the manufacturing base in the region.

Construction

The construction sector employed 6,100 in Q1 2012 and this fell to a low of 4,600 in Q1 2013. The numbers in this sector have started to grow again and currently the sector employs 10,800 people in the region, accounting for 8.5 percent of the total employment which is similar to the national trend.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector employed 8,300 in Q1 2012 and this grew to 10,200 in Q3 2018 and accounts for approximately 8 percent of employment in the Midlands, which is higher than the national average of 5 percent, reflecting the strength of the Agricultural sector within the Midlands and the rural character and natural assets of the region.

Tourism

CSO figures indicate that the Tourism sector employed 10,900 in Q3 2018. However, these figures can be considered as conservative as they only cover employment in accommodation and food services. The actual figure maybe somewhat higher if other "Services" employment, for example in visitor attractions is included.

Appendix 3: Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

The €60 million Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland. Administered by Enterprise Ireland, it supports new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions, or nationally.

Over the first and second calls under the REDF, the Midlands Region secured funding of over €3.4 million across four projects:

Call	Project	Description
1	Irish Manufacturing Research CLG	Irish Manufacturing Sector Research
1	Longford Innovation & Digital Hub	Development of Innovation and Digital Hub in Longford Town (linked project with Cavan and Leitrim)
2	Mountmellick Development Association	Centre for Business Excellence
2	Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG	A Creative Suite to provide central location and space that leverages the benefit of the iLOFAR telescope at Birr Castle

The Midlands Regional Steering Committee will work closely together with other stakeholders to leverage the opportunities that these projects will generate in the coming years. The Steering Committee can also assist in identifying projects that have the potential for funding in the future.

Appendix 4: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development

Local Authorities

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the strengthening of the role of Local Authorities towards economic, social and community development. Local Authorities therefore have a strong role in promoting economic development and sustaining and creating a positive environment for job creation. There is good rationale for increased local government involvement in economic development because of the economic impact of its functions generally, its links with enterprise, its local knowledge and leadership, the economic initiatives by many Local Authorities, and its local development and enterprise functions.

Operation of micro-enterprise support services through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Local Authority Business Support Units are now key elements of the local government role in economic development. Other economic development functions include:

- contribution to Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies,
- a strong direct role for Local Authorities in promoting economic development, more clearly specified in legislation;
- ensuring that all Local Authorities focus their general functions and services proactively towards supporting enterprise and economic development;
- leading and mobilising economic development locally in conjunction with relevant agencies;
- drawing up local economic development plans in conjunction with the overall City/County Development Plan.

The economic development role is supported by a dedicated Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) in each local authority service.

Bord Bia

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

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

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

Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. Their role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland provide a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services.

Fáilte Ireland also work with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy.

Fáilte Ireland promote Ireland as a holiday destination through domestic marketing campaigns and manage a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland.

InterTradelreland

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

Regional Skills Fora

Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the network of 9 Regional Skills Fora has been created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development. The innovative structure of the Fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers. The work of the Fora through facilitation and engagement will contribute to better outcomes for learners and support enterprise development. The Fora provide a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system; provide more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development, greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system; and enhancement of progression routes for learners. The Fora also provide a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment roles and opportunities for career progression in their sectors.

Skillnet Ireland

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

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

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

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

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

Waterways Ireland

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

Department of Rural and Community Development

The Department of Rural and Community Development also has a role to play in contributing directly to the Regional Action Plans through initiatives such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Town and Village Renewal scheme and the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. The Department's social inclusion programmes - most notably the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SIACP) - also contribute to supporting disadvantaged urban and rural communities.

Third Level Institutes

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)

Appendix 5: Project Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF), as part of Project Ireland 2040, aims to guide the future development of Ireland to 2040 and to influence the spatial patterns of a projected 1 million increase in our population. The NPF and the National Development Plan have been developed in conjunction to link spatial planning policy and infrastructure capital investment to support the potential in all regions.

The NPF is a long-term framework that sets out how Ireland can move away from the current 'business as usual' pattern of development. The purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift toward Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

The NPF also sets out a number of key national objectives which include enhanced regional accessibility, strengthened rural economies and communities, and enhanced amenities and heritage. The Ireland 2040 plan sets out a strategy to enable people to live closer to where they work, moving away from the current unsustainable trends of increased commuting; reverse rural decline and promote environmentally sustainable growth patterns and plan for and implement a better distribution of regional growth, in terms of jobs and prosperity.

The Government is focussed on unlocking the potential in all regions by a co-ordinated delivery of infrastructure and at the same time, enabling regional enterprise development that will enable better distribution of the future anticipated population growth across the whole country while also tackling congestion and quality of life issues.

Project Ireland 2040 Funds

In 2018 the Government launched Project Ireland 2040 and, as part of this initiative, committed €4 billion in funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and the Climate Action Fund. The four funds are a major innovation in Project Ireland 2040 and rather than allocating funding in a 'business as usual' way to Government Departments, money was allocated competitively to the best projects, which leverage investment from other sources thereby ensuring that the impact of this investment goes further.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government has committed to providing an additional €1 billion for a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) over the period 2019 to 2027. Initial funding of €315 million is being allocated to the Fund on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022. The Fund will provide investment to support rural renewal for suitable projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. It will be administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The new Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the National Planning Framework, and in particular to achieve Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities – one of the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)

The €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is intended to drive regeneration and rejuvenation of strategic and under-utilised areas within Ireland's five cities, key regional drivers and other large towns. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) has responsibility for implementing the fund, which has €100m available for expenditure in 2019 and an overall allocation of €550 million allocated to the fund up to the end of 2022. The fund will operate on a competitive, bid-based Exchequer grant basis, with proposals being required to demonstrate that they will be:

- Innovative and transformational urban regeneration projects;
- Public-sector led and with the option of community and/or private sector partners;
- Matched by at least 25 percent direct funding from other public and/or private sources;
- A minimum bid of €2m;
- A catalyst for development that would not otherwise occur; and
- Likely to leverage significant further public and private sector investment.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation launched funding under the Government's new Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund. €500 million is available for co-funded projects involving enterprises and research partners over the period to 2027.

What do we mean by Disruptive Technologies Innovation?

Disruptive technology is that which has the potential to significantly alter markets and their functioning and significantly alter the way that businesses operate. While it involves a new product or process, it can also involve the emergence of a new business model. Disruption is about the combination of technology and business model innovation.

Proposals are expected to address the development, deployment and commercialisation of one or more disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of new products and services. Ultimately, the projects funded will create the jobs of the future.

Climate Action Fund

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out the creation of a Climate Action Fund to support climate action projects which will leverage investment by public and private bodies. The Fund will have an allocation of at least €500m over the period to 2027.

On 29 May 2018, the Government agreed to establish the Climate Action Fund. This includes the objective of funding initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets in a cost-effective manner. It also offers the potential for innovative interventions which, in the absence of support from the Fund, would not otherwise be developed.

Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) was established on 1st January 2015. The Region covers nine counties containing twelve Local Authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils and Dublin City Council.

EMRA's responsibilities include:

- European functions; Manage EU Regional Operational Programmes and provide support to the EU Committee of the Regions through the Irish Regions European Office in Brussels
- Planning and Economic Development; Promote and co-ordinate strategic planning and sustainable development of the region, which includes the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines, to be replaced by the new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
- Promote effectiveness in local government; Promote the effective delivery of public services in the region in conjunction with the National Oversight & Audit Commission.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

One of the principal statutory functions of the Assembly is the delivery of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Regions.

The RSES includes a:

- **Spatial Strategy** – to manage future growth and ensure the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, study, visit and invest in.
- **Economic Strategy** – that builds on our strengths to sustain a strong economy and support the creation of quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.
- **Metropolitan Plan** – to ensure a supply of strategic development areas for the sustainable growth and continued success and competitiveness of the Dublin metropolitan area.
- **Investment Framework** – to prioritise the delivery of key enabling infrastructure and services by government and state agencies.
- **Climate Action Strategy** – to accelerate climate action, ensure a clean and healthy environment and to promote sustainable transport and strategic green infrastructure.

Economic Strategy

This is the first time that Irish planning is required to deliver an economic strategy as part of a regional spatial plan, which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures along with funding and investment priorities for the region. The RSES seeks to promote smart specialisation and clustering underpinned by an orderly settlement strategy and investment in 'placemaking'. The RSES Also sets out Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) to provide a competitive and resilient economic base and develop our skills, innovation and technology capacity, recognising the key roles played by the enterprise agencies (IDA, EI, LEOs, SFI) and to support the implementation of Regional Action Plans for Jobs (RAPJs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

Implementation

The RSES will be implemented through the review of all Local Authorities Development Plans and LECPs after the adoption of this Strategy. Key state agencies and sectoral bodies will also have to consider their strategies and investment plans in light of the adoption of the RSES. The RSES will be realised by the delivery of European and National funding that will achieve the Regional Strategic Outcomes expressed in the Strategy. These funds will focus on the priorities and key aspects of the RSES to sustainably grow the Region to 2031 and beyond.

An Roinn Gnó, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta
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