Final Progress Report
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Regional Action Plans for Jobs

50% of IDA employment between 2015 and 2017 is outside Dublin

2/3 of EI employment in 2017 is outside Dublin

31 Local Enterprise Offices

FIRST-STOP SHOP
for new and expanding enterprises

Supporting 42,000+ new jobs in 2017

Regional Skills Fora
fostering stronger links between employers and the education/training sector

Regional Unemployment*
Q4 2017

State Average: 6.1%

* Data based on pre-Q1 2018 NUTS3 groupings
Overview

This is the fourth and final Progress Report from the Implementation Committee established to oversee and monitor implementation of the measures contained in the Midland Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The report outlines progress made on measures due for completion up to and including the second half of 2017, as well as progress made on measures that are Ongoing during the 2015-2017 period of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland Region was launched on June 29, 2015. The core objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 14,000 jobs across the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois by 2020 through the delivery of 125 collaborative actions focused on increasing the number of entrepreneurs/start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, with further actions targeted at sectors of potential competitive advantage such as manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. The ambition is to increase the number of people in employment by 14,000 by 2020. This represents an important contribution to the target, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government, of creating 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The Regional Action Plans are monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. The Midland Implementation Committee is chaired by Mr Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council.

In 2007, when the economy last enjoyed full employment, the Midland Region had an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent - the lowest of all regions. However, there was a very significant dependence on employment in the construction sector which employed over 20,000 people at that time. During the recession, some 15,000 Construction jobs were lost and this contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate in the region which, by Q3 2011, stood at 19.6 percent.

In the period covered by this Progress Report, there has been a substantial improvement in the Midlands region, with an additional 15,900 in employment in Q4 2017 compared to Q1 2015. In the same period, the number unemployed has fallen by 7,200 while the Labour Force has increased by 7,300.

Progress in job creation and addressing unemployment has continued strongly. The Midlands Unemployment rate was 7.7 percent in Q4 2017, having fallen by 7.2 percentage points since Q1 2015. As of Q3 2018, the Midlands Region’s unemployment rate has reduced to 7.1 percent.

By the end of 2017, out of the 125 actions, 96 actions or just 77 percent have been Completed or are substantially complete. A total of nine are Deferred or Reconsidered. This represents a total implementation rate of 93 percent.

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1 While employment targets were originally based on the old NUTS 3 regional groupings, current employment data within the CSO’s new quarterly Labour Force Survey is based on the new configuration which came into effect in January 2018. The result of these changes is that data for some regions cannot be as reliably compared with their original targets as others. This Department is currently working to review and revise regional employment targets in light of the changes to NUTS 3 configurations and CSO methodology.

2 CSO Labour Force Survey, March 2018 (Revised NUTS3 configurations)
## Key Highlights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checkmark</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Athlone Institute of Technology is partnering with Maynooth University in a 5 year New Frontiers programme for innovative and early-stage startups in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland (Action 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Planning permission has been granted to construct 2 Advance Technology Units of 14,500 sq.ft (ATU's) at the IDA Business &amp; Technology Park in Athlone. (Action 47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>The development and marketing of Ireland's Ancient East both domestic and internationally, is continually being improved through online advertisement. (Action 53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Offaly and Laois Local Authorities continued to work with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte to develop an off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains. (Action 61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Skillnets Networks delivered training to over 500 companies based in the Midlands Region in 2017. (Action 98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Westmeath County Council has supported Mullingar Chamber of Commerce to successfully retain the prestigious Purple Flag award for Mullingar for 2017. (Action 116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Portlaoise Library has received approval under the Part 8 planning process in 2017 with a €5m investment due for completion in 2020. (Action 118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Offaly County Council continued to support the I-LOFAR project. The project was successfully &quot;switched on&quot; in July 2017 - connecting Birr to the Europe-wide network of radio telescopes. (Action 121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>The €230m Center Parc holiday village project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs and is expected to open in 2019. (Action 123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Checkmark]</td>
<td>Irish Manufacturing Research was successful with its application for funding under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (RED)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scorecard: Actions July 2017 – December 2017

This is the final Progress Report of the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs 2015 – 2017. For the Committee to present a statement on the level of implementation achieved during the 2015-2017 period, actions have been classified into four categories. In addition to closing out complete and deferred/reconsidered actions, this classification aims to present a final statement on actions that were deemed to be ‘ongoing’ at the outset of, or during, the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Complete</th>
<th>Substantially Complete</th>
<th>Partially Complete</th>
<th>Deferred/ reconsidered</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-35</td>
<td>Driving Entrepreneurship and Growing Business</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-42</td>
<td>Fostering Innovation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43-52</td>
<td>Attracting and Embedding Foreign Direct Investment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53-89</td>
<td>Building Sectoral Opportunities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-102</td>
<td>Skills Enhancement and Labour Market Activation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103-108</td>
<td>Building Business Networks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109-125</td>
<td>Marketing the Region</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) **Complete**: The Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed within the scope and life time of the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs (2015 – 2017).

2) **Substantially Complete**: The Committee has deemed that while these actions were not fully completed, substantial progress was made in the lifetime of the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs 2015 – 2017. The Committee acknowledges that work can/will continue on these actions and a decision will be taken as to whether they can form part of the Refresh and Refocus of the Midlands Action Plan through to 2020.
3) **Partially Complete**: The Committee has deemed that while these actions were not completed, a sufficient level of progress has been achieved in the lifetime of the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs 2015 – 2017, and work can/will continue on these actions. The Committee will consider if these actions could contribute as part of future strategic objectives in the Refresh and Refocus of the Midlands Action Plan through to 2020.

4) **Deferred/Reconsidered**: The Committee has deemed that these actions were either not initiated, or insufficient progress was made within the scope and lifetime of the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs 2015 – 2017. However, this does not preclude these actions from being considered as part of future strategic objectives in the Refresh and Refocus of the Midlands Action Plan through to 2020.

By the end of 2017, out of those 125 actions, 96 were Complete, 12 were Substantially Complete, 8 were Partially Complete, and 9 were deferred/reconsidered. This represents an overall implementation rate of 93%.
**Action Updates**

**THEME 1    DRIVING ENTREPRENEURSHIP & GROWING BUSINESS**

**Increasing the Number of Start-Ups**

**Action 1:** Enterprise Ireland will increase enterprise formation in the Midlands through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops, the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme, Competitive Feasibility Fund and Competitive Start Fund.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**

New Frontiers is Enterprise Ireland’s national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage startups. It is a three-phased programme, based in 14 campus incubation centres across the country. In the Midlands Region, New Frontiers is delivered by the Athlone Institute of Technology, in partnership with Maynooth University. EI has agreed a 5-year programme for New Frontiers with AIT/MU which commenced in H2 2016. Funding for increasing the size of the MIRC incubator on AIT campus has also been agreed.

Nationally, each year, New Frontiers funds approximately 150 companies. In 2017, 50 people participated in phase 1 and subsequently 13 participants started on phase 2 in October 2017. In 2016 - 62 people participated in Phase 1 (6 weeks part-time); 14 projects progressed to Phase 2 (6 months full time).

**Regional enterprise development,** start-up formation, is supported by a range of players at a regional level, such as the Local Enterprise Offices, the Local Authorities, the Higher Education Sector and Enterprise Ireland. To contribute to supporting start-up creation nationally, Enterprise Ireland provides a range of supports which are available regionally.

**Enterprise Start Workshops:** Currently this programme is being evaluated as the experience with the programme was that most of the clients who were involved were LEO and not EI clients. In future this approach may be incorporated with the appropriate LEO programme. Competitive feasibility and competitive start programmes are national programme and are not run at regional level.

The approach to prospecting for HPSUs will in future be more closely aligned with the LEOs.

**Action 2:** Each of the Local Enterprise Offices in the Midlands region will aim to increase employment in its baseline through increased start-ups and the scaling of existing clients. Annual Business Plans, setting out clear targets and objectives to support start-ups and enterprises in their region. Key aggregate targets for the Midland LEOs for 2015 are:

- €1.437 million will be available in grant assistance and enterprise development supports
- 40 Start Your Own Business courses will be run, for over 500 participants
- 4 Export Awareness Initiatives to be delivered to approx. 50 participants
- Over 60 clients will be assigned Start-up mentors
- 164 clients will be assigned Business Development mentors
Over 800 women will participate on core LEO training programmes (Start Your Own Business, Accelerate, Hi Start, Export Awareness, Lean, Mentoring)

65 schools to participate in Student Enterprise programme

These targets will be further developed in 2016 and 2017.

Lead responsible body: Midland LEOs

Status: Substantially complete

Narrative:
The Midland LEOs continue to support start-ups and companies with less than 10 employees. During the current reporting period the LEOs delivered the following supports:

- Start Your Own Business Courses: 16 courses and 267 participants.
- Mentoring for Start-Ups: 82 sessions
- Mentoring for Expanding Companies: 89
- Female Participation in Training Courses: 438
- Export Related Courses: LEO Laois ran a course for 10 people. Other Midland LEOs addressed through Midlands Engenuity Programme, EEN, Brexit Awareness and Mentoring.
- Student Enterprise Programme: 20 participating schools

Action 3: The four Local Authorities in the Midland region will implement Business Incentive Schemes which will provide grants to encourage early stage businesses to locate in vacant commercial or industrial units within designated areas.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Status: Complete

Narrative:
Laois: The Business Incentive Scheme has been in operation in Laois since 2015 and there has been a good take up. 4 Businesses availed of this scheme in 2017. Laois County Council also offered a 4% reduction on rates which were paid in full by 31st July 2017 or by agreed staged payment until 31st December 2017.

Longford County Council has operated a business incentive scheme since March 2015 to incentivise the occupancy of vacant commercial premises. A total of 35 businesses have been approved for relief under the terms of this scheme to date.

Offaly County Council: In 2017, 12 businesses have been approved relief under the terms of this scheme.

Westmeath County Council implemented a Business Incentive Scheme to incentivise the letting of long term vacant commercial properties. Qualifying properties are eligible to apply a rebate on their commercial Rates. There have been 12 applications to date in 2017. A further 18 businesses which availed of the scheme in 2016 and 13 businesses which availed of the scheme in 2015 will be eligible for the scheme again in 2017.
**Action 4:** Enterprise Ireland will work with the LEOs to develop new ways of delivering capacity improvement.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
LEO Westmeath has commenced the LEO Innovation Investment Fund (LIIF) Programme, to encourage innovation in business. 12 applications were received and 4 of these were shortlisted for training and mentoring to make a pitch for investment at regional level.

LIIF - LEO Longford -1 applicant shortlisted for training and mentoring at regional level.
LIIF - LEO Offaly had 8 applications and 4 finalists shortlisted for training and mentoring at regional level.
LIIF - LEO Laois had 5 applications and 2 finalists shortlisted for training and mentoring at regional level.

**Action 8:** Offaly Co. Council will support and develop The Junction Innovation Centre in Tullamore to facilitate the creation of new enterprises and promote the use of industrial design and innovative thinking.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Offaly County Council continues to work with Offaly Innovation & Design Centre Ltd to develop the Junction.

During 2017, the first floor of the building was reconfigured to include a training room, increased office space and hot desking. This was funded in part through Enterprise Ireland Competitive Funds. The funds also provided for salary support towards a Business Development Manager. This position was advertised and the Business Development Manager was appointed in July 2017. There are currently 19 people working in the business innovation centre.

**Action 9:** Enterprise Ireland will support the participation of 12 entrepreneurs in the Midlands on Phase 2 of the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme. Enterprise Ireland will implement the findings from the review of the Programme to maximise the positive impacts of the programme on entrepreneurship in the region, working closely with AIT (in partnership with NUIM) in the provision of the Programme.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** AIT

**Status:** Complete
Narrative:
In the current reporting period, 13 entrepreneurs have been taken on to the programme which commenced in October 2017.

Action 10: Enterprise Ireland will run a "Start-up Open Days & Clinics" in the Midlands for newly registered Start-ups in Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services from the region, with a view to prospecting for future start-ups and communicating and raising awareness of supports available to potential entrepreneurs in the Midlands.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Other responsible bodies: LEOs

Status: Complete

Narrative:
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the Midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region, through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

Action 12: Enterprise Ireland, working with other enterprise partners in the region, will increase its start-ups from the enterprise infrastructure in the region (e.g. incubators).

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Other responsible bodies: Relevant public and private partners

Status: Substantially complete

Narrative:
Enterprise Ireland’s primary focus is to increase the number of High Potential Start-Ups (HPSU) and candidates to the Competitive Start Fund (CSF) in the region through working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and the new frontiers programme. A max of 14 entrepreneurs are taken on each calendar year. Discussions continue between AIT/MU and EI on focussing the New Frontiers programme on the HPSU agenda. In addition, funding has been provided in doubling the size of incubation space in AIT.

The LEOs are the county level partners of EI on the start-up agenda and a formal transfer process is now in place to move appropriate clients (HPSU) from the LEOs to EI.

Action 13: Enterprise Ireland will run four “Innovating Start-ups” events in the Midlands to develop
the pipeline of innovative start-ups in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The main methodology to developing the pipeline of potential HPSUs is through the new frontiers program. In 2017, 50 startups participated in phase 1 and 13 candidates have progressed to phase 2.

In running the innovation arena at the national ploughing championships for agri-tech and engineering prospects 200 entries were evaluated and 60 exhibited at the arena. Some of these projects have progressed to other programs such as new frontiers and the LEO programs.

**Action 14:** Enterprise Ireland will run two facilitated Lean Start-up workshops for at least 16 start-ups in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
There were 10 participants involved over two programs during 2016.

**Action 15:** The four Local Development Companies in the region will provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and deliver a range of programmes to support entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The Local Development Companies will also work with the LEOs, with a view to progressing clients to the LEO services.

**Lead responsible body:** Local Development Companies

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**
The Local Development Companies will continue to work on this action throughout their programme period.

Laois: In 2017 year to date our job club has dealt with 168 formal job clients of which 44 have progressed into employment. Of the 197 drop-in callers, we have supported 45 into employment. Our unemployed mentoring service supported through SICAP has worked with 116 clients to date, of which 23 have been supported into full or part time employment. 9 of these are between the ages of 15 and 24.

113 individuals have received self-employment supports of which 30 have set up new businesses and 59 are receiving further self-employment supports including referral to the LEO SYOB course.

Laois Partnership Company are running two Local Training Initiatives in employability skills and catering and hospitality skills for long term unemployed (LTU) between the ages of 18 and 35. These programmes will give the skills to LTU young people to allow them access work or further
education. These programmes are funded by Laois Offaly ETB (LOETB). Currently 25 individuals are on these programmes which commenced in Sept 2017 and will conclude in April 2018.

Laois Partnership Company are running the countywide childcare CE scheme in Laois and have 48 individuals currently on the scheme. Those participants directly involved in childcare will be given the opportunity to get their QQI level 5 in childcare and this will allow them access employment in private childcare. Laois Partnership Company continue to run the TUS programme which gives LTUs the opportunity to get a years’ work placement with a not for profit or community organisation. Laois Partnership Company currently have 100 people placed with the scheme.

Laois Partnership Company run a suite of Labour Market skills packages through the BTEI funded by LOETB. Year to date we have 89 people trained in a range of skills packages including home repairs and maintenance, tiling and painting and decorating and health care modules.

In Westmeath the following were recorded up to Nov 16th
- 99 progressed into Employment
- 30 young people progressed into Employment
- 122 progressed into Self Employment
- 3 young people progressed into Self Employment
- 53 people were referred to LEO courses
- 3 Social Enterprises were supported

Support Existing Companies to Grow & Improve Performance

**Action 17:** Promote existing schemes to provide access to finance to start-ups and existing companies.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
All Midland LEOs actively promote Micro Finance, Back to Work Enterprise Supports, Enterprise Ireland supports, Intertrade Ireland supports and all LEO supports on an ongoing basis.

A range of channels are used by EI on a continuous basis to make entrepreneurs and existing companies aware of the range of supports available to provide access to finance. These include 1-1 consultations with executives of Enterprise Ireland (regionally & nationally based), briefing seminars, provision of relevant literature, attendance at exhibitions & conferences to promote the supports to new audiences, promotion through social media (regionally & nationally) and via e-zines.

**Action 18:** Enterprise Ireland will work with client companies from the region, including high potential start-ups, to increase participation on programmes and accelerate their capacity to scale up and succeed in international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 20:** InterTradeIreland will promote its Acumen and Elevate programmes in the region. ITI will target 5 Acumen approvals in the Midlands, providing financial assistance to local companies to investigate and pursue export opportunities in Northern Ireland.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Continued promotion of the programme during the period. However, during the period no projects from the region were submitted.

**Action 21:** Through its Trade Accelerator Voucher scheme InterTradeIreland will help companies to identify and break down barriers to trade leading to new export opportunities in Northern Ireland. The Trade Accelerator Voucher can help businesses get advice from participating expert providers in Northern Ireland and Ireland and can be redeemed against the cost of practical advice and expertise on specific issues.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**
Continued promotion of TAVs during the period and this will remain ongoing.

**Action 22:** The Midland LEOs will run the new ACCELERATE step-up programme, which is aimed at helping local small businesses to develop their management capabilities, improve their sustainability and accelerate their growth prospects.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
LEO Westmeath hosted a Management Development Programme in Q1 2017, 11 businesses participated. LEO Offaly and Laois are running a joint Management Development Programme in 2017. There are 10 companies participating from each county.

**Action 24:** The LEOs will deliver procurement seminars and workshops to assist business people tendering for larger contracts.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
LEO Westmeath ran a 'How to Write a Successful Tender' Workshop in Nov 2017 for 12 participants. LEO Laois have scheduled a Procurement Workshop for November 2017. LEO Offaly and LEO Longford address procurement queries through the Mentoring Programme.

**Ensuring the Availability of Work Space for Entrepreneurs**

**Action 25:** The Local Authorities in the Midland region will manage enterprise space and lands in the main towns to facilitate and encourage economic development, whether by start-up companies, expansion of existing businesses or inward investment.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Laois County Council manages a range of enterprise space and lands throughout the County. It is currently undertaking a scheme of improvements in Clonminam Business Park including new signage, road and footpath improvements and improved landscaping. New hot desking and training room facilities are being planned for Portarlington Enterprise Centre, Mountmellick and Mountrath.

Longford County Council has purchased a Building in Longford Town to establish an Innovation & Digital Hub. The building will be designed to accommodate up to 80 employees, employed through a range of start-up and expanding enterprises in the knowledge-based sectors.

Offaly County Council in general and LEO Offaly promotes a range of enterprise space and lands throughout the County. This is via our electronic newsletter which issues monthly to 3,000+ people, quarterly property database, and working with businesses in specific Industrial parks. In 2017, Offaly County Council designed and erected promotional signage in Portarlington Industrial Estate, Botley Lane. It has also improved lighting in the area and is negotiating the sale of a site in the estate. Offaly County Council is also liaising with business owners looking to identify and purchase sites around the county. LEO Offaly through its involvement with the North Offaly Development Fund is assisting with the promotion of Rhode Business Park.

Westmeath Local Enterprise Office markets Mullingar and Castlepollard e-Working centres on an ongoing basis. 6 desks are provided in Mullingar and are used by 2-3 clients per week on average. 3 desks are provided in Castlepollard. The uptake in the Castlepollard centre has been poor and provision of the facility is to be reviewed at the end of 2017. LEO Westmeath market commercial property in Westmeath.
**Action 26:** The Local Authorities will assist businesses in the identification of suitable premises/sites through the development of a Property Database of Industrial and Commercial properties available for sale or let.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Laois County Council has developed a database of available Enterprise lands in the County and it is hosted on "Connect2Laois" website.

Longford: This project will come on stream in Q1 2018

Offaly County Council maintains and updates quarterly a database of available commercial properties and sites for sale or rent. The database is published on www.offaly.ie and the www.localenterprise.ie/offaly

Westmeath County Council has compiled and maintains a database of commercial properties for sale or rent in County Westmeath.

**Action 27:** Westmeath Co. Council and Westmeath LEO will develop and roll-out an awareness campaign to highlight the regional E-Working Centre in Mullingar.

**Lead responsible body:** Westmeath County Council & LEO

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The e-Working Centers have been actively promoted through Social Media, Websites, Newsletters and Community Notice Boards.

**Other Initiatives to Promote & Encourage Entrepreneurship**

**Action 28:** The Local Authorities in the Midland region will each develop and publish a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) to support economic development and local community development in their administrative regions.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
All Local Authorities have published LECPs, with annual reviews being undertaken. Annual work plans and all funding opportunities are aligned to the strategic goals of the LECPs.

**Action 29:** Provide support and assistance to pop up shops and markets in the principal towns of the
region, enabling artists and craft makers to showcase and sell products.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Laois County Council through its REDZ programme "Connect2Laois For Food" held a Christmas Market showcasing Laois Artisan Food Producers on 30th November. Laois County Council provided financial support to the Christmas market organised by the Downtown Portlaoise Traders group held in Portlaoise on 27th November 2017.

Longford County Council supported the second Taste of the Lakelands Festival which was held in Lanesboro, County Longford in October. The festival showcased sixty artisan food producers from across the Midland Region with estimated attendance of 9,000.

Offaly: In addition to the Tullamore Show and National Ploughing Championships, Offaly County Council provided support to an artisan food and craft pop up shop in Birr in H2 2017.

Westmeath Local Authorities supported the following:
- Athlone Municipal District: Drama Arts and Crafts Festival held in May 2017;
- Moate Christmas Market held in Dec 2017.
- Mullingar Municipal District: Westmeath County Council in conjunction with Westmeath Food Network and Westmeath Community Development held a "Picnic in the Park" Family Fun Day and Food Fair in September 2017.
- A 4-day Christmas Market was held in Mullingar in December 2017.
- A total fund of €84,900 was provided by Westmeath County Council to 60 Community Groups for Festival and Events.

**Action 32:** Pilot a Part-time Entrepreneurship initiative, which would involve support for those who wish to develop an enterprise on a part-time basis, outside their normal working hours.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
This initiative is being pursued by LEO Offaly. LEO Offaly ran an initial pilot course last year and is running a second course in H2 2017. Feedback on the course is very positive.

**Action 33:** The ETBs will deliver inputs on entrepreneurship to all participants on relevant Further Education and Training programmes and promote self-employment within the Adult Guidance Service.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Status:** Complete
**Narrative:**
The 2nd iteration on the NFTE programme has now commenced and has been expanded to include target groups in Co Laois. Staff in each centre have undertaken CPD in entrepreneurship training to assist the coordinator in integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum in each centre. A showcase of the business ideas was held on 15th November in Axis Business Park, Tullamore to allow local business people, companies, mentors and volunteer organisation to advise NFTE Participants on their ideas.

Where relevant Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) has delivered inputs.
THEME 2  FOSTERING INNOVATION

Action 36: Enterprise Ireland will publish a call for proposals to increase the capacity in the Technology Gateways network to deliver more applied research and innovation projects for industry.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Status: Complete

Narrative:
The Technology Gateway Network is run by Enterprise Ireland in partnership with Institutes of Technology, which successfully deliver expertise and solutions for industrial partners in a time scale that industry expects.

Gateways:
- Deliver technology solutions for Irish industry close to their market needs.
- Are open access points for industry of all sizes.
- Act as local access points to the wider resources in the Irish research infrastructure.
- Have a proven track record of delivering for industry.
- Completed more than 800 industrial projects since 2013.
- The total value of these projects is more than €9M with 46% of the total directly coming from industry.

As a result of a recent call 3 new gateways were funded in IT Sligo, GMIT and IT Carlow.

Action 37: Enterprise Ireland will hold a national competitive call for proposals for the extension of Campus Incubation facilities.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Status: Complete

Narrative:
In the recent call AIT was granted funding which will double the size of its incubator.

Action 38: IDA Ireland will continue to roll out its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.

Lead responsible body: IDA Ireland

Status: Substantially complete

Narrative:
Work is ongoing and will continue on this action. The IDA Midlands Regional office is working closely with Athlone Institute of Technology and its existing client base to promote the region as a location for RD&I.

Action 39: InterTradeIreland will provide access to its Challenge programme, giving SMEs the opportunity to learn how to develop a culture of innovation using a sustainable and repeatable innovation process.
Lead responsible body: InterTradeIreland

Status: Complete

Narrative:

The Challenge Programme remains open to all eligible companies in the region and work will remain ongoing on this action.

**Action 40:** Enterprise Ireland will facilitate a Regional Innovation Forum to encourage peer to peer interactions and SME–HEI linkages to promote and showcase innovation (people, resources, training and research). HEIs involved in this event will include: Maynooth University (MU) working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC), Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Other responsible bodies: AIT, MU, ITC, WIT

Status: Complete

Narrative:

Athlone Chamber of Commerce has started this programme. The inaugural event was held in Athlone in H2 2017 where approx. 40 CEOs of companies and other organisations came together to discuss economic development activities in the Midlands. It is planned to hold similar gatherings throughout the year and into 2018.

**Action 41:** AIT will increase awareness of – and access to – AIT’s R&D/knowledge resources among enterprise and industry in the region.

Lead responsible body: AIT

Status: Complete

Narrative:

AIT has undertaken the following measures to increase awareness of its R&D facilities and knowledge resources:

- A New Frontiers video was completed and launched in Jul-17.
- A new Research & Innovation section on the AIT website went live in Sep-17.
- New content continues to be created for the Materials Research Institute (MRI), Applied Polymer Technologies (APT), Software Research Institute (SRI), Connected Media Application Design and Delivery (COMAND), Bioscience Research Institute (BRI) and Centre for Industrial Services and Design (CISD) individual websites. This content provides updates on facilities, expertise and case studies of completed industrial interactions.
- A vibrant social media presence is maintained utilising Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Content is regularly refreshed to drive traffic and engagement. A Twitter account for the Midlands Innovation & Research Centre (MIRC) was launched in Aug-17.
- AIT had a stand in the Innovation Arena at the Ploughing Championships in Sep-17.
• Our Research Institutes, Technology Gateways and Innovation and Enterprise team proactively engage with companies, entrepreneurs and start-ups on an ongoing basis, increasing awareness of AIT’s R&D facilities and knowledge resources.

**Action 42:** AIT will increase awareness of MetricIreland to help more companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the HE sector.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
AIT is represented on the Working and Steering Groups of MetricIreland. The Materials Research Institute (MRI including the Centre for Industrial Services and Design (CISD)) promotes MetricIreland through its extensive client engagement within the MedTech sector.
THEME 3  ATTRACTING AND EMBEDDING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

**Action 44**: IDA Ireland will target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland region over the period 2015-2019.

**Lead responsible body**: IDA Ireland

**Status**: Partially complete

**Narrative**: IDA Ireland continues to work on this action and work will remain ongoing on this action. IDA Ireland Midlands Region continues to work with our overseas colleagues for new name companies and with our existing client base, marketing focus continues to include New Name, Expansion and R&D.

**Action 47**: IDA is committed to building a second Advance Technology facility in Athlone in 2017, following on from the completion and occupation of the facility in Garrycastle.

**Lead responsible body**: IDA Ireland

**Status**: Partially complete

**Narrative**: IDA will continue to work on this action. Planning permission has been granted to construct 2 Advance Technology Units of 14,500sq. ft. (ATU’s) at the IDA Business & Technology Park in Athlone

**Action 49**: IDA will drive its Transformation programme with its established base of client companies, through increased client interaction.

**Lead responsible body**: IDA Ireland

**Status**: Substantially complete

**Narrative**: IDA will continue to work on this action. IDA Ireland client companies continue to expand their footprint and mandate of the Irish operation. IDA’s relationship with its clients from operations and regions is to review operations and support investments through incentives such as Training, RD&I, Lean Start. Transformation is aimed at IDA existing client companies in the Midlands region to embed and ensure sustainability of the operation in the region.
Theme 4  Building Sectoral Opportunities

**Action 53:** Develop and market Ireland’s Ancient East, which will help in scaling up the asset base and achieve international “stand-out” for the region based on its comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Tourism Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The development and marketing of Ireland’s Ancient East is a long-term project with work ongoing and investment will continue in the years ahead.

The Ireland’s Ancient East Autumn Domestic Marketing Campaign commenced 15th September 2017 and for 6 weeks showcased Ireland’s Ancient East across various media – TV, Radio, Digital and Out of Home. The campaign was bolstered by online, social, search, PR along with the website www.irelandsancienteast.com highlighting key articles and content for people to explore.

The objective of the campaign was two-fold:
1. Get families with school going children to book a short break in Ireland’s Ancient East during the midterm break.
2. Increase bed nights in Ireland’s Ancient East through more short breaks from adults (45-65) over the autumn period.

The combined campaign will reach approx. 96% of all adults in Ireland equating to 3,312,000 people.

Internationally, Ireland’s Ancient East continues to be promoted by Tourism Ireland across a range of platforms overseas including TV, print and online advertising; on Ireland.com and through social media channels; and at major international consumer and trade fairs. New multi-lingual content has also been added to Ireland.com for H2 2017.

In addition to this marketing activity, Fáilte Ireland has programmed and supported 11 international familiarisation trips with a total of 83 participants for the Midlands Region in H2 2017.

To further develop the tourism asset base for Ireland’s Ancient East, a new capital grants scheme was launched on October 12th. With €1m being earmarked for the initiative, heritage and visitor attractions throughout Ireland’s Ancient East are being invited to submit their ideas to improve the quality of physical interpretation at their sites. The scheme will remain open for applications until mid-January 2018.

**Action 54:** Promote the Lakelands as part of Discover Ireland home holiday campaign.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
In H2 2017 an allocation of funding was announced in the Budget to support the development and promotion of a new “Midlands” proposition to succeed the Lakelands and sit alongside the existing national tourism brands. Failte Ireland is planning workstreams for 2018 to finalise the new brand proposition and scope a new marketing campaign for the region.

**Action 55:** As part of the Ireland’s Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways tourism offerings, work with clusters of tourism businesses, mostly in the accommodation and food sector, to improve their ability to generate international sales and food experience for visitors.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Tourism Ireland, Industry

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
As reported in H1, IAE’s main approach to working with businesses in 2017 is through one-to-one industry engagements with a broad range of tourism stakeholders and businesses from across the 4 counties. Businesses include attractions, accommodation and activity providers. The focus of the process is to assist them to grow their international business and revenue, align their experience with Ireland’s Ancient East and ground the brand in their offering. Many key attractions have reported strong growth in 2017 including Athlone Castle, Hill of Uisneach, Birr Castle and Tullamore Dew.

Additional tourism enterprise supports delivered/scheduled in H2 for the Midlands area include: Excellence in Customer Service, Increasing Sales, IAE Champions Programme, Selling Tourism Experiences and best practice in interpretation.

In response to supporting the food tourism sector, Ireland’s Ancient East launched a key initiative in H2. A new programme has been rolled out entitled “Developing Ireland’s Ancient East In-Holiday Food Experiences”. This programme is aimed at businesses which are primarily food businesses but have already (or are developing) a visitor experience. FI will work with them to define their experience in line with IAE brand and to find a route to market for their offering. 20 food businesses attended a 1-day workshop in Portlaoise on 19th September 2017 and this will be followed by 1:1 mentoring and a sales workshop.
In tandem with developing this programme IAE has produced a stand-alone guide, “A Guide for Food and Drink Visitor Experiences” which is aimed at assisting businesses to align to Ireland’s Ancient East brand and to raise their profile within the brand marketing campaign. The Guide is available to download from the Fáilte Ireland website.

Fáilte Ireland will continue to roll out support programmes for the tourism industry in the Region.

**Action 56:** Develop Destination Athlone to make Athlone one of the top five centres for short breaks in Ireland and bring a higher number of visitors to the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Westmeath County Council

**Other responsible bodies:** Athlone Chamber, Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland

**Status:** Partially complete
**Narrative:**
Work will continue on this action. The Destination Athlone Initiative is supported by Westmeath County Council. Contributions to the amount of €30,000 was provided as a support to the marketing company. The Chief Executive, Mayor and District Manager are part of a Destination Athlone Team which meets on a quarterly basis.

**Action 57:** Support a suite of festivals that complement Ireland’s Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways offerings.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Waterways Ireland, Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Fáilte Ireland has agreed to establish a funding agreement with Local Authorities (LAs) to drive the implementation of tourism focused festivals and participative events. This commitment to a strengthened role for LAs has been reflected in the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and more recently in Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development (2017) which identified the need for Fáilte Ireland (amongst a number of bodies) to ‘provide practical support to Local Authorities in the development of comprehensive tourism strategies and support collaborative approaches at Local Authority and community levels’.

This new funding arrangement will replace Fáilte Ireland’s existing annual Regional Festivals and Participative Events Programme and will commence in 2018.

Longford County Council - Second Annual Taste of the Lakelands Festival run in Lanesboro, Co. Longford profiling 60 artisan food producers. Estimated visitor numbers 9,000.

Offaly County Council through its work with Offaly Local Development Company have provided LEADER funding to support key festivals and events in the County. In addition, Offaly Tourism Marketing Group is implementing a strategic marketing plan which includes an objective to improve collaboration between event organisers and a good spread of festivals and events throughout the year. Offaly County Council showcased over 30 artisan food and craft producers at both the Tullamore Show (60,000 attendance) and National Ploughing Championships (286,000 attendance).

New funding arrangements will be in place to support festivals from 2018.

**Action 59:** The Local Authorities will maintain and manage local tourism attractions on an on-going basis.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Local Authorities will continue work in relation to this action into the future.
Laois County Council (LCC) are working with voluntary agencies to improve and develop tourism attractions in Co. Laois which is in turn attracting more visitors. LCC are working with Fáilte Ireland to support and roll out the Ireland’s Ancient East Initiative promoting historical sites and will continue to work with the relevant State Agencies to enhance the local tourist attractions in compliance with the provisions of the County Development Plan in particular the Rock of Dunamaise, the Old Fort Protector Site and the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail.

Longford County Council continues to support the development of the tourism sector in County Longford particularly in the provision of infrastructure that facilitates the visitor. Offaly County Council in collaboration with the operators of the key tourism attractions are developing proposals to enhance the visitor experience.

Belvedere House Park and Gardens is wholly owned and managed by Westmeath County Council and has a significant role as a tourism and leisure asset. Its customer profile is primarily from the Domestic Tourism Market with most of its overseas visitors coming from Britain, USA, Germany and Italy. 2016 visitor numbers of 127,000 showed an increase of over 11% on 2015 numbers. Many events such as treasure hunts, bat walks, sporting events, cultural, craft & music events are held throughout the year.

Athlone Arts & Tourism is a management company established by Westmeath County Council in 2014. The company manages three of Athlone’s landmark cultural tourism assets; Athlone Castle Visitor Centre & Museum, Luan Gallery and Abbey Road Artists’ Studios. The company plays a crucial role in the development, promotion, appreciation and engagement of the cultural landscape of Athlone, Westmeath and the greater Midland Region.

Athlone Castle is an engaging, fun and unique all year-round family attraction housing eight individual galleries, each depicting a different aspect of life in Athlone down through the ages. As the hub of visual arts activity in the County, Luan Gallery plays a vital role regionally and nationally by presenting a wide range of art exhibitions, projects and installations. The aim of the space is to promote a dynamic contemporary visual art programme of both established and emerging artists from home and abroad.

Abbey Road Artists’ Studios are in a unique building which has had many different chapters since its creation in the 1800s. Originally built as a famine workhouse in 1841, the former town fire station now houses four individual artists’ studios as well as a large multipurpose upstairs space suitable for a variety of community cultural events including exhibitions, performances, workshops, classes and creative seminars.

**Action 60:** Invest €4 million in the Midlands region in 2015 as part of the development of the Dublin-Galway cycle route, for the section between Mullingar and Athlone.

**Lead responsible body:** Westmeath County Council

**Other responsible bodies:** DTTS,

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Work in relation to this action will continue.
The Galway to Dublin National Cycleway scheme is at various stages of development. In Westmeath this scheme is constructed from the Meath/Westmeath County Border to Whitegates in Athlone, 66km. In 2015 Westmeath County Council opened the ‘Old Rail Trail’, which is a 40km stretch of purpose built off-road walking and cycling facility, connecting the towns of Athlone and Mullingar. In 2016, this was extended by 2km to Whitegates in Athlone. Major Trailheads were established in Garrycastle, Moate, Castletown Station and Newbrook in Mullingar. These include car parking facilities. Parking was also provided at Tully and Streamstown. Bespoke signage was erected along the cycleway, containing information map boards, railway station signs, courtesy signs, tourist signs and directional signs. Arterial direction and tourist’s roads signs were also erected on feeder routes to the cycleway. Traffic counters have been erected at several locations along the route. In Athlone, 167,000 users were recorded from February to August 2017. As part of the works for the Old Rail Trail, Westmeath County Council carried out conservation works to protected structures at both Moate and Castletown Stations. Westmeath County Council also erected bespoke parapet railings along the masonry arch bridges.

In 2017, Westmeath County Council developed the Environmental Impact Statement and Compulsory Purchase Order for the proposed Athlone Pedestrian and Cycleway Bridge across the Shannon. An Bord Pleanala held an Oral hearing in August 2017 and it has been granted permission. The current objective of Westmeath County Council is to extend the cycleway from Whitegates in Athlone to Athlone Castle.

**Action 61:** Offaly and Laois Local Authorities will continue to work with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte to develop an off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains on part of the Coillte landbank.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly & Laois County Councils

**Other responsible bodies:** Coillte, Fáilte Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Offaly & Laois County Councils were successful in their application for €1m funding towards the development of the first phase of the off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains on part of the Coillte landbank. The procurement phase is underway and the request for tender has issued.

Offaly and Laois Local Authorities will continue to work with Coillte to deliver subsequent phases of the Mountain Bike Trail.

**Action 63:** Progress the development and promotion of Greenway and Blueways to capitalise on the centrality of the Midlands, linking the River Shannon, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and River Barrow.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Other responsible bodies:** DTTAS, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Local Authorities will continue work in relation to this action into the future.
Laois: An application was made by Waterways Ireland for the following development in 2017. The development of a multi-use shared leisure route (Blueway) approximately 115 km in length on the exiting navigation tow path, which is a National Waymarked Trail. This will include tailored surface finishes, information, directional and safety signage and all other associated ancillary works. The route commences in Lowtown, County Kildare, passes through County Laois and finishes in St Mullins, County Carlow. Approximately 47km of the route is in County Kildare, 16km in County Laois and 52km in County Carlow. The proposal will involve works to or within the curtilage of the following protected structures; Fisherstown Bridge (RPS 562), Courtwood Bridge (RPS 834), Grattan Aqueduct (RPS 593), Vicarstown Canal Warehouse 1 (RPS 606), Vicarstown Canal Warehouse 2 (RPS 607), Vicarstown Canal Warehouse 3 (RPS 608), Vicarstown Bridge (RPS 594), Camac Aqueduct (RPS 603), Ballymanus Bridge (RPS 838) and Maganey Bridge (Laois RPS 486). An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) have been prepared in respect of the project and are submitted with the application.

Longford: The extension works of the Royal Canal Greenway are continuing and works are expected to be completed in Q2 2018 providing full and safe cycling and walking access from the Westmeath border to the end of the canal At Clondra, County Longford.

Offaly County Council has developed an initial phase of 4km of the Grand Canal Greenway from Tullamore towards Lough Boora Discovery Park. OCC continues to work with Waterways Ireland on the 77km Grand Canal GreenWay and with Bord na Mona and Coillte to implement the development of a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland. Westmeath: A 375m off road cycleway extension was provided to Mullally’s Point on the shores of Lough Owel that completed the cycleway link from Mullingar to the lake. It provides a physical link for Lough Owel to connect to the key trails in the county, the Royal Canal Greenway (32Km), the Old Rail Trail (Mullingar to Athlone)40Km, and the future Dublin Galway long distance cycleway. Physical infrastructure at the trail heads is being improved and new signage installed content is being developed for a promotional campaign to run in spring 2018.

Manufacturing

**Action 64:** Enterprise Ireland will target manufacturing companies in the Midlands region to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a continuing key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.
**Action 67:** Progress the development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus (MMTC) - which will focus on Advanced/Discrete/Additive Manufacturing technologies, Industrial/Product Design and ‘Smart Factories.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Other responsible bodies:** Industry, regional/Local Agencies, Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
On 7th September 2017, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, TD, together with the Minister for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development, John Halligan, TD, launched four new world-class Science Foundation Ireland Research Centres including the CONFIRM Centre for Smart Manufacturing which is led by University of Limerick and in which AIT is a partner. CONFIRM’s vision is to transform and grow Irish manufacturing by integrating intelligence within products, machines, production systems and supply chains. To achieve this vision, CONFIRM will undertake fundamental scientific and engineering research to deliver disruptive innovations in digital manufacturing. CONFIRM will also develop dedicated testbeds and prototype lines for validation of CONFIRM’s technologies.

AIT is involved in or leading a significant number of the Centre’s proposed Work Packages and Targeted Projects.

In H2 2017, AIT continues to progress the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus R&D agenda in collaboration with research/HEI and industry partners.

**Action 68:** Enterprise Ireland and AIT will host an Innovation workshop with a focus on Manufacturing firms (including Med-Tech) in the second half of 2015.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland,

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
On 6th September 2017, AIT’s Enterprise-Ireland funded Applied Polymer Technologies Gateway hosted a joint event with IBEC’s MedTech and Engineering Division and other members of the EMD Ireland Technology Gateway Cluster (a consortium of six of Enterprise Ireland’s Technology Gateways operating within the engineering, materials and design sector including APT).

The event showcased the capability of APT and the other Technology Gateways relevant to the MedTech and Engineering sectors in Ireland. The event included industry case studies and a comprehensive overview of the many ways in which companies can engage with Technology Gateways as well as providing information about the various funding mechanisms available from Enterprise Ireland and supports available from IBEC’s MedTech and Engineering Division.
The event took place in Athlone and was attended by over 90 representatives from SMEs and multinational companies. Speakers included Dr Seán Lyons, APT centre manager, Mr. Morgan Tierney of Teleflex, Dr. Paddy Byrne, Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateway Management Team and Dr. Sinead Keogh, Director of the IBEC’s MedTech and Engineering Division. The event was well covered in local and national media.

Food Sector

**Action 69:** Enterprise Ireland will target, with its new company engagement model, food companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a continuing key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region (including food sector companies), provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 70:** To ensure a good quality pipeline of food entrepreneurs, Enterprise Ireland will run a pre-Food Works clinic in the region in 2015 and in 2016.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs, Bord Bia and Teagasc

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Food works currently does not run a pre-Food works regional events. The managers of the Food Works programme meet individually with each prospective food entrepreneur and progress them to the full programme as appropriate.

**Action 72:** Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia will facilitate collaboration/co-opetition on new product development and promote synergistic opportunities between large and small food companies in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies** Bord Bia
Status: Partially complete

Narrative:
This action will continue into the future. The Food Division of EI has been working with Bord Bia to progress this Action.

**Action 73:** Review the demand for food infrastructure, such as test food kitchens, to identify potential gaps based on defined industry needs, including that of micro food enterprises.

**Lead responsible body:** Local Authorities

**Other responsible bodies:** CECs, AIT, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs

Status: Partially complete

Narrative:
Through REDZ funding, Offaly County Council provided €50,000 assistance to Ferbane Food Campus, enabling the creation of three additional incubation units. LEO Offaly continues to work closely with start-up and expanding food companies to identify needs and possible gaps in infrastructure.

**Action 74:** The LEOs will target and increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Other responsible bodies:** Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and Super Valu

Status: Substantially complete

Narrative:
LEO Laois and Offaly delivered a joint Food Academy programme in H2 2017. Ongoing promotion of Food Academy programme is being undertaken. Assistance is also given to start-up food companies to prepare them for Food Academy.

**Action 76:** Assist in the development of the agri food and agri tech sectors within the region in line with Harvest 2020 objectives and the Rural Development Programme.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Development Companies

Status: Substantially complete

Narrative:
The four Local Development companies continue to roll out the LEADER programme in the region.

To date Laois have received two full application for funding for new food businesses and are working with 3 new businesses to progress applications.
In Laois REDZ funding was received to deliver an innovative food training and mentoring project to all aspects of the artisan food industry both in food manufacturing and food service. There are 30 businesses involved in this programme which is a partnership between Laois Partnership Co, LEO Laois and Laois County Council.

**Action 77:** AIT will host an annual event which will showcase regional artisan foods.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
AIT continues to have very strong engagement with local food producers, showcasing regional artisan foods in the Training Restaurant and Training Kitchens on an ongoing basis. The annual showcasing event hosts staff from AIT, along with local artisan food producers and prominent local hoteliers and restaurateurs, who will be invited to see their foods on the menu.

To better understand the range and impact of regional foods, students from the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure have also undertaken a number of site visits, including foraging for mint, rosehip, wild pea and elderberry in Ballincard House in Co Offaly with Wild Food Mary, meeting Carrig Brewing’s Head Brewer Francesco Sottomano for an in-depth discussion on the brewing industry in Ireland and the fermentation process and also meeting Una Flynn at Cakes by Una in Ballymahon, Co Longford. In October, students from the BA (Hons) in Culinary Entrepreneurship degree programme - which, among other topics focuses on regional food production - showcased their new food products at AIT. Two graduates of this programme (2017) were immediately employed in Carroll’s Cuisine, Co Offaly upon completion of their course, working in Quality and New Product Development roles.

**Internationally Traded Services and Software**

**Action 78:** Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist Internationally Traded Services and Software companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a continuing key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region, through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more.

Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.
**Action 80**: Enterprise Ireland will continue to work on an individual basis with the companies in the Mobile Telecommunications cluster to support employment growth and development of their export market plans.

**Lead responsible body**: Enterprise Ireland  
**Status**: Complete

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region, including the mobile Telco space, to grow is a key continuing focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region, through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 82**: Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist relevant construction companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body**: Enterprise Ireland  
**Status**: Complete

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region, including construction companies, to grow is a key continuing focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region, through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Energy and Sustainability**

**Action 83**: Progress the development of a Regional Energy Hub in the Midland Region.

**Lead responsible body**: Offaly County Council  
**Status**: Complete

**Narrative:**
Offaly County Council is working with the North Offaly Development Fund on a feasibility study to explore the opportunities for a Regional Energy Hub. The Feasibility Study issued in H2 2017.

**Action 85:** Promote and assist the delivery costs savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for businesses and public-sector organisations in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** SEAI

**Other responsible bodies:** Midland Energy Agency, other public bodies

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
SEAI delivered private sector and public-sector energy training across Ireland in H2 during 2017. SEAI also provided targeted grant programmes to the dairy farm sector and for smart lighting for SMEs.

**Action 86:** Work to develop and promote Sustainable Energy Communities model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars.

**Lead responsible body:** SEAI

**Other responsible bodies:** Midland Energy Agency, other relevant bodies

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The SEC Programme continued to grow with 134 members in the SEC Network to the end of 2017. SEAI provided a dedicated SEC Mentor to this region to support interested communities’ participation in the model and to work with early adopter communities. In this region, in H2, 8 new Sustainable Energy Community members joined the SEC Network. The National SEC Network Event was hosted in Athlone in November 2017 with 150 attendees alongside an electric vehicle demonstration event.

**Action 87:** As part of the alignment of Further Education and Training provision with local and future skills needs in the region, ETBs will identify skills gaps and develop tailored training solutions to enable the region to maximise economic benefits from the emerging Green Economy.

**Lead responsible body:** ETBs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Laois Offaly ETB:
A pilot programme is in the planning phase with private training provider, METAC in Mountrath that is exploring training in construction-related Green Energy from compliance with Building Control Amendment Regulations (BCAR) to construction of energy-saving housing (including more
economically viable alternatives to passive housing). It is planned to initiate these programmes in 2018, under the new Contract Training Framework. Engagement of employers in construction – and related sectors – is ongoing and LOETB will provide upskilling opportunities for current employees to meet skills deficits in the Green Economy.

LOETB continues to explore, with Offaly Local Development Co, Teagasc and rural communities in west Offaly the potential for sustainable utilisation of land, particularly cutaway bogs. Local community planning processes – funded and supported by Offaly Local Development Company - will seek to explore the feasibility of such initiatives.

Longford Westmeath ETB:

LWETB is a partner on the Regional Skills Forum where it responds to requests for specific training programmes.

**Action 88:** Develop Bioenergy Ireland to supply biomass for a range of customers, including power plants, CHP plants, etc.

**Lead responsible body:** Bord na Mona

**Other responsible bodies:** Coillte

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Bord na Mona formally launched its new Bioenergy business at the Ploughing Championship in September 2017. This new business unit will source sustainable biomass both in Ireland and abroad to provide green energy and support green jobs.

**Action 89:** Research the growing of suitable biomass on Bord na Mona peatland for potential use in Anaerobic Digestion plants for energy generation.

**Lead responsible body:** Bord na Mona

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**
Bord na Mona currently has several growing trials that are designed to assess the potential to grow certain crops on cutaway peatlands. It is envisaged that these trials will continue for the medium term.

In addition, Bord na Mona has worked with other stakeholders to review the BogFor project which relates to the growing of forestry on cutaway lands. This review has been completed.
Improving engagement between employers and skills providers

**Action 92:** AIT will task an office holder with responsibility for driving AIT’s engagement with enterprise and coordinating AIT-related Actions and deliverables under this Action Plan for Jobs for the Midlands.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
AIT tasked the Director of Innovation and Enterprise at AIT with responsibility for driving AIT’s engagement with enterprise and coordinating AIT-related Actions and deliverables under this Action Plan for Jobs.

**Action 93:** The ETBs will work in collaboration with a number of new partners and local employers in 2015 to develop and deliver targeted responses to local skills and employment needs in areas such as Retail, Hospitality, Manufacturing, Marketing, Languages and IT. These partners include Fasttrack to IT (FIT) in the ICT and Engineering sectors, and SOLAS (developing a Traineeship programme in Hospitality targeting 18-24-year olds under the Youth Guarantee). These approaches will be piloted in 2015 with a view to further expanding provision in 2016.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Other responsible bodies:** FIT, SOLAS, Hospitality sector employers, DSP/Intreo

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**
The ETBs will continue to work on this action into the future.

**LOETB:** In order to further enhance Hospitality as a key skills cluster for the region, LOETB is adopting a two-pronged approach to provision in this sector. The Traineeship model will be utilised to prepare learners for progression into employment in front of house, bar and food occupations, housekeeping and waiting. Furthermore, we will utilise the PLC programme in Hospitality to engage and support learners to access third level programmes geared towards the occupations in this sector that require higher education. The programme, as well as offering modules at Level 5 and availing of LOETB’s MOU with Athlone IT, presents the learner with supported self-directed learning and study skills opportunities to prepare for the transition to third level.

LOETB is also providing, in partnership with industry and local employers, 18 Traineeships in 2018 across 8 Skills Clusters, which generally illustrate where employment outcomes may be attainable in Laois and Offaly:

I. Engineering (Mechanical) [Welding / Fabrication Traineeship * 2/ Motor Technology / Engineering Pilot Traineeship]
II. Science and Technology [Bio Pharm / Medtech Traineeship]
III. Health, Family other Social Services [Healthcare Assistant Traineeships]
IV. Built Environment [Construction Skills for Employment Traineeship * 6]
V. Hairdressing, Beauty & Complementary Therapies [Beauty Therapy Traineeship (focus on Spa Industry)]

VI. Sport and Leisure [Outdoor Education Instructor Traineeship]

VII. Tourism / Food and Beverage [Hospitality Traineeship * 2]

VIII. Business Administration [Legal and Medical Administration Traineeship and Office Admin Traineeship]

These skills clusters have been identified through analysis of data available to LOETB from a variety of sources but primarily SLMRU and the Midland Regional Skills Forum as well as a collaborative approach to education and training provision that encompasses industry representative bodies, local and regional employers, DEASP at local and national level, Seetec and Turas Nua, Laois and Offaly County Councils, local partnership companies and the wider community and voluntary sectors. They reflect clusters where employers are experiencing skills shortages, clusters where DEASP and Jobpath client profiles may provide a match, clusters that have been identified as integral to the economic development of the region.

The training facility that will host the Bio-pharma / Medtech Traineeship has progressed to planning stage and will incorporate two Craft Apprenticeships in Tullamore.

**LWETB:** Has delivered programmes in most of these areas. Currently developing a hospitality traineeship with many employers and have run a number of make it in manufacturing programmes.

**Action 94:** The ETBs will develop local course design processes to reflect direct employer involvement in ITN, curriculum development, pilot and evaluation to meet the needs of employers, learners, jobseekers and priority cohorts so that processes are available and are embedded into and adhere to the relevant Awarding Body quality system.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs,

**Other responsible bodies:** Local employers, DSP/Intreo

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**

ETBs will continue to work on this action into the future.

**LOETB:** LOETB is continuing to work in partnership with employers to develop programmes to meet the occupational skills shortages and to support employers to upskill/reskill current employees. One area of specific need is certainly Lean Construction and LOETB will promote and facilitate provision of training with employees as well as employers in this area.

LOETB’s Employer Engagement FET Working Group has identified and started to implement the following actions that initially focus on enhancing service provision to employers already engaged with LOETB:

- Develop Employer Engagement Database – and a system to share information regarding employer engagement among appropriate staff ensuring that all contact and outcomes are recorded and duplication avoided
- Continue to engage with employers in the development of traineeship models that are most appropriate for both employees and trainees
• Incremental development of Training Needs Analysis to identify the training needs and skills gaps specific to Laois and Offaly employers/sectors. Initial TNAs with Hospitality, Engineering and Med-Tech Sectors
• Begin awareness raising campaign focussing on opportunities for employers to benefit from engagement with LOETB; initially focussing on Workplace Development / Traineeship / and Apprenticeship
• Develop a Toolkit to support employers, which outlines the training and development opportunities for staff across all stages of their employment and the expectations on employers who engage in various LOETB programmes - from work experience to work placement to traineeship to apprenticeship

**LWETB:** Has delivered a number of programmes which reflect direct employer involvement. LWETB is looking at developing a career traineeship in two sectors, but this will be based on "buy in" from Employers. Have submitted a robotics apprenticeship proposal to the apprenticeship council for consideration. May result in a collaboration with the AIT.

**Delivering Courses to Address Identified Skills Needs**

**Action 95:** The Education & Training Boards (ETBs) will increase provision in the STEM subject areas.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Other responsible bodies:** Local employers, Athlone IT, Carlow IT, Limerick IT

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
LOETB: LOETB have planned new provision for STEM subjects at Level 4. With the current low rate of unemployment, courses at the lower levels are required to assist learners with low educational attainment to progress to courses at the higher levels which will lead them to employment opportunities or third level progression opportunities.

As part of a revised cooperation agreement between LOETB and IT Carlow, LOETB have commenced the process of mapping FET STEM courses to Year 1 and 2 of the equivalent HE courses. This will better align current and future LOETB Further Education and Training Programmes with IT Carlow Higher Education Programmes, enhance current pathways between both organisations, and identify areas that require further development to better equip learners for HE.

**LWETB:** Additional STEM subject areas have been added into some LWETB programmes.

**Action 96:** The ETBs will deliver short term courses in security, retail, hospitality, and generic employment skills to target vacancies in the local economy.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
ETBs will continue to work in relation to this action into the future.
**LOETB** focusses primarily on learners – both unemployed and employed – gaining the skills and competencies to enhance their employability, career advancement and quality of life. It aims to provide an integrated service for the people of the region, working closely with early school-leavers, people with disabilities, local communities, those furthest from the labour market, job seekers, long term unemployed people, people in employment wishing to upskill or reskill, and with local industry and employers.

LOETB’s core aim is to facilitate and support people to gain the skills required for employment and simultaneously respond to the skills deficits being experienced by employers in Laois and Offaly. The current labour market landscape and the level of need presented by prospective learners often requires a range of integrated interventions of varying durations and skill levels to support the learner’s capacity to gain employment. All provision with employment outcomes include provision of training in generic employment skills as well as personal development and mental resilience training.

Learner supports are also provided across programmes – e.g. Maths for Trades that provides maths supports for Apprentices.

Traineeships offer the opportunity for the integration of skills development modules with substantial work placement that offers the employer ample time to provide work-based mentoring and training and offers the learner an opportunity to illustrate his skills and potential value to the business.

**LWETB**: Has also delivered programmes in these areas.

### Action 98: Skillnets will continue to fund groups of companies with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees, as well as free training to job-seekers.

**Lead responsible body**: Skillnets

**Status**: Complete

**Narrative:**

Action will continue into the future and Skillnets has continued to fund the development of workforce skills in the Midlands region through the provision of subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees, as well as free training to job-seekers. Skillnets Networks delivered training to over 500 companies based in the Midlands Region between Q2-Q4 2017.

Four Networks are based in the region:
- First Polymer Skillnet
- MBE Skillnet (Midlands, Border, East)
- Space Industry Skillnet
- Taste4Success Skillnet

Training delivered in the region between Q2-Q4 2017 was across all sectors including technology, food and beverage, retail, manufacturing, hospitality, healthcare and agriculture.

Over 1,500 trainees in the Midlands have undertaken training through Skillnets networks between Q2-Q4 2017. The training availed of by enterprises in the region is highly diverse, ranging from short programmes in herd fertility, injection moulding, automation, importing and exporting and digital sales, to accredited programme in healthcare support, project management and supervisory
Improving Participation in Work & Training

**Action 102:** IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will continue to collaborate with the Dept. of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland, D/SP & SOLAS

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
IDA will continue to work on this action
Ongoing with IDA Ireland client companies and new FDI investors into the Midlands Region.
THEME 6  BUILDING BUSINESS NETWORKS

**Action 103:** Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will facilitate the establishment of an industry-led CEO Forum in the Midlands to connect Irish and foreign owned companies in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** IDA Ireland in collaboration with enterprise sector and business representatives

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
This action will continue into the future. Athlone chamber have taken the lead on this initiative with the first meeting (40 CEOs) held in Athlone in H2.

**Action 104:** Regular meetings of local public enterprise partners will be held at regional level to discuss innovative approaches to collaboration to harness the enterprise potential of the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** IDA Ireland, Midland Local Authorities, LEOs, AIT and other relevant public bodies

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Meetings with Local Authorities are taking place on a regular basis where approaches to economic development are discussed.

**Action 106:** As part of their Global Sourcing initiative, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will work together to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. The agencies will ensure that their clients in the region, where appropriate, are engaged in this initiative.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Partially complete

**Narrative:**
This action is ongoing and work will continue.

EI Global Sourcing Event will take place in Dublin, Limerick and Sligo on May 16th & 17th 2018. IDA Ireland has compiled a company listing for the ‘save the date’ email which will be followed by an official invite in the coming months for the Sligo event. In addition to companies from the NW Region, companies from the Midlands Region will be invited to the Event in Sligo.
IDA Ireland is working closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. This is reflected by the Global Sourcing Trade Mission which has taken place.

**Action 107:** Introduce relevant Enterprise Ireland clients to potential FDI investors to highlight possible collaborations for those investors if locating in Ireland.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
This action is ongoing and work will continue. FDI investors visiting the Midlands Region are hosted by Enterprise Ireland companies cross various sectors to learn about their business and product offering and to form relationships.
THEME 7  Marketing the Region as an attractive place to live

Marketing the Region

**Action 109:** Appoint a dedicated official at middle management level to co-ordinate the efforts of the four Local Authorities in providing a cohesive regional focus to the Authorities’ activities under the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs, acting as an exemplar to other regions.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Planning Policy & Research Officer in place for Midlands Local Authorities

**Action 110:** Strengthen the marketing of MidlandsIreland.ie and continue to support the MidlandsIreland.ie website to promote the region across the straplines of Tourism, Enterprise, Living and Learning, in the interests of regional economic development. An annual work plan will be implemented across these different straplines.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Other responsible bodies:** Relevant agencies and industry

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The Midland Local Authorities supported the continuation of the MidlandsIreland.ie website in 2017 through the funding of the Planning Policy & Research Officer for the Midlands region.

**Action 111:** While maintaining a whole-of-region approach to enterprise support and job creation, the Local Authorities will develop a suite of branding initiatives to attract and locate businesses to the Midlands. These include, for example: - Guide to Doing Business in Laois; - Invest in Mullingar; - Westmeath Business Promotion Fund; - Doing Business in Offaly Guide; - Marketing Strategy for lands in Council ownership in Longford; - Strategy to enhance tourism and other enterprise potential in Offaly; - Destination Athlone.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Laois County Council launched the new ”Connect2Laois” website and brochure in October 2017. The website and brochure are centered around marketing Laois as a place to do business. The website contains numerous networks - a local business network and a diaspora network. It also hosts a database of lands available for enterprise development in Laois and portrays key location towns in the County. Laois County Council is currently devising a ”Connect2Laois” newsletter which will complement the website and brochure and further promote the enterprise potential of the County.
Longford County Council continues to promote the County as a location for inward investment. It is currently involved in marketing the potential use of several large industrial buildings for businesses that might be attracted to locate in the County.

Offaly County Council (through funding from Dept. of An Taoiseach) developed and launched an Offaly Diaspora Strategy, 2 promotional videos and a social media advert. The new marketing collateral is available on the This is Offaly Youtube Channel and will be promoted via social media through targeted campaigns in H2 2017 and H1 2018.

Westmeath County Council continued to work with the Chambers of Commerce and industry to promote enterprise and investment in the County. Under an SLA agreement with Mullingar Chamber the following initiatives were supported: Mullingar.ie website; A Digital Brochure to attract inward investment to Mullingar; The Renewal of the Purple Flag.

The Council continues to work with industry in Athlone to progress the Destination Athlone Initiative. A Business Promotion Fund of €60,000 was provided for 2017 and was expended under the auspices of the Economic, Enterprise and Tourism SPC. Initiatives supported in 2017 were; Contribution towards a National Life Science and Engineering Expo held in Mullingar; Contribution towards an Environmental Sciences Association of Ireland Conference held in Athlone; Contribution towards premises for an Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility in Mullingar.

**Action 112:** Attract at least one additional major employer to the region in the short-term through a collaborative approach on the part of industry

**Lead responsible body:** Midlands Chambers

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The Chambers actively supports the attraction of additional employers to the region, through regular participation in IDA and EI itineraries.

**Action 113:** Work with Film Offaly to promote Offaly as a destination for film production, with benefits to local professional, people and businesses.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Film Offaly is the county’s flagship project for commissioning and promoting high quality filmmaking in the county. The Film Offaly/Filmbase bursary is awarded annually and promotes the unique landscape and historic architecture of the county. Many of the award-winning films have gone on to win prestigious awards internationally.

LEO Offaly/Offaly County Council has identified Film Offaly/Offaly Film Commission as a key sector for economic development. Film Offaly has been highlighted in new marketing materials - including the Sunday Business Post supplement, this is Offaly campaign and the Offaly Diaspora Strategy Document.
Place making

Action 114: The Midlands Local Authorities will commence a regeneration programme to enhance the streetscape in the main towns and villages.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Status: Complete

Narrative:
ERDF Urban Development Fund (Gateway Towns):
The Part 8 planning process for the Athlone €3 million Street Enhancement Project was conducted in 2017 and the project is due to be completed in 2018. Following a period of public consultation, a Part 8 for the €3 Mullingar Street Enhancement scheme was approved at the October 2017 meeting of Westmeath County Council. The Tullamore public realm project is also due for completion in 2018.

Town and Village Renewal:
All Midland based town and village renewal projects which received funding are progressing, Laois was awarded c.€983k towards development in 12 villages, Longford was awarded c.€630k towards development in 10 towns and villages; Offaly was awarded c.€300k towards development in 3 towns and villages and Westmeath was awarded c.€590k towards development in 10 towns and villages.

Action 116: Work with local businesses in the Gateway and principal towns to apply for the Purple Flag, enhancing the region’s reputation as a place to work, live or visit.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Status: Partially complete

Narrative:
Westmeath County Council has supported Mullingar Chamber of Commerce to successfully retain the prestigious Purple Flag award for Mullingar for 2017.

Action 117: The Midland Local Authorities will continue to develop comprehensive programmes for Culture Night and Heritage Week across the region.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Status: Complete

Narrative:
Laois and Longford County Councils are an active partner in leading out Culture Night and Heritage week and had a comprehensive programme for both in 2017.

Offaly: Culture Night Offaly 2017 opened its doors to 30 incredible art and cultural events taking place across the county from Birr to Edenderry, Tullamore to Banagher, and everywhere in between, attracting an audience of close to 2000 people. SWITCH ON CULTURE was about local people in the
county experiencing music, exhibitions, film, photography, puppetry, poetry readings, street entertainment and storytelling.

Culture Night Offaly presented the very best of the county culture in historic venues in Leap Castle and Charleville Castle, in Birr Castle Science and Garden Centre, to Lough Boora Discovery park visitor centre, Tullamore D.E.W centre, JJ Hough’s in Banagher, Birr Theatre and Arts centre, at the Midlands Regional Hospital, a full programme in Tullamore Community Arts Centre, in libraries across the county as well as outdoor community events.

Westmeath: During Westmeath Heritage Week a total of 50 events at various locations (24) across the county. Most of the events (39) were free and there were many family friendly events (18) several of which were outdoor events (14). Several of the buildings open during Heritage Week are not usually/ not always accessible to the public (e.g. Tullynally Castle, Kilbixy Church, Moate Museum). A of number guest speakers travelled to the county to give talks.

The Eight Westmeath Culture Night held on Friday September 22nd, 2017 comprised 39 scheduled events, and several additional unscheduled pop-up events took place across the county: There was a range of participating venues, spaces and places where events and activities took place – throughout Culture Night (and day) this year. These included municipal spaces, such as arts centres and libraries, open air sites and locations such as courtyards and town squares, private artistic spaces and heritage sites.

**Action 118:** Construct new Library in Portlaoise. This €3.2m development in the Main Street area of Portlaoise, will be a very significant regeneration of a vacant property

**Lead responsible body:** Laois County Council

**Status:** Partially complete

**Narrative:**
Portlaoise Library: This project has received approval under the Part 8 planning process in 2017. Revised overall cost estimate is €5m (including site cost and fit-out costs). Design work is underway and the project is due for completion in 2020. The project is partially complete.

**Action 119:** Refurbish Portarlington and Edgeworthstown Libraries.

**Lead responsible body:** Laois & Longford County Councils

**Status:** Substantially complete

**Narrative:**
Portarlington Library is open after the refurbishment; this new library has experienced increases in membership since it reopened.

Edgeworthstown Community Library: Library Capital Programme 2016-2021
The project is now proceeding to Stage 2 with the appointment of Architects Kenny Lyons to manage the project. A draft timeline for completion of the build has been put in place with detailed design and
cost plan will be completed by the end of 2017. Pending Department approval of the overall design and cost plan, the project will proceed to tender early in 2018 with a completion date of early 2019.
THEME 8     POTENTIAL STRATEGIC AREAS FOR FURTHER JOB CREATION

**Action 120:** Explore the feasibility of an Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility in Mullingar

**Lead responsible body:** Westmeath County Council

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
An Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility has been established in Mullingar with funding secured under the first call of the REDF, announced in December 2017. (Westmeath County Council contributed €25,000 in 2016 and a further €25,000 in 2017 towards the cost of providing premises for the facility)

**Action 121:** iLOFAR: Support the Establishment of a next generation telescope in Birr.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Offaly County Council continues to support the I-LOFAR project. The project was successfully "switched on" in July 2017 - connecting Birr to the Europe-wide network of radio telescopes. Offaly County Council secured flagship REDZ funding of €316,000 towards the creation of an Education Space.

**Action 123:** Support the Development of Center Parcs Longford Forest

**Lead responsible body:** Longford County Council

**Other responsible bodies:** -

**Status:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The €230m Longford Forest holiday village project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for a holiday village park in Longford is on track and is expected to open in 2019 and SISK has been appointed as the main contractor. This action will continue.

**Action 124:** Explore the possibility of establishing an Irish Centre of Excellence in Robotics Technology in the Midland Region.

**Lead responsible body:** Regional Skills Forum

**Other responsible bodies:** Local Authorities

**Status:** Complete
Narrative:
Following the completion of a feasibility study the Irish Centre of Excellence in Robotics Technology (ICERT) was established. ICERT’s objectives are to:
1. Grow the Irish robotics industry by increasing the number of Irish businesses using robots and the ability of HEI’s to provide training to industry-ready graduates;
2. Act as a national centre for robotic innovation by building a much needed robotic and automation infrastructure which will enable technology transfer to industry;
3. Deliver training in robotics to SMEs, MNCs and international organisations through the robotics Skillnets, new robotics Apprenticeships and CPD training; and
4. Engage with the community to raise awareness of the role of ‘smart’ robots in our society through STEM outreach projects and promoting Robotics Coder Dojos.

ICERT partners come from Industry, Academia and Government. ICERT is comprised of:
- Irish Centre of Business Excellence (ICBE): a national federation of over 220 companies;
- Robotic and Drives Services: Ireland’s leading robotic systems integrator;
- Midlands Regional Skills Forum: a multi-agency government forum which supports industry skills development;
- Athlone Institute of Technology: a research leader with capabilities in key technologies; and
- Maynooth University: provider of robotic courses and research capabilities in smart devices.
Measures Deferred/Reconsidered:

The actions below have been deferred or set down for reconsideration under the next phase of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs

**Action 5**: Working with enterprise partners in the region, Enterprise Ireland will pilot an Entrepreneurial Partnering Programme with 5 entrepreneurs. This mentoring programme will seek to match new entrepreneurs with leading enterprises.

**Lead responsible body**: Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies**: IDA Ireland, LEOs and Industry

**Narrative:**
There are a number of approaches to the provision of mentorship for start-up companies including the general EI mentorship programme, mentorship provided to New frontiers participants, mentors provided by the LEOs and mentors provided to companies on a one to one basis. Given the comprehensive nature of mentor programmes currently being provided there is a sufficient range of mentorship programmes available to start-ups at regional level.

**Action 50**: Develop a Regional ConnectIreland Plan that is integrated with the Local Authorities’ enterprise development and job-creation activities. Formalise the name of a nominated officer from each county in the region for the roll-out of the Plan.

**Action 51**: Announce and run the Connectivation competition, inviting Third Level students to share their ideas for the future development of the Succeed in Ireland initiative.

**Action 52**: Liaise with AIT with a view to holding partnership events to create a network that will allow greater communication between the institution and its alumni.

**Action 58**: Enterprise Ireland will establish a consortium to develop a pilot digital heritage workshop initiative to connect actors from the heritage and ICT sectors to explore start-up opportunities around the “experience economy”. This pilot will support companies to identify and develop new products or services, using digital technologies, to enhance the experience of tourists.

**Lead responsible body**: Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies**: other regional stakeholders as required

**Narrative:**
Whilst the methodology for running this programme has been established a source of funding needs to be identified. This is likely to be a part of a submission to the REDF in 2018/2019

**Action 79**: Enterprise Ireland will run an Internet Marketing Awareness Workshop targeted at Midland based businesses, including understanding of EI supports available.
**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Narrative:** Midlands covered from other location.

**Action 101:** The Midlands Local Authorities will increase the number of 22-month work placements under the Gateway scheme from 159 to 245, to assist participants gain or update experience of the workplace, to learn new skills and return to the routine of work.

**Action 108:** The Midlands Gateway Chamber will celebrate and recognise the contribution of indigenous and multinational companies to the economy of the Midland Region through its annual Best in Business Awards.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Gateway Chamber

**Narrative:** Deferred to 2018.

**Action 115:** Explore funding options to pilot Rural Economic Development Zones, as recommended in the CEDRA report.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Narrative:** This initiative has been replaced by the Town & Village Renewal Scheme and reported upon in Action 114.
Appendix 1  Progress Report 3

Overview

This is the third Progress Report from the Implementation Committee established to oversee and monitor implementation of the measures contained in the Midland Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The report outlines progress made on measures due for completion up to and including the first half of 2017, as well as progress made on measures that are Ongoing during the 2015-2017 period of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland Region was launched on June 29th, 2015. The core objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 14,000 jobs across the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois by 2020 through the delivery of 125 collaborative actions focused on increasing the number of entrepreneurs/start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, with further actions targeted at sectors of potential competitive advantage such as manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. The ambition is to increase the number of people in employment by 14,000 by 2020. This represents an important step towards the target, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government, of creating 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The Regional Action Plans are monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. The Midland Implementation Committee is chaired by Mr Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council.3

In 2007, when the economy last enjoyed full employment, the Midland Region had an unemployment rate of 3.7% - the lowest of all regions. However, there was a very significant dependence on employment in the construction sector which employed over 20,000 people at that time. During the recession, some 15,000 Construction jobs were lost and this contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate in the region which, by Q3 2011, stood at 19.6%.

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3 At time of publication, Mr Gallagher has stepped down as Chair and Ms Anne Cusack, Founder and Managing Director of Critical Healthcare, Kilbeggan has been appointed as Chair by Minister Humphreys
Key Updates

Driving entrepreneurship & growing business

Local Enterprise Offices
The LEO annual jobs survey monitors employment performance amongst microenterprises employing 10 people or less that have received direct financial assistance through the LEOs. Over 300 new jobs were created in businesses supported by the Midland Local Enterprise Offices in 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEO Name</th>
<th>2016 No of LEO Clients</th>
<th>2016 Client All Jobs Total (FT &amp; PT)</th>
<th>2016 Gross All Job Gains (FT &amp; PT)</th>
<th>2016 Net All Job Gains (FT &amp; PT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>3842</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alongside direct grant support, LEOs also supported entrepreneurs and small businesses with training, mentoring and referral during 2016, aimed at developing business ideas and building company capacity. During 2016, the LEOs were again to the forefront in supporting youth entrepreneurship, access to finance initiatives and getting more microenterprises doing business online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M1 &amp; M2 Budget</th>
<th>SYOB Courses</th>
<th>SYOB Participants</th>
<th>Mentor Start Ups</th>
<th>Mentor Expansion</th>
<th>FPTP</th>
<th>Export Awareness</th>
<th>Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>379,418</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>324,475</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>426,986</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>628,616</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,759,495</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>1,499</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source LEO Outturn Report 2016: Female Participation Training Programmes (FPTP)

A record number of young entrepreneurs participated in Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) investment programme in 2016. Representing their counties in the regional finals were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEO Office</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>Best Business Idea</td>
<td>Sonrimor Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>Best Business Idea</td>
<td>Mast Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>Best Business Idea</td>
<td>Ballyeanal Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>Best Business Idea</td>
<td>Health-Fix Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>Best Start Up Business</td>
<td>Alan Meredith Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>Best Start Up Business</td>
<td>City Swifter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>Best Start Up Business</td>
<td>Gilteraps Glamping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>Best Start Up Business</td>
<td>Smart Business Analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>Best Established Business</td>
<td>Kelly Lou Cakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>Best Established Business</td>
<td>Fabiani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>Best Established Business</td>
<td>Dezymamite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>Best Established Business</td>
<td>Lift Hire Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KellyLou Cakes (Laois), City Swifter (Longford) and Smart Business Analytics (Westmeath) advanced to the National Finals, which were held in Google HQ during Enterprise Week.

**Inaugural Local Enterprise Showcase Awards, 2017**

This Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) initiative is aimed at supporting the Irish Craft and Design sector. The awards highlight excellence and innovation amongst the talented LEO supported craft makers and designers which participate in Showcase, Ireland’s International Creative Expo.

A talented Westmeath leather designer was the overall winner of the inaugural Local Enterprise Showcase Awards at the R.D.S. in Dublin. Brendan McEvoy from Mullingar, started the Irish luxury tech bag and accessory company, My Name is Ted, two years ago, was presented with his award by the then Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Ms. Mary Mitchell O’Connor T.D.

**Local Enterprise Week**

The focus of Local Enterprise Week is to increase awareness of the range of LEO supports and services available to micro and small enterprises. The Midland LEOs held a range of events for during Local Enterprise Week, March 6th-12th 2017 for start-ups, aspiring entrepreneurs, and small businesses in the region. Entrepreneurs of all ages had the opportunity to participate in workshops, seminars, advice clinics and one-to-one mentoring on every aspect of business, including: starting a business, trading on-line, finance, tendering, growing a business through digital marketing, cyber security, intellectual property, and being Brexit-ready in partnership with InterTradeIreland.

**Student Enterprise Awards**

The Student Enterprise Programme National Finals organised by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) for secondary schools took place on May 3rd 2017 in Croke Park. The LEO-run Student Enterprise Programme started in 2003 and more than 150,000 secondary school students have taken part over the last fifteen years, researching and setting up their own businesses.

This year’s Student Enterprise Programme attracted 22,000 student participants from 620 secondary schools around the country. The year-long programme helps each student to gain the skills and practical knowledge of running a real-life business. A total of 200 teenage entrepreneurs, aged between 13 and 18 and from 77 different enterprises, competed in the National Final, with every county represented.

The Midland Region was represented in all categories with the following receiving awards

In the Senior Category, for students from Transition Year to Leaving Certificate: The runner-up prize went to ‘J&S Kitchen Aid’ from Mercy Secondary School in Longford. In the intermediate category, the Innovation award went to Relay Smart, Athlone Community College in Westmeath. The Junior Category third place award went to Bin Belt, Moyne Community School in Longford.

**National Enterprise Awards**

The Awards - organised by the National Network of Local Enterprise Offices - celebrate the achievements of Ireland’s microenterprise sector. The awards recognise and celebrate the success stories of small business owners from all over the country. In addition to enjoying extensive media coverage, National Finalists compete for a €40,000 Prize Fund. Representing their counties are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Company Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>Infrastruct AMS Limited is a specialist engineering company providing a range of structural testing and investigation services for the built environment. The company is focused on providing accurate and structure-specific information using a multi-technique approach to comprehensively assess the condition of all types of structures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Longford**  
Purpledecks are Ireland’s leading Enterprise Mobile software systems provider. Purpledecks enable enterprises and institutions to rethink the interfaces they present to their customers and thereafter create their end-to-end mobile first products and systems. Working across multiple sectors such as Medtech, Biometrics, Media and Retail, Purpledecks have become the go-to company for supplying the ever-increasing demand for innovative and reliable software.

**Offaly**  
Dezynamite provide graphic design, printing, website design and promotional products. Dezynamite’s brand success is built on taking the hassle out of doing business for all their clients. This is achieved through high quality graphic design and branding solutions, an extensive product range, excellent pricing, outstanding customer oriented service and reliability.

**Westmeath**  
Lift Hire Ireland specialise in supplying Truck, Van and self-propelled M.E.W.P’s to the Telecoms, Construction and Manufacturing industries nationwide. The Westmeath Based teams are proud to be market leaders with multinational customers as clients.

**Youth Start Offaly**  
Youth Start Offaly was established in January 2016: a project which aims to promote and develop youth enterprise awareness and education for 12-20+ year olds in County Offaly. Youth Start Offaly is a collaborative project under the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), led by Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) and Offaly County Council (OCC).

This project primarily focuses on the delivery of the Foroige NFTE (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship) training programme, to target young unemployed and early school leavers in Offaly. NFTE, an internationally recognised programme, has been designed to facilitate young people to develop core skills in entrepreneurship and business, through creative and critical thinking, and to do so within a learning environment. This project is committed to supporting young people to reach their full potential through educational and entrepreneurial opportunities, and has been successful in building self-confidence, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, it seeks to advance youth employment.

In March 2016, learners from 6 centres located around the county began the NFTE programme. An element of the programme is participating in the International NFTE competition. Thus, throughout February and March 2017, eighteen businesses from the project presented their business plan to a panel of judges, who consisted of local business people from Tullamore, Edenderry and Banagher. On Wednesday the 15th of March, one business from the various centres around Offaly competed in the Regional competition, which took place in the Business Innovation Centre, Tullamore. Nifty Dog Collars were announced the overall Offaly NFTE Regional Winner 2017 proudly represented Offaly at the National Finals on Thursday the 30th of March.

**BT Young Scientist Exhibition**  
The 53rd annual BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition took place from January 11 - 14, and saw 550 projects presented by students from all around the country. Lanesboro Community College had two projects earning awards. Second place senior individual in the Social and Behavioural Sciences category went to Brian Lyons for his project ‘We remember 95% of what we teach’: Peer tutoring in TY. Sean Maguire and Patrick Kenny were Highly Commended for their work on their project; ‘Medical Cannabis: Is there a middle ground’.

**Attracting & Embedding Foreign Direct Investment**

**Aerie Pharmaceuticals, Inc.**
In January 2017, Aerie Pharmaceuticals entered into a lease agreement with IDA Ireland to establish a new manufacturing plant in the recently constructed 2,650m² IDA Advanced Technology Building in Athlone, County Westmeath.

The Athlone facility will house Aerie’s first manufacturing plant, which is expected to produce commercial supplies for Aerie’s current product candidates, Rhopressa™ and Roclatan™. Estimated project-wide construction and equipment costs are expected to total approximately €25 million (excluding ongoing labour-related and lease expenses), and commercial product supply for Rhopressa™, if approved, is expected to be available by 2020. The facility will create up to 50 jobs, and is on track to open in June 2017.

Zoetis pays $85m for Irish petcare biopharma Nexvet
Irish pet medication group Nexvet has been acquired by US animal health heavyweight Zoetis. The Irish clinical stage biopharma start-up, based in Tullamore, specialises in developing drugs for companion animals and was established by serial entrepreneur Mark Heffernan, previously Chief Executive of Trinity College Dublin spinout Opsona Therapeutics.

Sectoral Developments

Food Sector
Green Isle takes top award at Gulfood
Longford based Green Isle’s Goodfella’s pizza range won the 2017 Innovation award for Best Halal Product Range at Gulfood, the world’s largest annual food and hospitality event which took place in March 2017. The Middle East has an 80-90% import requirement, and as such presents a significant and growing opportunity for Irish food exporters. Green Isle has just launched its frozen pizza range in Saudi Arabia and they are the fastest growing pizza brand in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Tourism
County Tourism Strategies
The Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Patrick O’Donovan T.D., launched the County Tourism Strategies at the Local Authorities Tourism conference in March 2017. The Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018 includes a specific Action requiring each Local Authority to produce a tourism strategy. The County Tourism Strategies contain The Government’s Tourism Policy Statement “People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025” and gives the Local Authorities an enhanced role in tourism.

Improvements at Athlone Castle
Athlone Arts & Tourism received grant aid under the Fáilte Ireland ‘New ideas in Ancient Spaces’ Small Capital Grants Scheme which supports the improvement and development of compelling visitor experiences throughout the Ireland’s Ancient East region. Athlone Castle enhanced the visitor experience with the introduction of a multi-lingual audio guide for visitors to use on site. The guide is now available in five European languages, Chinese and English.

The Uisneach Interpretative Centre
The Hill of Uisneach is the mythological and sacred centre of Ireland located between Athlone and Mullingar. The 150-acre Hill comprises two national monuments. Ireland’s Ancient East has brought a new focus to its sustainable tourism potential and in May 2017, the official opening of the new Uisneach visitor centre took place, which is the base for cultural tours as part of Ireland’s Ancient East heritage trail providing a visitor experience and interpretation of The Hill of Uisneach.

National Cycle Network
Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Shane Ross officially opened the Garrycastle to Whitegates National Cycle Network in Athlone on Friday 7 April 2017. Westmeath County Council was awarded €496,187 in July 2016 to complete the 2.2km cycleway/greenway from a reallocation of National Cycle Network funding. The project is an extension of the 42km Mullingar to Athlone Greenway officially opened in 2015, which is part of the Dublin to Galway Greenway.

In May, Westmeath County Council prepared and submitted the EIS and CPO for approval to ABP for the provision of the Athlone Cycleway and Pedestrian Bridge, a significant item in advancing the Galway-Dublin Greenway through Athlone. The proposed location of the 75m bridge is surrounded by historical buildings and structures, tourism sites and commercial properties with access to the Castle and Luan Gallery.

Other developments

SteriPack Research Laboratory
SteriPack was granted planning permission by Westmeath County Council to change the use of the former Imperial Tobacco plant on the Dublin Road. The healthcare packaging company will establish a research laboratory, cleanrooms and offices at the former tobacco plant.

CLÁR Programme
In June, Michael Ring T.D., Minister of State for Regional Economic Development at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs announced details of funding for Measure 1 Safety Measures and Measure 2 Play Areas in the Midland Region under the CLÁR Programme. The CLÁR programme is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and forms part of the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total allocation</th>
<th>Total projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>€27,021.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>€155,588.06</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>€148,720.00</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>€77,096.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Action Updates

THEME 1    Driving entrepreneurship & growing business

Increasing the Number of Start-Ups

**Action 1:** Enterprise Ireland will increase enterprise formation in the Midlands through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops, the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme, Competitive Feasibility Fund and Competitive Start Fund.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
New Frontiers is Enterprise Ireland’s national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage startups. It is a three-phased programme, based in 14 campus incubation centres across the country. In the Midland Region, New Frontiers is delivered by the Athlone Institute of Technology, in partnership with Maynooth University. EI has agreed a 5-year programme for New Frontiers with AIT/MU which commenced in H2 2016. Funding for increasing the size of the MIRC incubator on AIT campus has also been agreed.

AIT will be launching its New Frontiers programme for 2017 in June. Athlone Institute of Technology, in partnership with Maynooth University, will deliver the programme in the Midlands Mid-East region.

A series of pre-programme Phase 1 Workshops to help prospective entrepreneurs to develop their business proposition will be held in the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at AIT and MaynoothWorks at Maynooth University during the summer.

**Action 4:** Enterprise Ireland will work with the LEOs to develop new ways of delivering capacity improvement.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Midland LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Enterprise Ireland will work closely with the LEOs and the New Frontiers programme to assist startups that do not make it through to the Phase 2 part of New Frontiers. Enterprise Ireland is also engaging with LEOs to effect transfers of clients that are in the EI portfolio but for whom it would be more relevant to be clients of the LEO. As part of the process of transferring EI clients to LEOs 11 companies have been transferred to LEOs in the Midlands.

**Action 9:** Enterprise Ireland will support the participation of 12 entrepreneurs in the Midlands on Phase 2 of the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme.
Enterprise Ireland will implement the findings from the review of the Programme in order to maximise the positive impacts of the programme on entrepreneurship in the region, working closely with AIT (in partnership with NUIM) in the provision of the Programme.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** AIT

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Approximately 35 participants were involved in New Frontiers Phase 1 and Phase 2 which commenced in September with 14 participants. Discussions are ongoing between EI and AIT/Maynooth University on the details of how best to assist these entrepreneurs. The overall aim of New Frontiers is to help high potential startups develop an investible business plan, and EI are constantly reviewing the approach on how best to achieve this through new tools such as business model canvas, customer development in workshop formats, and through 1 to 1 clinics.

**Action 10:** Enterprise Ireland will run a "Start-up Open Days & Clinic" in the Midlands for newly registered Start-ups in Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services from the region, with a view to prospecting for future start-ups and communicating and raising awareness of supports available to potential entrepreneurs in the Midlands.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the Midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 12:** Enterprise Ireland, working with other enterprise partners in the region, will increase its start-ups from the enterprise infrastructure in the region (e.g. incubators).

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** relevant public and private partners

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Enterprise Ireland’s primary focus is to increase the number of High Potential Start-Ups (HPSU) and candidates to the Competitive Feasibility Fund (CSF) in the region through working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Discussions with AIT and EI on focussing the New Frontiers programme more on the HPSU agenda has been planned, in advance of the start of the programme in H2 2016. In addition, funding has been provided in doubling the size of incubation space in AIT.

**Action 13:** Enterprise Ireland will run four “Innovating Start-ups” events in the Midlands to develop the pipeline of innovative start-ups in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
EI plan to run a combined event for Longford, Westmeath and one for Laois/Offaly in H1 2017 depending on demand.

**Action 14:** Enterprise Ireland will run two facilitated Lean Start-up workshop for at least 16 start-ups in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Lean is a particular approach to entrepreneurial development. Participants are taken through the business model canvas as a key tool to help them develop their business plan. Two programmes for 10 people each commenced in H2 2016. This programme will be re-evaluated in 2017.

**Action 15:** The four Local Development Companies in the region will provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and deliver a range of programmes to support entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The Local Development Companies will also work with the LEOs, with a view to progressing clients to the LEO services.

**Lead responsible body:** Local Development Companies

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The SICAP programme in each of the 4 counties continues including one to one mentoring of long term unemployed people to set up their own business. The RDP works with start up businesses who require capital investment.

Laois Partnership are working with 42 Long term unemployed people who are starting businesses in 2017 and 12 extra that started work in 2016 but didn’t get established until 2017. Laois Partnership are also working with 5 agrifood and 1 agri tech project in LEADER.

Longford Community Resources have supported 35 business with start your own business courses in 2017 of which 14 have set up in business also a further 22 business supported in late 2016 have commenced their business in 2017 i.e. 36 business set up in 2017. Longford Community Resources have 4 Agri Food projects who have submitted EOI’s.
Offay: Business plans for 7 new social enterprises have been completed with community groups in Offaly and applications for social enterprise support made to the LEADER programme 2014-20 by 4 of those groups.

Westmeath: 27 people were assisted into self-employment in H1 2017.

Support Existing Companies to Grow & Improve Performance

**Action 17:** Promote existing schemes to provide access to finance to start-ups and existing companies.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A range of channels are used on a continuous basis to make entrepreneurs and existing companies aware of the range of supports available to provide access to finance. These include 1-1 consultations with executives of Enterprise Ireland (regionally & nationally based), briefing seminars, provision of relevant literature, attendance at exhibitions & conferences to promote the supports to new audiences, promotion through social media (regionally & nationally) and via eZines.

LEOs actively promote Micro Finance, Back to Work Enterprise Supports, and LEO supports on an ongoing basis through events, social media, newsletters etc.

**Action 18:** Enterprise Ireland will work with client companies from the region, including high potential start-ups, to increase participation on programmes and accelerate their capacity to scale up and succeed in international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Enterprise Ireland is working with client companies in the Midlands in the following ways:

- Prospect for a pipeline of early stage start-ups and high potential start-ups. This includes: Enterprise Ireland’s New Frontiers Development Programme, the national entrepreneur development programme for early-stage startups, run in partnership with AIT.
- Enterprise Ireland’s Competitive Start Fund to support new early stage business via investments of up to €50,000 each through a series of Competitive Start Fund calls. 2016 was a great year for Start-Ups with 101 new High Potential Start up approvals (HPSUs) and 128 new Competitive Start Fund approvals (CSFs) throughout Ireland.
- A new start-up fund will be available from Enterprise Ireland when a new Competitive Start Fund (CSF) competition targeted at Experienced Business Professionals opens for applications in Q4 2017.
- Enterprise Ireland has a Service Level Agreement in place with four Business Innovation Centres throughout the country. These bodies work in partnership with Enterprise Ireland to assess, advise, validate and progress early stage-business plans of Enterprise Ireland clients to an
investor ready stage-point, with an objective of driving the number of High Potential Start-Ups approved each year by Enterprise Ireland.

**Action 20:** InterTrade Ireland will promote its Acumen and Elevate programmes in the region. ITI will target 5 Acumen approvals in the Midlands, providing financial assistance to local companies to investigate and pursue export opportunities in Northern Ireland.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Both programmes continued to be promoted in the region through the Acumen Consultant network and InterTradeIreland events. During the period 1 Midlands based Acumen applicant was approved to the programme.

**Action 21:** Through its Trade Accelerator Voucher scheme InterTrade Ireland will help companies to identify and break down barriers to trade leading to new export opportunities in Northern Ireland. The Trade Accelerator Voucher can help businesses get advice from participating expert providers in Northern Ireland and Ireland, and can be redeemed against the cost of practical advice and expertise on specific issues.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
This work continues and the scheme is promoted to all companies seeking to develop their cross-border markets. In light of Brexit, the Trade Accelerator Voucher can also now be used to help businesses get advice on specific issues such as Tariffs and Currency Management.

Given that a number of counties are particularly exposed to these challenges, InterTrade Ireland is now offering two vouchers to help businesses seek advice on issues related to currency. The first is the Trade Accelerator voucher, offering €1,000 towards the cost of practical advice from experts on specific issues, such as currency management. The second is the Brexit Start to Plan Voucher, which offers up to €2,000 towards professional advice in relation to Brexit matters.

**Action 22:** The Midland LEOs will run the new ACCELERATE step-up programme, which is aimed at helping local small businesses to develop their management capabilities, improve their sustainability and accelerate their growth prospects.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Longford and Westmeath LEOs are delivering a joint management development programme with 20 participants in total, 9 from Longford and 11 from Westmeath.
**Action 23:** InterTradeIreland will deliver 3 Public Tendering workshops for SMEs over the period 2015-2016 and provide relevant training for local small businesses. InterTradeIreland will also promote public tendering opportunities to SMEs in the region, including cross border public sector opportunities, consortia building for larger contracts and below threshold contracts.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
InterTradeIreland delivered an Introduction to Tendering workshop on 8th March 2017 in Mullingar Park Hotel which was attended by 18 participants. Also, InterTradeIreland held two workshops in the same location on 17th and 31st May 2017.

Go-2-Tender is an InterTradeIreland programme which has been developed to give SMEs the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to tender successfully for public sector contracts in their own jurisdiction or on a cross-border basis.

The programme is geared towards SMEs who are new to tendering or who want to improve their basic tendering skills. The course consisted of a two-day workshop and a half day of mentoring.

**Action 24:** The LEOs will deliver procurement seminars and workshops to assist business people tendering for larger contracts.

**Lead responsible body:** LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
As per Action 23.

**Ensuring the Availability of Work Space for Entrepreneurs**

**Action 25:** The Local Authorities in the Midland region will manage enterprise space and lands in the main towns to facilitate and encourage economic development, whether by start-up companies, expansion of existing businesses or inward investment.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Laois County Council manages a range of enterprise space and lands throughout the county.
Longford County Council are operating a scheme to improve entrance and directional signage in Local Authority owned business estates.
Westmeath Local Enterprise Office markets e-working centres situated throughout the country on an ongoing basis.
Offaly County Council manages a range of enterprise space and lands throughout the county. Offaly County Council has leased 25J Axis Business Park to Prism Industrial Controls Ltd for 18 months. The Junction Business Innovation Centre has been expanded to create a training room and additional hot desk spaces. Improvements have been made to parks in Ferbane and work is underway in Portarlington.

**Action 26:** The Local Authorities will assist businesses in the identification of suitable premises/sites through the development of a Property Database of Industrial and Commercial properties available for sale or let

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The local authorities are developing/maintaining property databases of all commercial available properties for sale or rent both in private and Council owned property to facilitate economic development.

**Other Initiatives to Promote & Encourage Entrepreneurship**

**Action 29:** Provide support and assistance to pop up shops and markets in the principal towns of the region, enabling artists and craft makers to showcase and sell products.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Other responsible bodies:** LEOs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The local authorities provide support and assistance to pop up shops and markets throughout the year, most of which take place in H2 over the summer months and in the lead up to Christmas e.g. Tullamore Show, Mullingar Christmas Market etc.

**Action 30:** Pilot “Out-of-Hours” access for people to utilise the library services outside of normal opening hours.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
There are 2,029 members registered for My Open Library services in Offaly. There was a 64% increase in Out of Hours use of the library facilities in Tullamore over the 2015-2016 period.

**Action 31:** Longford and Offaly Library services will pilot the provision of business supports and job seeking supports through a collaboration between the Library and the Local Enterprise Office.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly & Longford Councils & LEOs
**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Longford and Offaly Library services continue to provide business supports and job seeking supports through collaboration between the Library and the Local Enterprise Office.

**Action 33:** The ETBs will deliver inputs on entrepreneurship to all participants on relevant Further Education and Training programmes and promote self-employment within the Adult Guidance Service.

**Lead responsible body:** ETBs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The 4 Laois Offaly Education and Training Boards (OETB) target groups, 3 youthreach centres and a community training centre, all successfully completed the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) training programme resulting in a total of 29 young people creating 19 Mini Businesses. The programme is currently being evaluated before recommencing with improvements made.

LOETB are currently considering how it can assist in a follow-up intervention which may involve mentoring/guiding individuals and businesses that wish to continue beyond the NFTE competition. LOETB are in discussions with partners in Laois to see if a similar Youth Enterprise programme can be rolled out in the county.

Where relevant, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) has delivered inputs.

**Action 35:** Under the Teagasc Option programmes support farm family diversification in the Midland Region, including support measures to diversify into artisan foods, rural tourism, alternative land use and other entrepreneurial activities.

**Lead responsible body:** Teagasc

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Two Workshops were held in March 2017 in Mullingar and Tullamore in co-operation with all relevant stakeholders. Both workshops had 30 attendees.

**THEME 2  Fostering innovation**

**Action 38:** IDA Ireland will continue to roll out its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IDA Ireland continues to support companies through its RDI program, which incentivises companies to develop new process for products and services, further embedding existing operations in the Region.
**Action 39:** InterTrade Ireland will provide access to its Challenge programme, giving SMEs the opportunity to learn how to develop a culture of innovation through the use of a sustainable and repeatable innovation process.

**Lead responsible body:** InterTradeIreland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Challenge remains open to all eligible companies in the region as promoted through engagement with the LEOs

**Action 41:** AIT will increase awareness of – and access to – AIT’s R&D/knowledge resources among enterprise and industry in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
AIT has undertaken the following measures to increase awareness of its R&D facilities and knowledge resources:

- New content continues to be created for the Materials Research Institute (MRI), Applied Polymer Technologies (APT), Software Research Institute (SRI), Connected Media Application Design and Delivery (COMAND), Bioscience Research Institute (BRI) and Centre for Industrial Services and Design (CISD) internet portals. This content provides updates on facilities, expertise and case studies of completed industrial interactions.
- A vibrant social media presence has been established and maintained utilising Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Content is regularly refreshed to drive traffic and engagement.
- A new folder and set of inserts have been created for research, innovation, enterprise and commercialisation at AIT, detailing the R&D resources available to enterprise and case studies of AIT-company R&D collaborations.
- A seminar on “BREXIT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IRISH ECONOMY” was delivered at AIT by David Murphy Business Editor RTE on 27-Mar-17.
- An “Ethics in Sport” conference will be held in AIT on 11-May-17.
- AIT’s Research Institutes, Technology Gateways and Innovation and Enterprise team proactively engage with companies, entrepreneurs and start-ups on an ongoing basis, increasing awareness of AIT’s R&D facilities and knowledge resources.

**Action 42:** AIT will increase awareness of MetricIreland to help more companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the HE sector.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
THEME 3  Attracting and embedding foreign direct investment

**Action 44:** IDA Ireland will target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland region over the period 2015-2019.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
As part of IDA’s current strategy, Winning: FDI 2015 - 2019, IDA continues to target 25 new investments for the Midlands Region.

**Action 46:** IDA will source clients for its Advance manufacturing facility in IDA Garrycastle Business & Technology Park, Athlone.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
In January 2017 IDA entered into a lease agreement with Aerie Pharmaceuticals to establish a new manufacturing plant in the recently constructed 2,650m2 IDA Advanced Technology Building in the IDA Garrycastle Business & Technology Park, Athlone. The project is supported by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation through IDA Ireland.

**Action 49:** IDA will drive its Transformation programme with its established base of client companies, through increased client interaction.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IDA is continuing to engage with clients and drive its Transformation programme.

THEME 4  Building sectoral opportunities

**Tourism**

**Action 53:** Develop and market Ireland’s Ancient East, which will help in scaling up the asset base and achieve international “stand-out” for the region based on its comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage.
Lead responsible body: Fáilte Ireland

Other responsible bodies: Tourism Ireland (TI)

Update: Ongoing

International Marketing: IAE will feature heavily as part of Tourism Ireland’s overseas campaign. TI’s core strategy in 2017 is to accelerate market diversification and drive regional/seasonal growth. Key elements include trade activity (e.g. newsletters to travel trade, FAM trips, co-operation activity), consumer activity (consumer shows, various media, social media etc) and targeted media/publicity activity.

Domestic Spring Campaign for IAE commenced April 2017. The key objectives of this campaign are to:

- Increase Awareness & Familiarity of the Ireland’s Ancient East proposition
- Inspire domestic holiday makers to take incremental short breaks in Ireland’s Ancient East

Media choices include TV, Video on Demand (Youtube, Sky, RTE player), Press and Content Partnerships (Independent.ie), all supported by an extensive Digital campaign (social media, Google search). Tourism experiences in Midlands counties will feature throughout the campaign.

Website: IrelandsAncientEast.com has been upgraded for 2017. New features include provision of practical information through tourism listings/content and personalised route planning to help visitors plan their trip and encourage them to stay longer in IAE.

Signage: 15 IAE Orientation Signs now installed at key attractions throughout Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. In total, the signs promote over 50 different tourism experiences available to visitors across the 4 Midlands counties. Phase 2 of this programme is now underway.

Action 54: Promote the Lakelands as part of Discover Ireland home holiday campaign.

Lead responsible body: Fáilte Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Failte Ireland is continuing to develop and promote Ireland’s Mystical Waterway as a signature tourism experience under the Ireland’s Ancient East brand. Experiences located in the area will feature as part of domestic and international marketing campaigns. A welcome new initiative for 2017 is the production of a new RTE series "Creedon's Shannon" as a follow up to Creedon's Epic East and Creedon's Wild Atlantic Way. Filming has already commenced and the programme is due to air in the summer.

As part of the IAE website upgrade, FI invested €100,000 in developing new digital content (video and imagery) for Irelands Mystical Waterway. This content is available for industry along the Shannon to use free of charge.

FI continues to build on our strong relationship with tourism businesses and stakeholder groups including Waterways Ireland, the Irish Boat Rental Association (IBRA), Local Authorities, and Leader Groups. IBRA members have agreed to brand their fleet with Ireland’s Ancient East ‘decals’ for 2017.
and have also agreed to use “Irelands Mystical Waterway” in marketing collateral; e.g. Silverline Cruisers showcased a Mystical Waterways backdrop at Holiday World, Dublin in 2017.

**Action 55:** As part of the Ireland’s Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways tourism offerings, work with clusters of tourism businesses, mostly in the accommodation and food sector, to improve their ability to generate international sales and food experience for visitors.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Tourism Ireland, Industry

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IAE’s main approach to working with businesses in 2017 is through one-to-one industry engagements with a broad range of tourism stakeholders and businesses from across the 4 counties. Businesses include attractions, accommodation and activity providers. The focus of the process is to assist them to grow their international business and revenue, align their experience with Irelands Ancient East and ground the brand in their offering. By end Q1, more than 50 such industry meetings have taken place in the Midlands region.

In addition, the IAE team will deliver a range of Enterprise Supports throughout Irelands Ancient East for 2017. These programmes are designed to build staff and management capability and result in improved business performance. Programmes include Service Excellence Champions Programme, Tour Guiding programme, Digital Brand Toolkit Workshop, AttrAction Interpretation Programme, Extending the Tourism Season Workshop and Storytelling Workshops. Trade from the Midlands will be invited to attend all programmes as appropriate. The "Champions" programme has been designed to enhance cross-selling capability in particular, and 2 programmes were delivered within the Midlands in H1 2017.

Specifically with regard to food, Failte Ireland is currently developing a new national Food Tourism Strategy which will be completed by end Q2. At a destination level, the IAE team is developing a training programme and toolkit for various types of Food Experiences (from artisan producers with a visitor experience, to food foraging, to visitor attractions that serve food) to assist them to align to Ireland's Ancient East brand and to raise their profile within brand marketing campaign. Our objective is to raise the profile of the food experience in IAE. It is expected that a training programme to support this activity will commence in Q3.

Finally, 10 key tourism trade from the Midlands attended Meitheal 2017 and these businesses were supported by FI training to ensure best possible outcomes from the international sales opportunity. Longford County Council continues to work with Lanesboro Community groups on a project to build a taste of the Lakelands Brand to promote local food producers from the region and to promote Lough Ree as a premier fishing destination.

**Action 56:** Develop Destination Athlone to make Athlone one of the top five centres for short breaks in Ireland, and bring a higher number of visitors to the region as a whole.

**Lead responsible body:** Westmeath County Council

**Other responsible bodies:** Athlone Chamber, Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland
**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Destination Athlone is being supported by Westmeath County Council.

**Action 57:** Support a suite of festivals that complement Ireland’s Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways offerings.

**Lead responsible body:** Fáilte Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Waterways Ireland, Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The following festivals in the Midlands are being funded under Failte Ireland’s Regional Festivals and Events Programme 2017: Taste of the Lakelands (€2,000), Irish Game and Country Fair (€7,000) and Uisneach Bealtaine Fire Festival (€3,500)

Longford Tourism committee is working to build up the Táin March as a tourism festival that can support the IAE brand

**Action 59:** The Local Authorities will maintain and manage local tourism attractions on an on-going basis.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The Local Authorities assist in the promotion, development and management of local tourism attractions on an ongoing basis:

The Donaghmore Warehouse & Museum and the Heritage Centre in Timahoe in Laois are leased to Local Community Groups by the County Council.

Longford County Council supports the work of County Longford Tourism Committee to develop and promote tourism in the county through the provision of funding to the committee to employ a tourism officer.

Offaly County Council is establishing a Product Development Group to ensure that the 'public good' value of public land holdings in Offaly can be fully realised.

Westmeath County Council manages and maintains tourism attractions in their remit e.g. Athlone Castle (visitor numbers for 2016 up by 1500 to over 25,000) & Belvedere House, Park & Gardens.

**Action 61:** Offaly and Laois Local Authorities will continue to work with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte to develop an off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains on part of the Coillte landbank.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly & Laois County Councils
Other responsible bodies: Coillte, Fáilte Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Planning permission has been granted by Laois and Offaly County Councils for the Slieve Bloom Mountain Biking Trail. The project includes provision for bike hire, wash facilities, and parking (40.6km within County Laois and 32.2km in County Offaly, linked by an on road section along the R440 in the townland of Baunreagh, County Laois and Glenregan, County Offaly). Funding options are currently being explored.

Action 63: Progress the development and promotion of Greenway and Blueways to capitalise on the centrality of the Midlands, linking the River Shannon, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and River Barrow.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Other responsible bodies: DTTAS, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Waterways Ireland has submitted a planning application for the Barrow Blueway to Laois County Council and a request for further information has issued.

Offaly County Council have completed a 3.6km section of the Grand Canal Greenway from Tullamore to Ballycowan Bridge which is en route to Lough Boora Discovery Park.

Westmeath County Council was successful in securing funding for infrastructure and signage under the REDZ Scheme for cycleways and blueways.

Manufacturing

Action 64: Enterprise Ireland will target manufacturing companies in the Midlands region to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has also been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.
**Action 66:** Develop a Regional Design & Manufacturing Network, linking companies and AIT research centres to progress regional design and manufacturing opportunities.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, industry

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
AIT’s Materials Research Institute and Enterprise-Ireland funded Applied Polymer Technologies Gateway have developed a network of companies (including Enterprise Ireland and IDA client companies) in the Manufacturing, Design and Polymer sectors to link companies with AIT’s R&D resources and to progress polymer, design and manufacturing opportunities. Among the activities organised by AIT for the network include:
- Open days at AIT featuring industrial and academic speakers discussing the latest industry developments.
- Industry workshops to facilitate the showcasing of new equipment and industry best practice and to provide forums for engineers and managers to get together and experience real world applications of new and emerging technologies.
- AIT promotes and facilitates collective collaborative opportunities among the network.
- A needs assessment of companies and stakeholders active in the polymer processing and polymer materials area, regarding access to advanced R&D supports and associated expertise.
- AIT is involved in and promotes the annual Polymer Seminar of the Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining among the network. The Seminar delivers insights into the Irish Plastics Processing Sector and delegates hear about the latest in cutting edge technologies from a diverse and influential group of speakers. The 2017 Seminar took place in Athlone on 27-Apr-17.

**Action 67:** Progress the development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus (MMTC) - which will focus on Advanced/Discrete/Additive Manufacturing technologies, Industrial/Product Design and ‘Smart Factories.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Other responsible bodies:** Industry, regional/Local Agencies, Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
AIT is engaged in ongoing dialogue with regional and national partners/stakeholders. In H1 2017, AIT continues to progress the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus R&D agenda in collaboration with research/HEI and industry partners.

**Food Sector**

**Action 69:** Enterprise Ireland will target, with its new company engagement model, food companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland
Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

Action 72: Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia will facilitate collaboration/co-opetition on new product development and promote synergistic opportunities between large and small food companies in the region.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Other responsible bodies: Bord Bia

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
The Food Division of EI has been working with Bord Bia to progress this Action for delivery in 2017.

Action 74: The LEOs will target and increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme.

Lead responsible body: LEOs

Other responsible bodies: Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and SuperValu

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Ongoing promotion of Food Academy programme is being undertaken. Assistance also given to start-up food companies to prepare them for Food Academy.

Action 76: Assist in the development of the agri food and agri tech sectors within the region in line with Harvest 2020 objectives and the Rural Development Programme.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Development Companies

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
This work is ongoing in each of the counties with support through the LEADER programme for food business startups. Local development companies have also submitted applications for European Innovation Partnership funds to develop the Agri sector further.

**Action 77:** AIT will host an annual event which will showcase regional artisan foods.

**Lead responsible body:** AIT

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
AIT’s engagement with regional artisan food producers has evolved from a one-off event to very strong engagement on an ongoing basis to include curriculum and menu design and showcasing regional artisan foods in AIT’s training restaurant on an ongoing basis.

On 5-Apr-17, students from the BA in Culinary Entrepreneurship degree programme - which, among other topics focuses on regional food production - showcased their new food products at AIT. Donal Bracken and Zara Dunne from Offaly, and Natalie O’Reilly from Cavan, who are calling their company ‘BIY’ (Bake it Yourself), showcased their gluten-free “Nut and Seeds” bread. Ciarán Kiveney from Westmeath and Johnny Harvey from Galway, who are calling their company ‘CJ Food’, have developed a range of convenience onion rings for the hotel and restaurant trade that cleverly utilise the entire onion. Jennifer Smith from Meath and Helen Keane from Tipperary, who are calling their company ‘VitaPopz’, have created wholesome fruit and vegetable ice-pops and power shots that have no added sugar, making them safe for diabetics and children.

**Internationally Traded Services and Software**

**Action 78:** Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist Internationally Traded Services and Software companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 79:** Enterprise Ireland will run an Internet Marketing Awareness Workshop targeted at Midland based businesses, including understanding of EI supports available.
Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
This is part of a series of workshops held around the country. Discussions are taking place regarding a Midlands specific workshop.

Action 80: Enterprise Ireland will continue to work on an individual basis with the companies in the Mobile Telecommunications cluster to support employment growth and development of their export market plans.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

In addition to financial support to companies in the Midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

Action 82: Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist relevant construction companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

Lead responsible body: Enterprise Ireland

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. In addition to this Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

Energy and Sustainability
**Action 83:** Progress the development of a Regional Energy Hub in the Midland Region.

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Offaly County Council has commissioned a Feasibility Study and final report is expected in H2 2017.

**Action 85:** Promote and assist the delivery costs savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for businesses and public sector organisations in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** SEAI

**Other responsible bodies:** Midland Energy Agency, other public bodies

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
SEAI continue to make Energy MAP and Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy training available across the business and public sectors.

**Action 86:** Work to develop and promote Sustainable Energy Communities model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars.

**Lead responsible body:** SEAI

**Other responsible bodies:** SEAI, Midland Energy Agency, other relevant bodies

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The SEC programme continues to grow with 84 Sustainable Energy Communities across Ireland. Exemplar projects have successfully applied for €30 million in Better Energy Community grants for 2017, with three Laois based projects benefitting.

**Action 87:** As part of the alignment of Further Education and Training provision with local and future skills needs in the region, ETBs will identify skills gaps and develop tailored training solutions to enable the region to maximise economic benefits from the emerging Green Economy.

**Lead responsible body:** ETBs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A pilot programme is in the planning phase with private training provider METAC in Mountrath, exploring training in construction-related Green Energy from compliance with Building Control Amendment Regulations (BCAR) to construction of energy-saving housing (including more economically viable alternatives to passive housing). It is planned to initiate these programmes in 2018, under the new Contract Training Framework.
LOETB has started working with Offaly Local Development Co and Teagasc in exploring a rural development initiative incorporating education and training, job creation and development around permaculture and more sustainable utilisation of land – agricultural and other. A working group has been formed and research is underway.

LWETB is a partner on the Regional Skills Forum where it responds to requests for specific training programmes.

**Action 88:** Develop Bioenergy Ireland to supply biomass for a range of customers, including power plants, CHP plants, etc.

**Lead responsible body:** Bord na Mona

**Other responsible bodies:** Coillte

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Bord na Mona has set up a new Biomass business unit. Work is ongoing to assess the potential of various biomass supply chains.

**Action 89:** Research the growing of suitable biomass on Bord na Mona peatland for potential use in Anaerobic Digestion plants for energy generation.

**Lead responsible body:** Bord na Mona

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Growing trials are ongoing to assess the viability of growing biomass crops such as rush, reed canary grass, and willow on cutaway lands. In addition, BnM is liaising with a review of the BogFor trials (forestry) which is being carried out by Dept Agriculture, Food and Marine.

**THEME 5  Skills enhancement and labour market activation**

**Improving engagement between employers and skills providers**

**Action 93:** The ETBs will work in collaboration with a number of new partners and local employers in 2015 to develop and deliver targeted responses to local skills and employment needs in areas such as Retail, Hospitality, Manufacturing, Marketing, Languages and IT.

These partners include Fasttrack to IT (FIT) in the ICT and Engineering sectors, and SOLAS (developing a Traineeship programme in Hospitality targeting 18-24 year olds under the Youth Guarantee). These approaches will be piloted in 2015 with a view to further expanding provision in 2016.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Other responsible bodies:** FIT, SOLAS, Hospitality sector employers, DSP/Intreo
Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Based on the success of the Hospitality and Tourism programme, LOETB are exploring the possibility of expanding the programme to other areas in the Laois/Offaly region for the coming academic year 2017/2018.

Consultations are underway with the Regional Skills Forum and industry in the region to explore the feasibility of constructing a training facility to meet the needs of the medtech industry. LOETB are exploring the option of adding a number of Language subjects to their PLC provision for 2017-2018.

The IT PLC programme in Tullamore FETC has been reviewed in collaboration with AIT, which has resulted in the addition of a software module in order to ensure the course is relevant to learners looking to progress to HE.

A number of Further Education and Training Centres in LOETB are running modules in Catering and Culinary Skills under both the Youth Guarantee Scheme and the Youth Education Initiative. Construction of a training Kitchen is currently underway in Portlaoise Further Education facility in order to provide modules in Catering and Culinary Skills under both the Youth Guarantee Scheme and the Youth Education Initiative.

LWETB has delivered programmes in the majority of these areas.

Action 94: The ETBs will develop local course design processes to reflect direct employer involvement in ITN, curriculum development, pilot and evaluation to meet the needs of employers, learners, jobseekers and priority cohorts so that processes are available and are embedded into and adhere to the relevant Awarding Body quality system.

Lead responsible body: Midland ETBs

Other responsible bodies: FIT, SOLAS, Hospitality sector employers, DSP/Intreo

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
LOETB is working in partnership with local employers, DSP, Regional Skills Forum, City and Guilds and employer representative bodies to design, develop, pilot and mainstream training programmes across a diverse range of sectors - construction, engineering, beauty therapy, healthcare support and vehicle conversion to date.

The aim of these partnerships is to develop bespoke training that responds specifically to local skill deficits AND offers opportunities for employment to unemployed people in Laois and Offaly. In 2017 these partnerships will result in new programmes in Construction - two in Formwork and two in General Operative at Mount Lucas, Steel-fixing at Mount Lucas, Local General Operative with construction employers in Banagher and West Offaly, and one with Laois employers at Mountrath.

There is a Vehicle Conversion planner with a small cluster of employers in Ferbane and Clara. Significant changes have also been made to Beauty and Healthcare provision that specifically respond to employer needs in those sectors.
LWETB has delivered a number of programmes which reflect direct employer involvement. LWETB is looking at developing a career traineeship in two sectors, but this will be based on "buy in" from employers.

**Delivering Courses to Address Identified Skills Needs**

**Action 95:** The Education & Training Boards (ETBs) will increase provision in the STEM subject areas.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Other responsible bodies:** Local employers, Athlone IT, Carlow IT, Limerick IT

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A feeder type course will run in Tullamore FETC in the coming academic year to assist learners to progress to the Applied Science, IT and Engineering PLC programmes. Additional STEM subject areas have been added into some LWETB programmes.

**Action 96:** The ETBs will deliver short term courses in security, retail, hospitality, and generic employment skills to target vacancies in the local economy.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland ETBs

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
LOETB completed two short term retail programmes in January 2017 and are working with Jobpath providers – Turas Nua and Seetec to develop programmes that may offer long-term unemployed people job opportunities that are accessible and appropriate to their skill sets and capacity.

LOETB are providing a number of 14 week Construction programmes in Formwork, General Operatives and Steelfixing to facilitate retention and support earlier employment opportunities. Short-term programmes present a challenge as employers have articulated a preference for work placement as a key component in all training.

However, LOETB is integrating specific skill development with work practice in a time period that balances the trainee’s need to be work ready when work placement begins with a sufficient time period to prove their worth to the employer on-site.

LWETB has delivered programmes in these areas.

**Action 97:** Promote the Graduate Business Growth Initiative through EI’s regional office in the Midlands. The programme supports the placement of graduates with SME companies.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
The Graduate Business Growth initiative supports Enterprise Ireland SME client companies to hire up to two graduates per year. The Scheme has been promoted at national level primarily through social media and the EI website.

**Action 98:** Skillnets will continue to fund groups of companies with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees, as well as free training to job-seekers.

**Lead responsible body:** Skillnets

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Skillnets has continued to fund the development of workforce skills in the Midlands Region through the provision of subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees, as well as free training to job-seekers. 32 Skillnets Networks have delivered training to over 180 companies based in the Midlands region in Q1 2017. Four networks are based in the region:
- First Polymer Skillnet
- Taste4Success Skillnet
- MBE Skillnet (Midlands, Border, East)
- Space Industry Skillnet

Training planned for delivery in this region from Jan-Mar 2017 is across a range of sectors including medtech, retail, healthcare, hospitality, agribusiness, IT and manufacturing technology. Over 85% of companies supported by Skillnets are SMEs or sole traders.

Over 600 trainees in the Midlands have undertaken training in Q1 2017. Courses include lean manufacturing, employment law, organic farming, ICT, injection moulding, food manufacturing and management development and leadership programmes.

**Improving Participation in Work & Training**

**Action 100:** Engage with Department of Education, IoTs and Universities to determine the feasibility of establishing Third Level outreach facilities.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Local Authorities and Midland LEOs are represented in the Regional Skills Forum which meets on a regular basis to discuss meeting employer skill needs.

**Action 102:** IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will continue to collaborate with the Dept. of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland, D/SP & SOLAS
Update: Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IDA Ireland continues to collaborate with the Department of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

**THEME 6   Building business networks**

**Action 103:** Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will facilitate the establishment of an industry-led CEO Forum in the Midlands to connect Irish and foreign owned companies in the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** IDA Ireland in collaboration with enterprise sector and business representatives

Update: Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Industry CEOs identified during the stakeholder events the value of CEOs from both multinational and indigenous companies meeting on a regular basis among themselves. This forum will ideally be only an industry CEO forum. Ideally, EI are looking for a number of CEOs who will take ownership of this forum. The agencies can provide support to enable this to get started. This ongoing item is linked through Enterprise Champion sub-groups. This Action item will require some degree of funding and could form part of an application to the regional funds once the call for these regional funds have been launched. Discussions are continuing on the scope and nature of this call.

**Action 104:** Regular meetings of local public enterprise partners will be held at regional level to discuss innovative approaches to collaboration to harness the enterprise potential of the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Enterprise Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** IDA Ireland, Midland Local Authorities, LEOs, AIT and other relevant public bodies

Update: Ongoing

**Narrative:**
An active strategic brainstorming group has met a number of times to discuss collaboration with regards to operational plans. Engagement with all LEO’s and Local Authorities on the Local and Community Economic Plan process has happened and will continue in the future. From these meetings, a number of projects are currently in gestation. These include an initiative supporting part-time entrepreneurship, the iLOFAR radio telescope in Birr Castle and an initiative around food hubs. Discussions between local authorities and the agencies have been happening on a regular basis. In addition, the regional skills forum has been an active series of meetings between all bodies on the issues of skills development for industry.

**Action 106:** As part of their Global Sourcing initiative, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will work together to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and
indigenous companies. The agencies will ensure that their clients in the region, where appropriate, are engaged in this initiative.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IDA Ireland is working closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. This is reflected by the Global Sourcing Trade Mission being hosted in Athlone on May 18th and by the continued use of Enterprise Ireland client companies on company site visits.

**Action 107:** Introduce relevant Enterprise Ireland clients to potential FDI investors to highlight possible collaborations for those investors if locating in Ireland.

**Lead responsible body:** IDA Ireland

**Other responsible bodies:** Enterprise Ireland

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
IDA Ireland is working closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. This is reflected by the Global Sourcing Trade Mission being hosted in Athlone on May 18th and by the continued use of Enterprise Ireland client companies on company site visits.

**Action 108:** The Midlands Gateway Chamber will celebrate and recognise the contribution of indigenous and multinational companies to the economy of the Midland Region through its annual Best in Business Awards.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Gateway Chamber

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A date for the annual business awards has yet to be confirmed.

**THEME 7  Marketing the region as an attractive place to work and live**

**Marketing the Region**

**Action 110:** Strengthen the marketing of MidlandsIreland.ie, and continue to support the MidlandsIreland.ie website to promote the region across the straplines of Tourism, Enterprise, Living and Learning, in the interests of regional economic development. An annual work plan will be implemented across these different straplines.
Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Other responsible bodies: Relevant agencies and industry

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
The local authorities launched tourism strategies in March 2017. All Local authorities have developed a suite of promotional videos.

Action 112: Attract at least one additional major employer to the region in the short-term through a collaborative approach on the part of industry

Lead responsible body: Midlands Chambers

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
The Midland Gateway Chamber continues to advocate and support the development and expansion of business in the Midland Region.

Place making

Action 114: The Midlands Local Authorities will commence a regeneration programme to enhance the streetscape in the main towns and villages.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Update: Ongoing

Narrative:
Over €1.4m was allocated to Midland projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2016. 26 projects in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath are benefiting from the fund in 2016, all projects involved a level of physical enhancement works in or around town or village centres, with each county allocated €360,000 for community projects. All projects are nearing completion. Athlone, Mullingar & Tullamore are benefitting from the Urban Development Strand of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme. All public realm projects are due for completion in 2018. Laois County Council has published its Public Realm Strategy for Portlaoise Town.

Action 116: Work with local businesses in the Gateway and principal towns to apply for the Purple Flag, enhancing the region’s reputation as a place to work, live or visit.

Lead responsible body: Midland Local Authorities

Update: Complete

Narrative:
Mullingar currently holds the Purple Flag. Applying for the Purple Flag is being considered by the Local Authorities through the proposed Town Teams.
**Action 117:** The Midland Local Authorities will continue to develop comprehensive programmes for Culture Night and Heritage Week across the region.

**Lead responsible body:** Midland Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
Events are currently being prepared for Heritage Week and Culture Night for H2 2017.

**Action 118:** Construct new Library in Portlaoise. This €3.2m development in the Main Street area of Portlaoise, will be a very significant regeneration of a vacant property.

**Lead responsible body:** Laois County Council

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The project has received approval under the Part 8 planning process in 2017. Revised overall cost estimate is €5m (including site cost and fit-out costs). Further preparatory design work underway.

**Action 119:** Refurbish Portarlington and Edgeworthstown Libraries.

**Lead responsible body:** Laois & Longford County Councils

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The new Portarlington Library officially opened in February 2016. Edgeworthstown Community Library: Library Capital Programme 2016-2021. The project is now proceeding to Stage 2 with the appointment of Architects Kenny Lyons to manage the project. A draft timeline for completion of the build has been put in place with detailed design and cost plan to be completed by end of 2017. Pending Department approval of the overall design and cost plan, the project will proceed to tender early in 2018 with a completion date of early 2019.

**THEME 8  Potential strategic areas for further job creation**

**Action 121:** ILOFAR Support the Establishment of a next generation telescope in Birr, County Offaly

**Lead responsible body:** Offaly County Council

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A consortium of Irish universities is building a LOFAR radio telescope at Birr Castle, Co. Offaly with €2 million in funding from Science Foundation Ireland, the universities, and philanthropists (www.lofar.ie) and Offaly County Council. This will be fully operational by Autumn 2017.
**Action 122:** Ibec to hold an Annual Regional Event on Topic of relevance to Business.

**Lead responsible body:** Ibec

**Other responsible bodies:** Local authorities

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
Ibec held a seminar on May 9th in Athlone – “Digital Age: your guide to digital innovation and GDPR compliance”. Digital innovation increasingly underpins the growth and dynamism of both business and the broader economy. Compliance with upcoming EU General Data Protection regulations (“the GDPR”) on safeguarding data privacy will mean that privacy is now everyone’s business, whether as an employer or as customer facing business.

**Action 123:** Support the Development of Center Parcs Longford Forest

**Lead responsible body:** Longford County Council

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
The €230m Longford Forest holiday village project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for a holiday village park in Longford is on track and is expected to open in 2019.

**Action 124:** Explore the possibility of establishing an Irish Centre of Excellence in Robotics Technology in the Midland Region.

**Lead responsible body:** Regional Skills Forum

**Other responsible bodies:** Local Authorities

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**
A full feasibility study has been undertaken and the idea has been widely publicised to the level of cabinet with local, regional and national and international stakeholders aligned in agreement that the initiative could result in 3,000 jobs over the medium-long term. A triple helix partnership of regional stakeholders from government, academia and industry has been appointed and a formal agreement is being drafted.

Local firm Robotics and Drives have funded this initiative to the tune of €30,000. The firm has developed a team, which can deliver on this action, however the project requires funding to retain key experts and drive the Action plan forward.

**Action 125:** InterTrade Ireland to host a regional Getting Brexit Ready Event

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**
InterTrade Ireland held a successful Getting Brexit Ready event in partnership with the Regional LEO offices as part of Enterprise Week, which was held in March in Athlone. Longford based Goodness Gluten Free Bakery presented at this event.