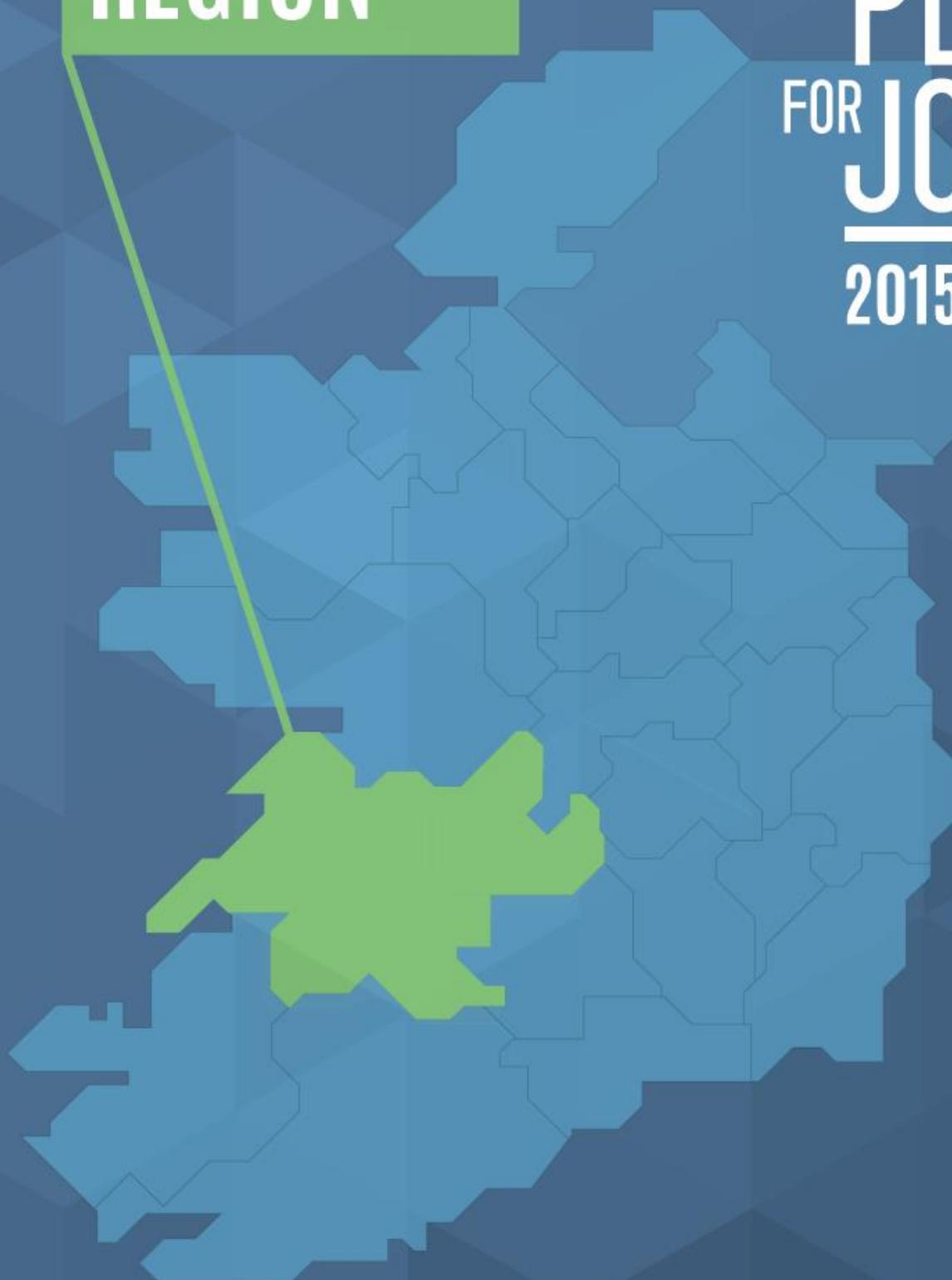


**MID-WEST
REGION**

**ACTION
PLAN
FOR
JOBS**

2015-2017





Action Plan for Jobs: Mid West Region

2015-2017

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Minister's Foreword



Since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012, employment has increased by over 120,000 across the economy as a whole and has exceeded the initial target set by the Government for 2016. However, while we have made great progress in increasing the overall numbers of people in employment, we need to accelerate the pace of economic recovery in the regions, through targeted supports for enterprise and job creation, if we are to achieve the goal of sustainable full employment by 2018. Vibrant and competitive regions are important, not just from an economic perspective, but also from a societal point of view. Growing the economic base of regions supports social cohesion and provides opportunities for families to continue to live and work in their local communities.

The Government's 2015 Action Plan for Jobs places an emphasis on developing the jobs potential of the regions. It includes a commitment to develop and publish a suite of Regional Action Plans for Jobs to support enterprise growth and job creation in the regions. These plans will complement and contribute to the Local Economic and Community Plans to be developed by the local authorities and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be developed by the three Regional Assemblies.

This Action Plan for Jobs for the Mid West region, covering the counties of Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary, aims to build on the strengths of the region, to support businesses to start up, grow and generate exports. Stakeholder engagement has been a core focus of the development of this plan, with many people, businesses, and public sector bodies in the Mid West region actively contributing to identifying opportunity areas and actions for inclusion in the plan.

Like the national Action Plan for Jobs, the Mid West APJ sets out a series of commitments on the part of public bodies, complemented by some actions from the private sector, which will support enterprise growth and job creation. It is intended that this Plan will be a living, dynamic document, with additional actions and ideas added as they emerge over the lifetime of the Plan.

This Action Plan is the fruit of significant collaborative work between the businesses, people and public sector bodies within the region, which includes vibrant industry, education and tourism sectors, as well as Shannon Airport, an international gateway for goods, services and passengers, and I would like to thank them all for their input into this work. It is the collaborative efforts of all these stakeholders which will make a real and lasting impact on the jobs potential of the region.

While my Department has facilitated the compilation of this Action Plan based on the engagements with stakeholders in the Mid West, ownership of the Plan – and ensuring delivery of actions - rests with the people, businesses, and public sector bodies in the Mid West region.

To support regional enterprise development, the Government will provide up to €250 million over the next five years to support Regional Action Plan process. €150 million of this funding will be made available to IDA Ireland for a property programme by IDA Ireland. A further sum of up to €100 million will be made available through Enterprise Ireland over the next five years to support innovative and collaborative approaches to support job creation across the regions.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Richard Bruton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Richard Bruton, T.D.,
Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation**

Executive Summary

The Mid West Action Plan for Jobs seeks to build on the successful APJ national plan which, each year, looks at how Government and industry can collaborate to improve the environment for enterprise to grow and jobs to be created.

The Mid West Action Plan for Jobs covers the counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. The region suffered badly in the crash¹, when 21,800 jobs (13%) were lost, with construction the worst affected but manufacturing also badly hit. Export-oriented enterprises supported by IDA and Enterprise Ireland suffered more than proportionately with some very significant closures. Although employment in the region is now growing recovery has been slower than in the rest of the country. The recovery has been led by employment in agency supported companies (2,167 additional jobs (+9%) from 2011 to 2014). There has been a strong flow of announced expansions in export led sectors in the region and there are early signs of revival in the domestic oriented economy after a number of difficult years. The unemployment rate has fallen from its peak of 17% to now stand at or a little above the national average.

The region has a vibrant and diverse enterprise base with significant capacity to grow. The overall ambition of this Plan is to have a further 10-15% employment in the region by 2020 and to ensure the unemployment rate lies within 1% of the national average.

The Mid West's dynamic enterprise mix, skills and talent base, excellent connectivity, strong education and research infrastructures and significant tourism and cultural assets offer great potential to realise this ambition and contribute towards the objective of creating sustainable full employment in Ireland from 2018 onwards. The aim of this Plan is to deepen linkages across the public and private sector bodies in the region and support a cohesive effort to build on these strengths and drive the enterprise and jobs agenda within the region. This increased collaboration will be facilitated through a number of recent reforms put in place by Government, including:

- the growing impact of the Local Enterprise Office network developed through the close co-operation between EI and the Local Authorities;
- the fresh mandate of the new Education and Training Boards who, like the Higher Education Institutions, are now focused on developing a stronger link with their local enterprise base;
- the strengthening of the Regional Offices of IDA and EI with a new focus in their respective national strategies on regional job growth;
- the reform of Local Government, with a greater emphasis on the economic development role of the local authorities; and
- the emergence of a stronger policy framework to underpin sectoral opportunities with a strong profile at regional level

Stakeholder engagement has been a cornerstone of the development of this Plan, with many people, businesses, and public sector bodies in the Mid West region actively collaborating and contributing to the Plan to improve their region's enterprise capability and hence jobs prospects.

¹ Q1 2007 to Q1 2010

Strengthening the collaborative efforts of all these stakeholders will make a real and lasting impact on job creation within the region.

Key Objectives to support jobs growth in the Mid West Region

Target an increase in employment in the region by **10 to 15% over the period to 2020** resulting in the creation of **23,000 more jobs compared to 2014**

Achieve an **increase of at least 25% in the number of start ups** in the region, through targeted initiatives and programmes to support enterprise

Increase employment in the existing base of companies by strengthening their capacity to **scale up their business** and **win new markets**. The existing base of over 1,000 enterprises supported by the agencies, which now employ over 30,000 people will be a particular focus of this effort

Attract more investment to the region: over the next 5 years, IDA is aiming for a **30% to 40% uplift in projects**, to a total of **66 investments** within the region

Position the Mid West as **the best location in Ireland for integrating skills provision with enterprise requirements**. The availability of a highly educated 'jobs ready' workforce in the region will encourage further investment in areas such as ICT and MedTech, which are already strong and growing employment sectors in the Mid West

Increase the innovation activity of enterprises in the region and develop their collaboration with the region's world class research institutes to foster innovation, supporting companies to **develop new products, services and processes**

Strengthen the important sectoral clusters in the region: **Aviation, Lifesciences, Engineering and Internationally Traded Services**

Increase the value of agri-food exports by 85% by 2025 by supporting food start-ups to grow and scale and enhancing the marketing of the region's food and beverage products

Grow **overseas tourist numbers** in the Mid West to **1.26 million** by 2025, increase **overseas tourism revenue** in the Mid West to **€375million** by 2025, and grow employment in the sector by 25% to 2025

Build **strong enterprise networks** around the region's ambitions to build competitive advantage, grow its enterprise base, and create the collaboration needed for the region to fulfill its potential



Key Projects and Actions

Key Projects and Actions that will drive the jobs increases over the coming years in the Mid West region include:

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Enterprise Ireland will run a Competitive Feasibility Fund for the Mid West in 2015 to assist new start-up companies, and build on this initiative.

Innovate Limerick will engage in the Construction of the Limerick Innovation Hub in Roxboro Limerick, which is due to commence in 2015. This will provide 35,000 sq.ft of stage two enterprise/incubation space for start ups and growing companies in the region.

Education and training providers will build a pipeline of future entrepreneurs through supporting the development of entrepreneurship in the education system through primary level programmes such as Bi Gnothach Enterprise Programme, second level programmes such as Student Enterprise Awards and Exploring Enterprise and a range of initiatives at third level.

Enterprise Ireland will create a Regional Innovation Process to encourage peer to peer interactions and SME – HEI linkages to promote and showcase innovation (people, resources, training and research).

The Shannon ABC Technology Gateway, based jointly in Limerick and Tralee Institutes of Technology, will showcase its applied research capability and promote greater industry engagement in collaborative research.

Skills

Education and training providers will deliver targeted educational initiatives aimed at meeting industry demand for highly skilled graduates across a range of sectors, including ICT, Engineering; Precision Engineering, MedTech and Agri-Tech. Higher and further education providers will collaborate with industry in developing programmes of study that will provide 'job ready' graduates for enterprise within the region.

A Regional Skills Forum will be established to improve collaboration between enterprise and the education sector in delivering the skills agenda. This can build on the existing well developed, productive and collaborative engagement between industry and education providers in the region, aimed at ensuring the availability of a sustainable supply of high quality skilled labour to support economic growth in the region.

Attracting Inward Investment:

Collaborative actions, aimed at strengthening the capacity of the region to sustain and grow existing FDI and attract new inward investment, will:

- Target 66 investments for the Mid West over the period 2015-2019.
- Target new inward investment opportunities by marketing the region as a location for FDI by aviation and aerospace companies.
- IDA will also provide an advanced technology building in Limerick in 2017.

Sectors

At sectoral level, key projects include the development of sectors with potential, such as Sport, Design, Renewable Energy and Marine, along with further projects outlined below:

Manufacturing

- Deliver targeted educational initiatives aimed at meeting industry demand for highly skilled graduates; and
- Develop a stock of high quality office and manufacturing buildings to potential FDI and EI clients in the manufacturing sector in the Mid West.

Aviation

Build on the region's key competitive strengths in aviation and aerospace to sustain and grow employment in the sector in the Mid West, through:

- The formation of a cluster group of aviation and aerospace industries in the region to support collaboration between existing enterprises and to act as a key reference point for attracting further investment in the sector;
- Enhancing the infrastructure in the region to support growth of existing enterprises and to act as a key selling point to attract further investment in the sector.

Tourism

- Enhance the marketing of the compelling tourism offering in the region, leveraging Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) and Ireland's Ancient East brands;
- Develop further tourism offerings in areas such as water based recreation and offerings based on the cultural and sporting heritage of the region.

Pharma

- Investment in relevant skills to support enterprise growth in the sector;
- Strengthening existing sectoral networks to provide an opportunity to facilitate productive interaction between companies, and between companies and research institutes, to facilitate, for example, convergence between medical technologies and ICT, leading to advanced innovations in products and services.

Agri-Food

Collaborative actions to develop the food sector will encourage food entrepreneurs and support food start ups to grow and scale through targeted supports and enhanced marketing of the region's food and beverage products, to increase the value of agri-food exports in the region by 85% by 2025.

In total there are over 150 actions in this Regional Plan. The Plan will be a living document and new actions will be added over time as existing actions are delivered, and new actions or opportunities present themselves.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This Action Plan, for the Mid West region, covering the counties of Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary² aims to build on strengths and assets of the region to develop a competitive, sustainable enterprise economy that can provide full employment over the long term.

Good progress has been made since the start of the national Action Plan for Jobs process 4 years ago, with the rate of unemployment in the region falling from 16% in Q1 2012 to 10.1% in Q1 2015.

The objective of this Plan is to ensure that the region develops to its full potential, by capitalising on regional strengths and areas of competitive advantage and establishing a cohesive approach to enterprise support and job creation in the region, to support businesses to start up, succeed, grow and export.

The Mid West region has a vibrant and diverse enterprise base, with recognised strengths in manufacturing, ICT, Aviation, Pharma/MedTech, Tourism and Renewable Energy. In addition, sectors such as Agri-Food and Agri-Tech, Sports Industry and Design offer further potential to develop sectoral strength. Many of these sectors are underpinned the presence of world class research centres in the University of Limerick and the Limerick Institute of Technology, which have a strong track record of collaborative linkages with industry, supported by Enterprise Ireland research and innovation programmes and the Shannon ABC Technology Gateway, which connects industry to research resources both within the region and across the State.

The Mid West region is a proven location for international business and is home to 116 FDI client companies, 10 % of IDA Ireland's total company portfolio – the third largest region by number of FDI companies in what is only the 6th largest population centre.

Another key competitive strength of the region lies in its excellent education infrastructures. There is a wide range of third level institutions across the region, including the University of Limerick, named 'University of the Year 2015' by the Sunday Times Good University Guide and Limerick Institute of Technology, named 'Institute of Technology of the Year' in both 2008 and 2012, also by the Sunday Times. Skillnets Training Networks are very active within the region, working with SMEs to build their management and financial capability. In addition, both Limerick & Clare and the Tipperary Education and Training Boards provide extensive further education and training within the region.

Education and training providers within the region have developed strong relationships with enterprise over the last number of years. There are many collaborative initiatives underway between industry and education and training providers to ensure the availability of a sustainable supply of high quality skilled labour, to support economic growth in the region.

² Following a decision of Government in June 2011, Tipperary was unified under a single local authority on 1st June 2014. However, the County continues to be split into two separate regions under NUTS III: Mid West and South East and it is recognised that investment and job creation in Tipperary contributes to the achievement of objectives in both the Mid West and South East regions.

There are also a number of regional and cross-regional business networks within the Mid West region, which bring together groups of talented entrepreneurs and enterprise to share, create and develop new ideas within and across sectors.

Key objectives of this Plan include:

- Increasing the numbers of start ups in the Region;
- Supporting existing enterprise in the region to grow and scale;
- Increasing innovation capability within the region to support companies in developing new products, services and processes for the global marketplace;
- Ensuring the continued supply of high quality talent to support enterprise within the region;
- Attracting and embedding FDI;
- Building on Sectoral opportunities to sustain and grow employment across a broad range of sectors, locations and skills levels;
- Strengthening business networks across the region to deepen collaborative working and connect enterprise across the region to a wider knowledge and support base.

The following chapters of the Plan provide an overview of the Mid West region, and identify the region's strengths, assets and sectors with growth potential, along with a series of actions to support job creation in the region.

Consultation was carried out with regional stakeholders, including an Enterprise Forum on 9th April, attended by over 20 companies across a broad range of sectors, a Regional Stakeholder Forum on 16th April 2015, which was attended by over 160 participants from the public, private and voluntary sectors, along with significant ongoing engagement with public and private sector bodies across the region. The contributions from stakeholders at these engagements all form significant and important components of this Plan. In particular, stakeholders identified the need for collaborative action to support the job creation agenda in the regions. While there is already a lot of practical and strategic co-operation taking place at local and regional levels, this Action Plan provides a framework in which such collaboration can be further enhanced between stakeholders to make a real and lasting impact on job creation within the region.

Implementation of this Plan will be overseen by Enterprise Champions based in the region and by a Regional Implementation Committee which will involve the key stakeholders in the region and which will meet twice each year to review progress on the delivery of Actions in the Plan.

The Plan covers the period 2015-2017 but, through the monitoring process, new actions can be added during that period, making the Plan a dynamic and living basis for progressing the jobs agenda in the region.

Synergies with Local Government Reform

This Action Plan is developed at NUTS III³ level and will complement and contribute to rural development initiatives and to the Local Economic and Community Plans being developed by the three local authorities in the region, as well as contributing to the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) to be developed by the Southern Regional Assembly, in common with the other Regional Assemblies. The RSES will support implementation of national spatial policies and the economic policies and objectives of the Government, including the national Action Plan for Jobs and these Regional Action Plans for Jobs, by enhancing co-ordination of planning and economic development functions of relevant Government departments and agencies and the local government sector, including the new Local Economic and Community Plans.

National Spatial Strategy

The National Planning Framework will be prepared in 2016 and will seek to build on the successes of the National Spatial Strategy to provide a strategic spatial policy context for balanced national and regional development over the next 20 years. It will provide the over-arching framework to inform co-ordinated decision-making by relevant Government Departments and Agencies that must be followed through in subsidiary plans – as such its influence will range from nationally important projects that will contribute to the strategic profile of the State, to more local actions that provide vital supports to our communities. In this regard the NPF will play a key enabling and co-ordinating role in the national effort to secure sustainable economic recovery.

Fig 1. Ireland's Planning Policy Framework 2016+



³ On 1st of January 2015 three new NUTS II Regional Assemblies consisting of a total of 8 Strategic Planning Areas at the NUTS III level came into operation.

Chapter 2: Mid West Region Overview

2.1 Population and main urban centres

The Mid West comprises counties Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary. The region has a population of 379,327 (Census 2011) and has seen an increase of 5.1% in its overall population in the period 2006 – 2011. All three counties have experienced growth; the population of Clare has increased by 5.6%, Limerick by 4.2%, and North Tipperary by 6.5%. The Mid West Region has an extremely favourable age structure with 28% of the population under the age of 20, and close to 50% of the population under the age of 35 (Census 2011).

Mid West population by county

Limerick:	191,809
Clare:	117,196
North Tipperary:	70,322
Total:	379,327

The major urban centres are Limerick City (pop. 91,454 including suburbs, making it the third largest city in Ireland), Ennis (pop. 25,360), Shannon (pop 9,673), Nenagh (pop. 8,439) and Thurles (pop 7,933).

The National Spatial Strategy, 2002-2020 designated Limerick/Shannon as a 'Gateway', a centre with a strategic location, nationally and relative to their surrounding areas, providing national-scale social and economic infrastructure and support services, with Ennis as a hub town and surrounding towns and villages supporting the regional economy.

2.2 Connectivity

Excellent national and international connectivity is a key strength of the Mid West region. The national road and rail networks of the region have seen significant development with the opening of the M7 motorway to Limerick, the Limerick Tunnel, the M8 motorway from Dublin to Cork – part of which is in the Mid West region, and the Limerick-Galway and Limerick-Waterford rail lines. This network provides connectivity to Dublin, Cork, Galway, and Waterford as well as connectivity between the Mid West, West and South East regions. These links to and from the Limerick/ Shannon Gateway are of vital importance in terms of improving linkages and co-operation with the 'Gateway' cities of Galway, Cork, Waterford and Dublin, enabling cross regional cluster development.

Shannon Airport is of major significance both regionally and nationally, being an international gateway not only to the Mid West but also to the West and South West of Ireland. It also serves as an international gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way. The airport is a key driver of economic development for business connectivity, tourism and cargo for these regions. Shannon Airport's full US Customs and Border Pre-clearance facility allows passengers to pre-clear all formalities before departing, making their arrival in the US easier and faster. In 2014, over 1.6 million passengers passed through the airport, an increase on the 2013 figure of 1.4million⁴.

⁴ <http://www.shannonairport.ie/gns/about-us/traffic-figures.aspx>

The Shannon Foynes Port is a designated Port of National Significance (Tier 1) within National Ports Policy and has the deepest available water of any port in the country. The sea ports and Foynes and Limerick Docks are hugely important, providing employment and trade opportunities. The Shannon Foynes Port Company has recently commenced construction on the first phase of its overall development master-plan which will further improve port facilities within the Shannon Estuary.

Fig 2: Map of Mid West Region



2.3 Quality of Life

Location decisions by companies (both foreign and indigenous) are not only considered in terms of (relative) cost, but also in terms of access to skills and talent, access to markets and customers (physical and virtual), innovative capacity and capability, and an environment offering an attractive quality of life for a mobile workforce.

The Mid West region, comprising coastal areas, mountains and waterways, offers a rich living environment which, together with the high quality recreational, cultural, sporting and educational facilities available, makes the region a very attractive place to live in, to work in and to visit. In Clare, 'Quality of Life' is considered a particular strength of the county and the Clare County Development Plan recognises the need to maintain and enhance the county's high quality living environment as an important factor in the future development of the county.

In terms of cities, Limerick, in particular, is performing well in terms of the quality of life factors, and is now ranked as one of the top 10 places in Western Europe in which to invest, by award-winning magazine, Site Selection's 6th Annual Global 'Best to Invest' Report 2014.

Access to affordable housing, a strong educational infrastructure and world-class amenities and leisure opportunities for those who decide to invest and work in the region are also seen as positive quality of life features. In particular, the Limerick/Shannon Gateway offers much greater affordability when compared with other Gateway cities. The Mid West also offers good connectivity to Dublin, Galway, Cork and Waterford. The eastern part of the Region offers proximity to the M8 motorway, connecting Thurles to Cork and Dublin and excellent rail links in terms of commuting and connectivity to Dublin.

2.4 Key Infrastructure Requirements to Support Enterprise

World class infrastructure is critical to support enterprise and success in export led growth.

A strong theme identified by stakeholders was the need to strengthen broadband Infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to enable companies to avail of growth opportunities and do business more effectively. This will be delivered through the Government's draft Intervention Strategy under the National Broadband Plan, which was published for public consultation on the 15th July 2015 and sets out the strategy to deliver high speed broadband with at least 30Mbps connectivity being available to all homes and businesses throughout Ireland, through a combination of commercial and public investment.

While connectivity between the main cities of Limerick, Dublin and Galway has improved significantly as a result of investment in the motorway network, provision of improved N24 road linkages from Limerick to Waterford and M18 linkages between Gort and Tuam would improve connectivity between Limerick and the more rural areas of the region, as well as linking the Gateways of Galway, Limerick, Shannon and Waterford, while the development of a new M20 motorway from Limerick to Cork is also of vital importance to connect the cities and regions. The extension of the dual carriageway to Shannon Airport would improve connectivity to the airport and

the development of a Limerick North Distributor Road would link the University of Limerick campuses in Limerick and Clare. Improvement of sustainable transport links into Limerick, particularly in terms of road and rail along the Limerick— South Tipperary—Waterford corridor are also identified as a requirement, in order to reduce journey times.

The Shannon Foynes Port Company has recently commenced construction on the first phase of its development masterplan, which will further improve port facilities within the Shannon Estuary. Improvement of transport infrastructures around the port at Foynes, including rail and road links, would enhance the potential for development of a logistics hub in the region.

Shannon International Aviation Services Centre and Shannon Commercial Properties are jointly assessing the business case for the construction of further Aircraft Hangars at Shannon Airport which, if constructed, can play a key role in the attraction of Engine Maintenance, Aircraft Interior Fitout and Aircraft Recycling businesses to Shannon.

In terms of property, the shortage of ready to occupy office space in the centre of Limerick is being addressed by local authorities. Limerick City and County Council is engaged in discussions to deliver office property space at locations such as the “Hanging Gardens” site and the Opera Centre site. As part of the Limerick 2030 Plan Limerick City & County Council is developing a number of key strategic Sites throughout the City and the County. These will include office/enterprise space for both multinationals and indigenous enterprise. A number of strategic sites have been secured by Limerick City & County Council and are under development:

1. Cleeves Riverside Park (8 acre site).
2. Hanging Gardens Office Block (100,000 sq.ft).
3. Opera Site (300,000 square feet/2 hectare site).
4. Limerick Innovation Hub has planning approved (35,000 sq.ft). Construction is to commence in 2015.
5. Anderson Enterprise Factory(100,000 sq.ft)
6. Colbert station – phase 2 of the development is to include office space.

A shortage of office space was identified in Tipperary during a recent independent study of available workspace in the county and Tipperary County Council will now look at measures and solutions to address this gap.

The Mid West Area Strategic Plan (MWASP) was published in May 2013 and its adoption will make a significant contribution to the creation of a more competitive, socially inclusive, economically and environmentally sustainable region. In addition, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), envisaged under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and proposed National Planning Framework, will enable actions to be taken at a regional level to address infrastructure gaps and other ecosystem priorities, informed by the evolving needs of enterprise and new ways of working.

Chapter 3: Economic performance

3.1 Employment and Unemployment

Overview

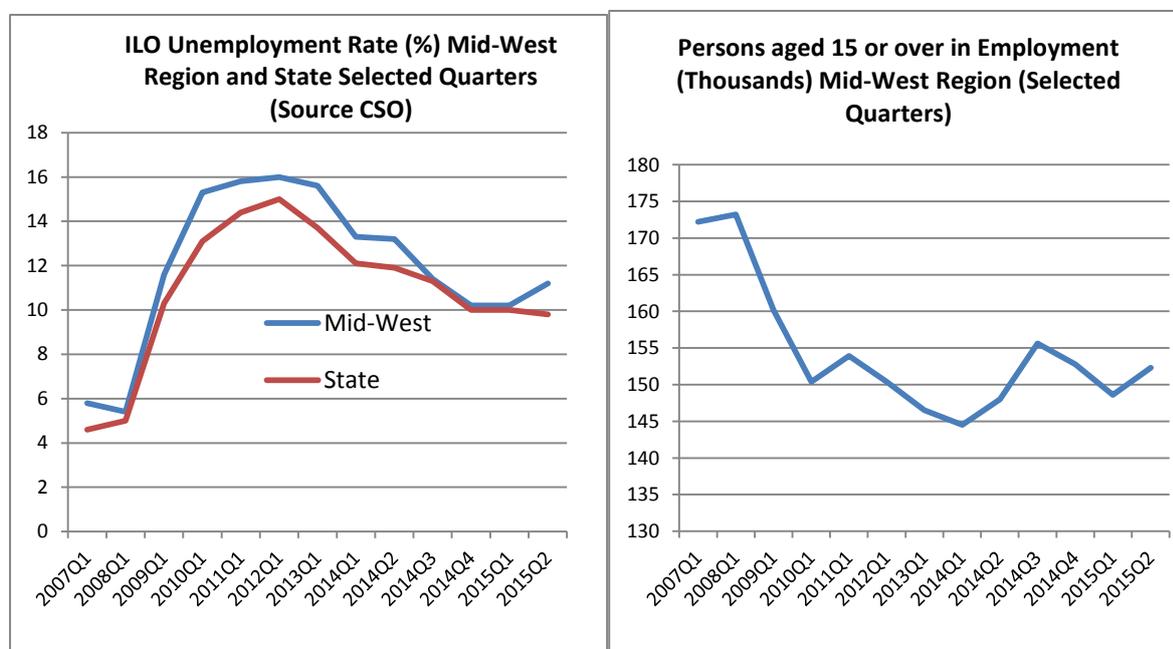
As was the case with all regions, employment in the Mid West was substantially impacted by the economic recession which commenced in 2008. In 2007, when employment in Ireland was at its highest historically, the Mid West region had 172,200 people in employment (Q1, 2007), with an unemployment rate of 5.8% - well above the national rate of 4.6% at that time.

The unemployment rate for the region rose to as high as 17.1% in Q4 2010, well above the national rate of 14.1% at that time. From the period Q1 2007 to Q1 2014, employment in the region fell by over 27,700 to 144,500. As the national economy recovers, the employment situation in the Mid West has begun to improve, albeit slowly, with the numbers in employment now standing at 152, 300 (Q2 2015).

Mid West region Key labour market data Q1 2015	
Nos. in employment:	148,600
Unemployed:	16,700
In Labour Force:	165,400
Unemployment Rate:	10.1%

Latest figures from Q2 2015, show the unemployment rate for the region had fallen to 11.2% (see trend at Fig. 3 below), which is above the national unemployment rate of 9.8%.

Fig 3: ILO Unemployment Rate (%) Mid West Region and State; Numbers in Employment Mid West Region⁵



⁵ Source: CSO QNHS Q1 2015 - Persons aged 15 years and over classified by NUTS2 and NUTS3 regions and ILO Economic Status

Sectoral employment trends

Table 1 below provides a summary of employment by broad sectoral category from Q1 2007 to Q1 2015. The Services sector now accounts for 69% of all employment in the region, Industry accounts for 17%, Construction 7% and Agriculture 7%.

Table 1 – Mid West Employment by sector, 2007-2014 (selected Quarters)

Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Thousand) NACE Rev 2 Economic Sector									
(Selected Quarters)									
Mid West Region						Change Between Q1 2007 and Q1 2012		Change Between Q1 2012 and Q1 2015	
	2007 Q1	2012 Q1	2013 Q1	2014 Q1	2015 Q1	(,000)	%	(,000)	%
All NACE economic sectors	172.2	150.4	146.5	144.5	148.6	-21.8	-12.7	-1.8	-1.2
Agriculture, forestry, fishing (A)	11.7	8.7	8.5	10.9	10.5	-3.0	-25.6	1.8	20.7
Industry (B to E)	30.9	23.9	23	24.1	25.2	-7.0	-22.7	1.3	5.4
Construction (F)	23.5	10.2	9.2	8.4	10.4	-13.3	-56.6	0.2	2.0
Services (G to U)	105.9	107.1	105.6	100.9	102.5	1.2	1.1	-4.6	-4.3

Source: CSO StatBank/Quarterly National Household Survey Main Results / QNQ40

Services

Employment in the Services sector remained stable relative to other sectors over the period of the recession. The sector currently accounts for 69% of all employment in the Mid West region, compared to 61.5% in Q1 2007, highlighting the growth of this sector in terms of its contribution to employment in the Mid West. There are currently 102,400 people working in the Services sector in Q1 2015.

Industry/ Manufacturing

Employment in the Industry/Manufacturing sector decreased by over 7,000 over the period from Q1 2007 to Q1 2012, from a high of 30,900 to a low of 23,000 in 2013. However, the numbers employed in this sector have started to increase again since 2012 and currently stand at 25,200 in Q1 2015. Manufacturing still retains a proportionately larger share of total regional employment (17%) compared to the national figure of 12.8%, reflecting the strength of the manufacturing base in the region.

Construction

The Construction sector employed 23,500 people in Q1 2007. The numbers employed in this sector in the Mid West region fell to a low of 8,400 by Q1 2014 but have started to grow again and currently the sector employs 10,400 people in the region in Q1 2015, accounting for almost 7% of total employment, similar to the national trend of 6.3%.

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for approximately 7% of employment in the Mid West, slightly above the national average of 5.6 %, reflecting the strength of the Agri-food/ Agri-Tech Sector within the Mid West and the rural character and natural assets of much of the region. While the numbers employed in this sector have declined since 2007, Agriculture still remains an important sector in the region.

Employment in the Services Sector

Within the broad Services sector, the combined areas of Public Administration/Defence, Human Health/Social Work and the Education sector account for 38,700 of those employed in the Mid West which represents over 38% of all Services employment and 26% of total employment in the region.

Given that a significant proportion of those employed in Human Health/Social Work and the Education sectors are likely to be public servants, there is a very high level of public sector employment in the Region. This is unsurprising, given the three local authorities in the region, as well as decentralised Government Departments / Offices located in Limerick, Nenagh and Ennis.

Outside the public service areas, which have delivered stable and ever growing employment, private sector services have suffered a prolonged decline and are only beginning to experience a recovery. The Wholesale and Retail sector remains the most significant sector of employment in the region, with 21,300 persons employed at Q1 2015, representing over 14% of total employment in the region. Employment in this sector has fallen from 2007 levels but has shown signs of a recovery in the past year.

Table 2 – Mid West Employment in the Services sector

Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Thousand) by Region, NACE Rev 2 Economic Sector and Quarter			
Mid West Region	2007 Q1	2012 Q1	2015 Q1
Services (G to U)	105.9	107.1	102.5
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G)	24.3	21.3	21.3
Transportation and storage (H)	8.8	9.0	6.1
Accommodation and food service activities (I)	9.7	10.0	7.9
Information and communication (J)	3.8	5.5	3.9
Financial, insurance and real estate activities (K,L)	5.4	6.1	4.6
Professional, scientific and technical activities (M)	6.3	6.2	8.7
Administrative and support service activities (N)	6.1	4.5	3.7
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security (O)	7.2	9.0	7.5
Education (P)	11.7	10.5	12.3
Human health and social work activities (Q)	15.7	16.7	18.9
Other NACE activities (R to U)	6.8	8.4	7.6
Not stated
Source: CSO StatBank / Quarterly National Household Survey Main Results / QNQ40			

Employment in Industry / Manufacturing

Employment in the Industry/ Manufacturing Sector has decreased by 5,700 over the period Q1 2007 to Q1 2015, and currently stands at 25,200.

The numbers employed in Enterprise Agency-supported companies in the Manufacturing sector (Table 3) in the Mid West have decreased overall by 1,869 since end 2006. However, in the last three years the beginnings of a recovery are evident, with 1,525 jobs being added.

Table 3 – CSO Industrial Employment and Employment in Enterprise Agency supported Manufacturing

CSO Industrial Employment and Enterprise Agency Manufacturing Employment (Selected Periods)			
Mid West Region	2007 Q1	2012 Q1	2015 Q1
CSO Industrial Employment	30,900	23,900	25,200
Manufacturing Employment in Enterprise Agency Supported companies	End 2006	End 2011	End 2014
Manufacturing	21,173	17,756	19,281
Food, Drink and Tobacco	3,120	2,760	2,772
Computer, Electronic, Optical Products and Electrical Equipment	3,915	3,366	3,801
Medical and Dental Instruments and Supplies	2,200	2,784	3,613
Basic and Fabricated Metal Products	2,702	2,087	2,154
Machinery and Equipment	1,650	1,329	1,458
Chemicals and Chemical Products	1,794	1,213	1,348
Non-metallic Mineral Products	1,637	1,036	1,245
All Other Manufacturing	4,155	3,181	2,890
Source: CSO QNHS Data and DJEI 2014 Annual Agency Employment Survey			

Employment in companies supported by State agencies

At the end of 2014, there were 27,278 people employed in Enterprise Agency supported companies operating in the Mid West region representing 12.8% of overall employment in the region. 24,489 were in permanent full time employment.

Table 4 – Employment in Enterprise Ireland and IDA-supported companies by sector (selected years)

Employment in Enterprise Agency Supported Companies (Selected Years)							
Mid West Region				Change between 2006 and 2011		Change between 2011 and 2014	
	2006	2011	2014		(%)		(%)
All Sectors	33,187	25,111	27,278	-8,076	-24.3%	2,167	8.6%
Manufacturing	21,173	17,756	19,281	-3,417	-16.1%	1,525	8.6%
International Services	8,651	4,268	4,389	-4,383	-50.7%	121	2.8%
Other Sectors	3,363	3,087	3,608	-276	-8.2%	521	16.9%
Source: DJEI 2014 Annual Agency Employment Survey							

In the period between 2006 and 2011, the numbers in employment in IDA supported companies fell by almost 5,500 (29%). Losses in the International services sector were particularly acute with employment falling from 7,113 to 2,457 representing a loss of 65% (4,587 jobs) in this sector. In the

same period, employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies fell by almost 1600 (11%) with the majority of losses (1,543) being incurred in the Manufacturing sector.

Since 2011 employment in IDA supported companies has increased by almost 1,200 with 826 new jobs created in the Manufacturing sector while employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies has increased by 1,000, with 700 new jobs added in Manufacturing companies.

Enterprise Ireland supports in the range of 430 client companies in the Mid West region, employing 12,731 people (11,252 in full time permanent employment). Major client companies of Enterprise Ireland include Pfizer Nutritionals Ltd, Profile Developments Ltd, Duggan Systems Ltd, Foynes Engineering, Abbey Farm Equipment Ltd, EI Electronics, Ohshima Ireland Ltd, Anglo Irish Beef Packers and Carey Brothers, Fabricated Products Ltd and Eirtech Aviation Ltd.

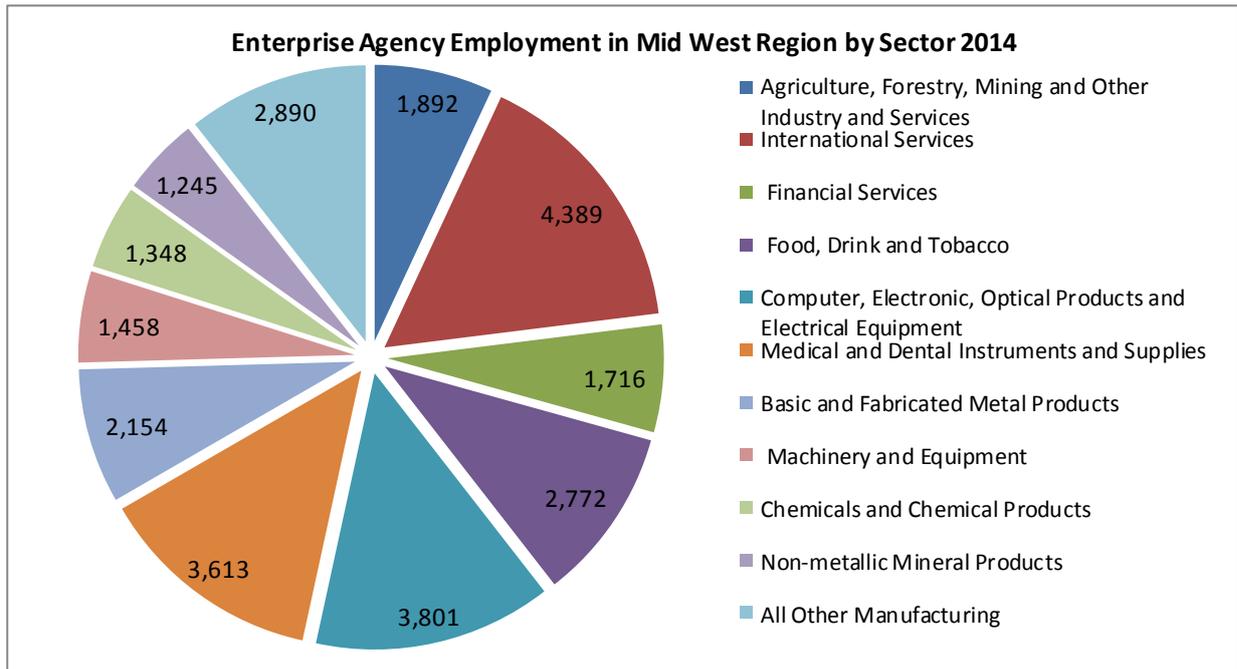
IDA Ireland has 116 FDI client companies in the Mid West region, employing just over 14,575 people in a range of sectors including ICT, Engineering and Life Sciences. A sample of IDA's clients in the region include Analog Devices B.V., Dell Products, Intel (ICT), Johnson and Johnson Vision Care (Ireland) Ltd, J&J Ethicon, Roche Ireland Ltd, Regeneron (Bio pharma) Cook Ireland Limited, Stryker Orthopaedics Limerick (MedTech), Lufthansa Technik Shannon, Kostal Ireland GMBH, Rusal Aughinish Ltd, Optel Vision, Proctor and Gamble, Element Six Limited (Engineering), Northern Trust Management Services (Ireland) Ltd, Genworth Financial, GE Capital Aviation Services Ltd, (International Financial Services).

The Manufacturing sector, employing approximately 19,000 people, accounts for most of the Enterprise Agency-supported employment in the Mid West region, with four sectors between them accounting for 64% of employment in this sector – Computer, Electronic, Optical and Electrical Equipment 3,801, Medical and Dental Instrument 3,613, Food Drink and Tobacco 2,772 and Basic and Fabricated Metal products which employs 2,154.

There are approximately 4,400 people employed in International Services in the region, with the vast majority engaged in Computer Programming, Consultancy and related activities in the ICT sector.

The Med-Tech sector has grown consistently since 2007 and now accounts for employment of over 3,600, a 64% increase on 2007 levels. While the numbers employed in the Food sector have remained static in recent years, with the removal of milk quotas there is significant potential to grow this sector in the region.

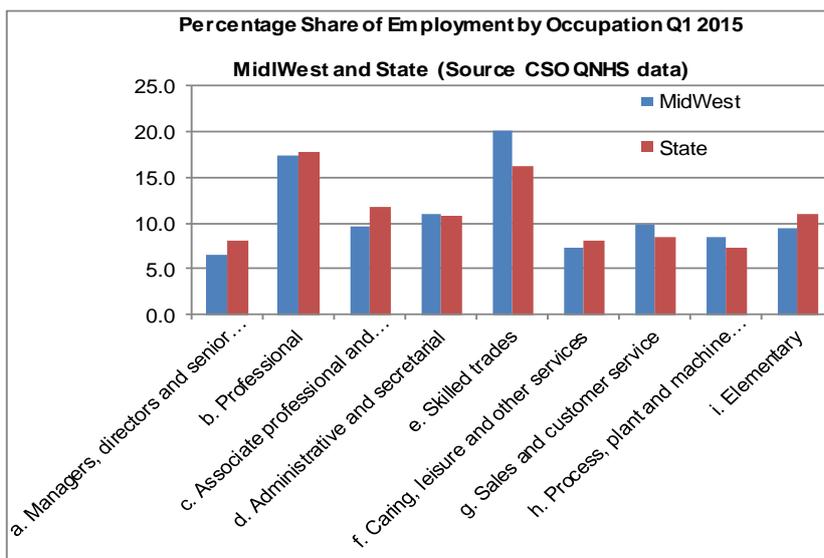
Fig 4 Sectoral Breakdown of Enterprise Agency supported employment



Employment by Occupation

Figure 5 below shows a breakdown of employment by occupation across the Mid West region as at Q1 2015. The highest proportion of the workforce in the region, 20%, is engaged in the Skilled Trades category compared to the national figure of 16.2%. In the A and B classifications, covering the Managerial and Professional occupations, the region compares quite closely to the national average, with a cumulative figure in these categories of 24% compared to the national average of 26%.

Fig. 5 - Employment by occupation: Mid West versus State QNHS Q1 2015



Source: Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by UK SOC2010 – 1 digit and NUTS3 Region Q1 2015

3.2 Business Demographics in the region

Table 5 below provides a breakdown of the number of active enterprises (including all of County Tipperary) for selected sectors in the Business Economy in the years 2007 and 2012.

The figures indicate that the, Wholesale/Retail, Professional/Scientific/Technical activities and Tourism sectors continue to be the most important sectors in terms of number of active enterprises, with the latter reflecting the strong tourism offering of the region. Construction, despite very high losses in the period shown (active enterprise -42%), continues to be a significant sector in the region, as does Manufacturing -in terms of the numbers employed in the sector.

Table 5 – Number of Active Enterprise, Key Sectors, Mid West region, 2007 and 2012

Active Enterprises in Mid West Region and South Tipperary Selected Sectors			
	2007	2012	% Change
Business economy excluding activities of holding companies (B to N)	21,057	17,501	-16.9%
Manufacturing (C)	1,440	1,276	-11.4%
Construction (F)	5,923	3,407	-42.5%
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G)	4,702	4,284	-8.9%
Transportation and storage (H)	1,235	1,000	-19.0%
Accommodation and food service activities (I)	2,081	1,942	-6.7%
Information and communication (J)	633	631	-0.3%
Financial and insurance activities excluding activities of holding companies (K-642)	289	310	7.3%
Real estate activities (L)	869	863	-0.7%
Professional, scientific and technical activities (M)	2,369	2,352	-0.7%
Administrative and support service activities (N)	1,380	1,277	-7.5%
Education (P)	535	862	61.1%
ICT total	604	617	2.2%
Source: Derived from CSO Database BRA18: Business Demography NACE Rev 2 by Activity, County, Year and Statistic			

Scale of companies

Of companies in Counties Clare and Limerick active in 2012⁶, approximately:

- 16,000 (91.3% of total number) employed less than 10 people with total employment of 22,356
- 880 (5%) employed between 10 and 20 people accounting for employment of 11,403
- 422 (2.4%) employed between 20 and 49 staff accounting for employment of 12,566

⁶ The CSO datasets do not distinguish between Tipperary North and Tipperary South; therefore it is not possible to provide this data for the Mid West region as a whole.

- 176 (1.0%) employed between 50 and 249 employees accounting for employment of 16,042
- 35 (0.2%) large companies in these two counties region employed more than 250 employees accounting for employment of 16,845

Data for all of County Tipperary is set out below for indicative purposes only: a significant portion of these companies are located in South Tipperary which is included in the South East region. Of the 5,835 companies active in Tipperary in 2012, approximately:

- 5,357 (91.8% of total number) employed less than 10 people with total employment of 7,726
- 302 (5.2%) employed between 10 and 20 people accounting for employment of 3,813
- 122 (2.1%) employed between 20 and 49 staff accounting for employment of 3,655
- 43 (0.7%) employed between 50 and 249 employees accounting for employment of 3,706
- 11 (0.19%) large companies in the county employed more than 250 employees accounting for employment of 4,153

Similar to all other regions, these statistics demonstrate that the Mid West enterprise base is dominated by small indigenous companies, with a relatively small number of large companies (less than 0.2% of total) accounting for employment of 16,845 (21.3%) in the three counties covered.

3.3 Education and Skills attainment

Table 6 below shows the highest level of education completed by the population in the Mid West region, based on the 2011 Census of Population. The average for the State is provided for comparative purposes.

The data shows that 69% of people in the region completed their education at or before upper secondary level, compared to 66% for the state as a whole.

In terms of 3rd level or higher 26% of the population in the Mid West region attained third level education qualifications. This is within 3% of the national average of 29% and is perhaps reflective of the strong educational infrastructure in the region.

Table 6 - Highest Level of Education completed by percentage of population: Mid West region and national average, 2011

Highest Level of Education completed: Mid West region and national average, 2011		
Level of Education	Mid West	State
Primary or no Formal	15.1%	15.2%
Lower secondary	17.7%	16.6%
Upper secondary	36.4%	34.4%
3rd Level +	26.1%	29.1%
Not stated	4.6%	4.7%
Persons (,000)	248.0	3,003.5
Source: Derived from CSO Census of Population 2011		

3.4 Gross Value Added (GVA)

In 2012, the latest year for which such data is available, the Mid West Region accounted for 6.6% (estimated value €10.5bn) of the total Gross Value Added within the State in 2012.

GVA per person in the Mid West region in 2012 was €27,464 compared to €34,308 nationally.

The services sector accounts for the majority of GVA in the Mid West, at 67.3%, followed by manufacturing (30.4%) and Agriculture (2.3%).

Manufacturing and Agriculture both contribute to more GVA in the Mid West than nationally. Agriculture accounts for 2.3% of GVA compared to 1.5% nationally, while the Manufacturing & Construction sector contributes to over 30% of GVA in the Mid West compared to 27% nationally.

Mid West region – GVA 2012 Data

Mid West GVA represents 6.6% of State Total

GVA per Capita 2012: €27,464 compared to State average of €34,308

Composition of GVA

Services 67.3%

Industry 30.4%

Agriculture 2.3%

Chapter 4: Enterprise Assets

4.1 Enterprise Agencies in the Mid West Region

Enterprise Ireland



Enterprise Ireland works with companies in the Mid West to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales in global markets. In this way, it supports sustainable economic growth and regional development, and secures employment. As an open economy, export success is fundamental to Ireland's regional and national growth.

The development of Mid West companies is important because locally owned businesses are more likely than others to:

- Generate a self-sustaining cycle of growth and reinvestment. Companies' profits are more likely to remain in Ireland and seek new investment and business opportunities within existing businesses or new startups;
- Form part of a balanced portfolio of economic activities that provide insurance against technology, sector or market-specific shocks;
- Provide and sustain a base of sub-supply and services companies to service the multinational company base; and,
- Generally operate a wide range of business functions in the Mid West and Ireland and provide opportunities for employee advancement and for the development of world-class companies.

Enterprise Ireland's client base in the Mid West is in three main categories:

- Manufacturing and internationally traded services companies⁷ employing ten or more people (with a focus on exporting or with the potential to export);
- Innovation-led start-ups with the potential to grow in international markets; and,
- Irish food companies, both those home-grown in Ireland, and those that are overseas owned or controlled.

Employment Levels in EI Client Companies in the Mid West

According to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation SPD Annual Employment Survey, there were 12,731 people employed in EI client companies in the Mid West in 2014⁸. This represents 7% of EI-supported employment nationally.

Enterprise Ireland's Role

Enterprise Ireland works with SMEs and large companies and works extremely closely with the Local Enterprise Offices in the Mid West. This ensures that targeted supports are available to companies regardless of their size but based on their needs.

Enterprise Ireland provides strategic support (aimed at developing capability within companies) and financial supports (for co-funded development projects). Very often both are combined to maximise

⁷ Examples include sectors such as Electronics, Engineering, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Dairy, Beef sectors, Financial Services, Procurement, Software, Digital Media and Internet

⁸ DJEI SPD Annual Employment Survey 2014

the impact of the supports provided. In the period 2013 to 2014, Enterprise Ireland approved €24.4 million directly to client companies in the Mid West.

Such supports are aimed at all aspects of a company's business plan and are designed to work together and mutually reinforce each other. Supports range from management development programmes, export development programmes, lean/productivity improvement, various financial supports (including grants to undertake feasibility, R&D) the provision of equity to startups, access to 31 Overseas Offices around the world, access to mentors and access to third level research (e.g. University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology).

Enterprise Ireland's agenda covers a number of key areas:

Entrepreneurship & New Companies: Developing the pipe-line of Mid West entrepreneurs and startup companies with the potential to trade internationally in the future in cooperation with, for example, the Mid West Local Enterprise Offices, University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology.

Non-Exporting Established Companies: Working with domestically focussed companies with the potential to export via the Potential Exporters Division (PED) regionally-based seminars, workshops, on-line diagnostic tools and market research resources are all provided to companies seeking new opportunities and preparing to enter new markets.

Established (Exporting) Companies: Enterprise Ireland engages with established Mid West companies in developing their capability to consolidate and deepen their footprint in existing export markets. Supports range from LEAN, R&D, management development, funding and access to 30 Overseas Offices – all as part of a comprehensive growth strategy.

Innovation: Enterprise Ireland offers a range of supports to drive innovation activities within all companies at different stages of development. The Technology Gateway Shannon ABC is located in the Mid West. Enterprise Ireland has also made significant investment in three Technology Centres in the Mid West (Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre, the Irish Centre for Composite Research and The Dairy Processing Technology Centre).

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland's new five-year corporate strategy places a renewed emphasis on FDI in the regions, setting ambitious FDI targets for each region. Over the past five years (2010-2014) IDA has secured 51 projects for the Mid West region.⁹ IDA is targeting a minimum increase in investment of 30% to 40% in each region outside Dublin over the period 2015-2019 compared to the agency's 2010-2014 strategy, an uplift which would result in between 66 to 71 investments for the Mid West region.



IDA Ireland's regional strategy implementation is centred on:

- Engagement with the existing client base in the region, and at corporate level, in order to ensure job retention and to explore/support expansion opportunities where they arise. One third of IDA

⁹IDA Ireland strategy – *Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015 -2019*

expansion and R&D projects occur in regional locations, and expansion projects on average tend to generate a higher number of jobs than 'new name' projects;

- Leveraging the enterprise cluster strengths of each region;
- Working to ensure each region has office and manufacturing buildings and greenfield sites available to potential FDI and EI clients;
- Engaging with all stakeholders, Enterprise Ireland, local authorities, third level institutes, indigenous and multinational companies etc., to ensure that IDA can market each region's competitive business environment.

The IDA and Enterprise Ireland co-operate on a local level to support FDI and enterprise development, through actions such as networking events for indigenous and FDI client companies and the promotion of regional supply chains to potential FDI clients.

Fáilte Ireland

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

- research and insights into the tourism industry and visitor experience
- advice on how to start and grow a tourism business
- latest tourism industry news
- quality assurance schemes
- management development programmes
- online and offline marketing training and support
- best practice and case studies
- access to funding

Local Enterprise Offices



Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), which operate within the local authority structure, act as a "First Stop Shop" for anyone seeking information and support on beginning a new business or growing an existing business. Their role is to drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation. They support business start-ups and work to increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses. Support is provided in the form of information, advice, training, mentoring, management development and selective financial support.

Local Enterprise Offices located in counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary (with offices in Clonmel and Nenagh) play a key role in supporting entrepreneurship and enterprise development within the Mid West region. They provide a range of services including:

- Business Information and Advisory Services;
- Enterprise Support and Development Services;
- Entrepreneurship Support Services;
- Local Economic Development Services.

Enterprise Ireland has a central role in maximising the impact of LEOs in the region through key interaction areas, to include ensuring proactive progression pathways for client enterprises between the supports of the LEOs and those offered by EI.

The LEOs are also an important element in the wider economic development role of local authorities, which has been significantly enhanced under the Government's *Action Programme for Effective Local Government* (October 2013) and the Local Government Reform Act 2014. Key strategic objectives of the local authority economic development role will be to implement actions to capitalise fully on the economic potential of local strengths and assets, and also to collaborate with relevant agencies to maximise the economic impact of major growth centres, in accordance with regional economic priorities which, in future, will be agreed in the context of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

In 2014 the Local Enterprise Offices had 507 clients with a combined total of 3,120 jobs in LEO supported companies. For 2015 and subsequent years, each LEO will publish an annual Business Plan, setting out clear targets for job creation and enterprise support.

InterTradelreland

InterTradelreland is a Cross-Border trade and business development body funded by the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation and the Northern Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which has been given responsibility to boost North/South economic co-operation to the mutual benefit of Ireland and Northern Ireland.



InterTradelreland supports businesses throughout the island of Ireland to take advantage of cross-border opportunities (worth in excess of €2.8bn annually) to improve capability and drive competitiveness, growth and jobs. Since its establishment, over 25,000 small businesses have been supported by InterTradelreland to identify and develop all-island trade and innovation opportunities; 6,000 have participated directly on programmes, with over €980m worth of trade and business development value and over 3,000 jobs created.

InterTradelreland helps small businesses through a strong mix of funding support, business intelligence and meaningful contacts. It supports companies not only with funding, but also with specialist expertise and vital introductions to help find the right person with the right skills. InterTradelreland also helps early stage companies become more 'investor ready' with a range of Equity and Venture Capital Advisory Services and links to key Business Angel networks on the island. For more established businesses looking to grow, InterTradelreland's Funding for Growth Advisory Services and expertise can help guide them to the most appropriate form of finance for their business stage.

InterTradelreland also provides access to a strong knowledge base through graduates, Universities, company collaboration and specialist advisors to support innovation and product development. Its extensive networks and partnerships, formal and informal, are central to its purpose to grow business in Ireland and Northern Ireland. A series of business events, including conferences,

seminars, workshops and masterclasses on various topics and themes (most of which are free to attend) offer companies the opportunity to make important connections across the island.

InterTradeIreland supports SMEs to prepare for public procurement opportunities through workshops, Meet the Buyer events and tender alerts. The body also helps SMEs to gain access to cross-Border sales through programmes such as Acumen and Elevate, and to identify sources of finance. The annual Seedcorn Competition, run by InterTradeIreland, is aimed at early and new start companies that have a new equity funding requirement and has a total cash prize fund of €280,000. The competition is run on a regional basis across four regions – Munster, Connaught & Leinster, Dublin and Northern Ireland.

4.2 Property Solutions

Shannon Commercial Properties

Shannon Commercial Properties is a subsidiary of Shannon Group and operates the property portfolio of the former Shannon Development. It has over 400 buildings and 2,000 acres of land in over 50 locations in the Shannon region. In addition, Shannon Commercial Properties manages the commercial property assets of Shannon Airport including its portfolio of MRO aircraft hangars.

A key objective of Shannon Commercial Properties is to commence a redevelopment program of its key property assets in particular in the Shannon Free Zone. This activity has already commenced and the goal is to provide high quality property solutions including new Grade A office and advanced manufacturing units as well as upgrading existing facilities in the Shannon Free Zone.

The Shannon Free Zone is the largest business park in Shannon Commercial Properties portfolio. Since its foundation in 1959, the 600 acre business park has become home to approximately 130 companies and generating multi-billion euro in exports per annum. The largest business activity cluster in Shannon is the Aviation/Aerospace cluster. Companies in this cluster include Aercap, Eirtech Aviation, Engine Lease Finance, GE Capital, Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), Lufthansa Technik and Magellan Group. Other business clusters in Shannon include Shared Service and Back Office Operations, Financial Services & Insurance, Supply Chain Management, Computer Services, Pharmaceutical, Medical Devices and Manufacturing. Companies in these sectors include El Electronics, Element 6, EMC, Extreme Networks, GE Sensing, Genworth, Ingersoll Rand, Intel, John Crane, Molex, UCB Pharma, TNT and Zimmer.

In addition, to the Shannon Free Zone, Shannon Commercial Properties owns and manages business and technology parks in Ennis, Limerick and Thurles.

Business and Technology Parks

In addition to the Shannon Free Zone, other Business and Technology Parks in the Mid West region include:

- **Information Age Page, Ennis** Specifically aimed at encouraging knowledge-based enterprise, the 35-acre Information Age Park, Ennis has approximately 50,000 sq.ft. of high-quality office space across in a landscaped urban environment, offering everything from turn-key business

incubation units to flexible high quality office space, as well as ready-to-go sites for private development.

- **National Technology Park, Limerick** The National Technology Park is located 6km to the north-east of Limerick City, adjacent to the motorway to Dublin and 30km from Shannon Airport. Providing a world-class business environment connected to a modern university campus, the National Technology Park has become home to a growing and influential nucleus of high-technology and knowledge-based companies, including over 80 global multinational subsidiaries, Irish technology companies, R&D institutions and support services.. ICT, Healthcare and e-Learning are the dominant sectors at the National Technology Park.
- **Raheen Business Park**, with an ideal location close to Shannon Airport, and major rail and road routes, is home to many international companies, including Regeneron Pharmaceutical; Analog Devices; Dell; Banta and Stryker Corp.
- **Tipperary Technology Park**, located in the historic town of Thurles, is home to many local, national and multinational companies availing of the communication links, infrastructure, accessibility and advanced business facilities they need to make this a local centre of business innovation and excellence.

Community Enterprise Centres

Community Enterprise Centres play an important role in nurturing and growing start ups and supporting enterprise at local and regional level. There are thirteen Enterprise Ireland funded Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) located in the Mid West region. Two further CECs are currently under construction in Co. Limerick, with clients Southill Development Co-op Society Ltd and Kantoher Development Group Ltd.

4.3 Southern Regional Assembly

The Southern Regional Assembly is the regional tier of government for the southern region and is based in Waterford. The Regional Assembly performs the following roles across the southern region:

- Management and monitoring ERDF co-financed Regional Programmes;
- Promotion and co-ordination of public services in the region;
- Monitoring and submitting proposals in relation to EU funding;
- Regional Planning including preparation of Regional Spatial & Economic Plans and making observations to public bodies with regard to the regional implications of their policies and plans.

4.4 Local Authorities

There are three local authorities in the Mid West region - Tipperary County Council, Clare County Council and Limerick City and County Council. These local authorities provide an extensive range of services for the residents of the Mid West counties, covering areas such as economic development – including operation of the Local Enterprise Offices, community development, housing, planning, tourism and physical infrastructure. The local authorities also play an active role in the development of industry, business, social, arts, heritage and cultural affairs.

The local authorities also have an enterprise development remit, with supports in the Mid West including:

- Information, advice, training, mentoring, seminars and selective financial supports;
- Provision and maintenance of innovation/enterprise unit space;
- The Commercial Incentive Scheme, which relates to grants to new occupiers of vacant premises in prime retail areas;
- Online Business Directory in some counties;
- Assistance/advice in public procurement for SMEs and sole traders;
- Assisting businesses in the identification of suitable premises through tailored property solutions;
- Limerick Economic Forum to promote & advance economic development;
- Strategic Policy Committees for Enterprise and Economic Development.

The Limerick 2030 Plan

City-regions are widely recognised as key to economic/ social revitalisation and regional growth and central to driving economic development, innovation and employment. In recognising this Limerick City & County Council have developed and are delivering on the Limerick 2030 Economic & Spatial Plan for Limerick to enable Limerick and the Mid-West reach its full potential. The 'Limerick 2030: An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick' is a 15 year plan that aims to transform Limerick through the economic, social and physical renaissance of Limerick City Centre and the wider County & Mid West Region. The Limerick 2030 Plan is essentially about ensuring that Limerick, as the heart of the Mid West Region, delivers projects of scale that will benefit the wider region in terms in terms of job creation and investment.

The plan seeks to deliver 12,000 jobs with 5,000 in the City Centre over the lifetime of the plan, to transform Limerick and the wider Mid West Region. Since the €500 million, 15-year plan was launched in 2013:

- 2,500 new jobs have already been secured for Limerick.
- National and International partnerships have been secured to deliver a range of new investments from Film Studios to Innovation Hubs.
- Numerous strategic sites and locations in Limerick have been purchased and secured to anchor major new projects.
- Close to ½ million sq ft of new world class office and enterprise space is in development to support this new investment drive.

Clare County Development Plan 2011–2017

The Clare County Development Plan 2011-2017 sets out a vision of 'A County Clare where people want to live and work sustainably and visit because of its unique quality of life. An inclusive County of sustainable communities that each have respect for their environment, a sense of awareness of place, a sense of shared purpose and a sense of civic pride'.

Some of the key goals of the Clare County Development Plan 2011-2017 include:

- Promoting tourism development

- Harnessing the potential of the Shannon Estuary
- Prioritising the growth & development of Shannon Airport
- Maximising the County's renewable energy resources and developing clean technology
- Realising the full potential of Shannon Linked Gateway
- Ensuring a vibrant retail offer
- Proactively pursuing economic growth and maximising natural resources
- Investing in infrastructure
- Maintaining a high quality environment

Tipperary County Development Plan

Following the establishment of Tipperary County Council in June, 2014, the Council is currently undertaking a variation process of both existing County Development Plans to put in place a strategic planning framework and new vision for the future development of the County of Tipperary. This new strategic planning framework will ensure the future support and promotion of regional economic opportunities and job creation in Mid-West and South East Regions.

The County Development Plan pertaining to the Mid-West Region is the North Tipperary County Development Plan, 2010. The Plan includes the following Strategic Aims:

- To secure the County's role as a location for economic growth in the Mid-West Region in support of the Shannon-Limerick Gateway
- To work in partnership with state bodies to facilitate and encourage the development of technology parks, enterprise units, start up-business and to ensure the County is economically sustainable
- To maximise the County's renewable energy resources including facilitating the sustainable development of Bio- Energy and Bio-Technology Enterprises within the County
- To promote the development of the tourism sector, including harnessing the potential of the Lough Derg area in partnership with adjoining local authorities and tourism stakeholders.
- To maximise the potential and opportunities of the retail sector, while protecting and enhancing the viability and vitality of town centres
- To encourage sustainable development of rural communities and to revitalise rural villages as nodes for employment and residential growth
- To invest in the county's infrastructure in partnership with state and private providers

4.5 Higher and Further Education & Training

Within a 90 minute catchment of Limerick, there are 3 Universities and 3 Institutes of Technology with a student cohort of c.67,000 and c. 20,000 graduates per annum. In the Mid West Region itself, there are two 3rd Level Institutions - University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology. In addition, the Limerick & Clare and Tipperary Education and Training Boards provide almost 28,000 adults with Further Education and Training opportunities throughout the region.

University of Limerick

The University of Limerick (UL) has been named 'University of the Year 2015' in the Sunday Times Good University Guide. UL is an internationally focussed university with a student population of 13,000, is home to Europe's largest student Internship programme and also houses Ireland's only on-campus live trading floor.

The University of Limerick has the following faculties in its campuses in Limerick and Clare:

- Kemmy Business School (Accounting and Finance, Management and Marketing, Personnel and Employment Relations, Economics);
- Education and Health Sciences (Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Psychology, Graduate Entry Medical School, Education and Professional Studies, Nursing and Midwifery, Clinical Therapies);
- Arts, Humanities and Social Science (Sociology, History, Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, Law, Politics and Public Administration, Culture and Communication);
- Science and Engineering (Architecture, Civil Engineering and Materials Science, Computer Science and Information Systems, Electronic and Computer Engineering, Mathematics and Statistics, Life Sciences, Mechanical, Aeronautical and Biomedical Engineering, Physics & Energy, Design and Manufacturing Technology, Chemical and Environmental Science);
- Irish World Academy of Music and Dance.

In relation to research, University of Limerick has a large number of academic-industry collaborations. The University has particular strengths in Materials, Manufacturing, ICT, Applied Mathematics and Health. UL hosts 2 Large SFI funded Centres and 3 large scale Technology Centres, funded by EI and IDA, which focus on identifying new sources of industrial growth and job creation and achieving competitive advantage for industry in Ireland by leveraging the innovative capacity of the Irish research community.

Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology has approximately 6,500 students across its campuses in Limerick, Ennis, Thurles and Clonmel, the majority of whom are pursuing courses in the areas of Science, Engineering and IT or Business. LIT offers courses from Level 6 (certificate) through Level 10 (Ph.D) whilst also catering for craft apprentices and adult and continuing education. LIT is unique in the Institute of Technology system in offering enterprise incubation facilities co-located with each of its campuses (see also Chapter 6).

LIT was awarded the Sunday Times 'Institute of Technology of the Year' in both 2008 and 2012 by the Sunday Times University Guide.

LIT has three faculties, all of which are multi-campus operations:

- Art & Design (LSAD), offering programmes in Painting, Printing, Fashion, Visual Communications, Digital Animation, Multimedia and Sculpture – LSAD has a strong national and international reputation with its Fashion Design courses in the global top 50;
- Applied Science, Engineering & IT (ASET), offering programmes in Mechanical, Electronic, Automotive and Software Engineering, SCM, Applied Biosciences, Biotechnology, Drug Analysis, Games Development, Construction, Civil Engineering, Quantity Surveying;

- Business & Humanities (BH), offering programmes in Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Management, Tourism, Hospitality, Sports Management and Sports Strength and Conditioning, Social Studies.

Mary Immaculate College

Mary Immaculate College, located in Limerick, is a College of Education and Liberal Arts, founded in 1898. It became academically linked to the University of Limerick in 1991 and all degrees, certificates and other educational awards offered at the college are accredited by the university. The college has approximately 3,500 students, enrolled in a wide range of programmes in Education and the Liberal Arts at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Shannon Consortium

UL, LIT and MIC collaborate closely under the banner of the Shannon Consortium, which is recognised as a Regional Cluster by the HEA under national policy for higher education. The Shannon Consortium footprint maps perfectly against the NUTS III region (Mid West) for the purpose of the Action Plan for Jobs and the Regional Skills Forum, thus ensuring cohesion of objectives and implementation.

Garda National Training College, Templemore

The Garda National Training College, Templemore is the national centre for policy training, development and education within the Irish State and provides foundation training programme for new recruits and operational training programmes to serving Gardaí, including high level training for senior management.

Gurteen College, Roscrea

Gurteen College, Ballingarry, Roscrea, owned by Teagasc, offers a range of practical agricultural training courses on their 380 hectare farm. The centre offers both residential and day time tuition to meet the needs of young farmers in terms of farming practices, certification, succession etc.

St Patrick's College, Thurles

St Patrick's College, Thurles, Tipperary is a college of education, primarily specialising at undergraduate level in preparing students to teach in post-primary schools. Accredited by the University of Limerick, the college currently offers four full-time BA in Education degrees, which prepare teachers of Religious Studies, Irish, Business and Accountancy for employment in post-primary schools.

Shannon College of Hotel Management

Shannon College of Hotel Management, a constituent college of NUI Galway, located in Shannon, Co. Clare, provides professional training and qualifications for professional managers in the hospitality industry.

Burren College of Art

The Burren College of Art in Ballyvaughan, Clare, gives student artists the opportunity to develop their creative potential in the unique environment of the Burren.

SOLAS

SOLAS, the new Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland, is responsible for the delivery of integrated Further Education and Training by the Education and Training Boards. SOLAS works closely with a wide range of stakeholders on the needs of the labour market, including learners, employers, Education & Training Boards, Government departments, state bodies, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and representative organisations.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

There are two ETBs serving the Mid West region, collectively serving the needs of over 39,400 learners from first level through to adult education and further training:¹⁰

- Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board
- Tipperary Education and Training Board

Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) provides services in Limerick and Clare. Through its extensive network of further and adult education centres and programmes throughout the region, including its two dedicated training centres in Limerick and Shannon and its FE college in the city, it offers the standard trade apprenticeships as well as a wide range of education and training opportunities, both certified and uncertified, catering for the full age spectrum of the population of its catchment area, from school leavers to retirees.

The new LCETB Employer Engagement strategy involves engagement between the LCETB and Chambers, LEOs, Ibec and Regional Skills Fora and increases links with all HEA institutions.

LCETB Training Centre Raheen is directly involved with employers and IDA in exploratory discussions regarding the provision of specific skills programmes for companies. These links enable LCETB to address specific training needs and design bespoke programmes if required. LCETB Training Centre Shannon is directly involved with Mid West based companies in the aviation, electronic, precision engineering and toolmaking areas. LCETB participates in 'Limerick for Engineering', enabling direct links with over 20 leading edge companies, multinationals and SMEs in the region. This is a direct link to employers to develop a pipeline of apprentices, technicians and engineers in the region to meet the specific demands of the engineering sector in the region.

The new LCETB Hospitality Education Training Centre provides students with QQI accredited programmes for a variety of jobs in the hotel and catering industry. This is an example of direct liaison with employers in the hospitality industry and addresses their skills shortage. LCETB Hospitality Programme directly targets people who are unemployed and enables them to retrain in a specific skills programme. To date the programme has linked directly with the IHF, VFI, Fáilte Ireland, DSP and local consortium of hoteliers in the Mid West region. 75% of graduates of the programme gain employment and LCETB is currently developing a Career Traineeship in Hospitality. In addition, and in response to growing opportunities in the sector, three Local Training Initiatives are focussed on delivering hospitality skills training. These are based in East and West Clare and South Limerick. The success of the programme to date is based on consultation with industry and curricula are driven by industry needs.

¹⁰ Includes data for South Tipperary; Tipperary ETB data is gathered at county level

Tipperary Education and Training Board provides a comprehensive range of quality education programmes to meet the needs of the community it serves, with accredited courses ranging from Levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. In addition, Tipperary ETB plays a significant role in the Strategic Development of the County through a variety of inter-agency programmes.

Tipperary ETB has formal referral protocols with the Department of Social Protection and Local Enterprise Offices for better interagency communication. Tipperary ETB has also signed a MOU with Limerick Institute of Technology, to ensure there is a closer working relationship between further education and higher education for the benefit of the learner.

Tipperary ETB operates a number of programmes with direct employer involvement, e.g. Skills for Work, which allows those in employment to upskill via inputs from Tipperary ETB. These courses are designed in collaboration with employers and each one is unique to the requirements of the workplace.

- The Up-Skilling/Re-Skilling Committee subgroup of the North Tipperary County Development Board Economic Working Group was responsible for initiating and successfully running a 'Who To Talk To' Event in 2012, 2013, 2014 and an all-county Enterprise Week in May 2015.
- An Education and Training Needs Analysis of employers was also carried out and finalised in July 2014 by the Up-Skilling Committee, with key actions to be rolled out by the LCDC.

Skillnets

Skillnets funds 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. Skillnets has 63 training networks nationwide. Through its ManagementWorks programme, which offers structured learning and one-to-one mentoring support, Skillnets works with SMEs to build their management and financial capability.

Skillnets training networks based in the Mid West region:

- ACIST Skillnet (Mid West Regional Network)
- Social Media Skillnet
- County Tipperary Skillnet
- ULearning Skillnet
- XLVets Skillnet
- Limerick Chamber Skillnet
- Innovation & Lean Sigma Skillnet
- IMDA Skillnet (Irish Medical Devices Association)
- Business Excellence Skillnet
- Lean Water & Energy Skillnet
- Aviation & Aerospace Skillnet
- FINUAS Skillnet

Other national sectoral Skillnets that deliver training to companies in the Mid West include;

- National Organic Training Skillnet
- CPA Ireland Skillnet (Certified Public Accountants)
- Macra na Feirme Young Farmers Skillnet
- Farm Business Skillnet (Irish Farmers Association)
- Law Society Skillnet
- HPSU Skillnet (High Potential Start Ups)
- ISME Skillnet (Irish Small and Medium Enterprise)

Over 1,400 companies in the Mid West region were members of a Skillnets training network in the past year and over 5,100 employees benefited from training. The main sectors supported by Skillnets in the Mid- West region are Agriculture, Services, Food & Drink, Retail, Manufacturing, Health and Tourism & Travel. Further information on Skillnet networks and training courses is available on www.skillnets.ie

Intreo (Employment Services)

Intreo, a new service managed by the Department of Social Protection, was launched in 2012. Intreo Centres act as a single point of contact for all employment services and supports for both Jobseekers and Employers, providing support regarding benefits entitlements, advice on training options and assistance in securing employment/employees.

Intreo Centres in the Mid West Region are located in Limerick, Newcastle West and Ennis with plans currently underway for Thurles local office to become an Intreo Centre. The Department of Social Protection also has Branch offices in Kilmallock, Ennistymon, Kilrush, Tulla, Nenagh and Roscrea. Jobseekers are provided with employment and income support services via Intreo Centres in the Mid West region.

4.6 Research and Technology Centres

University of Limerick

In terms of research, University of Limerick hosts 3 large scale Technology Centres, funded by EI and IDA, which focus on identifying new sources of industrial growth and job creation and achieving competitive advantage for industry in Ireland by leveraging the innovative capacity of the Irish research community. An outline of the main research focus of each centre is provided below, with further detail in Chapter 8.

- The Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre (PMTC), providing access to a wide range of core capability and skills in continuous processing, mathematical modelling, statistics and process optimisation.
- The Irish Centre for Composites Research (iCOMP), providing world class innovative R&D capability and networking opportunities for industry throughout Ireland across all sectors where there are opportunities to use composite materials and associated technologies.
- The Dairy Processing Technology Centre (DPTC), a centre of excellence for dairy processing research and innovation.

The University of Limerick hosts two large SFI funded Centres:

- Lero – The Irish Software Research Centre is also headquartered at the University of Limerick, which has raised the level and profile of Irish software research with such effect that it is now one of the best known and highly regarded software-related research centres in the world. Lero interfaces with a wide range of industry, state agencies, educational bodies and international collaborators to deliver on its twin goals of research excellence and social and economic relevance.
- The Synthesis and Solid State Pharmaceutical Centre (SSPC), representing a significant combined Science Foundation Ireland and industry investment of €42 million. Its mission is to position Ireland as a global hub of pharmaceutical process innovation and advanced manufacturing.

Mathematics Applications Consortium for Science and Industry (MACSI), also hosted by UL, is the first industrial mathematics network of its kind in Ireland, representing the largest single grant awarded to mathematics in this country. MACSI works closely with scientists and industry on interdisciplinary problems using mathematical expertise to develop insight and provide innovative solutions.

The Taoiseach, Enda Kenny launched the €52 million Bernal Project – a science and engineering initiative in University of Limerick on the 17th October 2013. The project will contribute to the national research initiative in the areas of Pharmaceutical, biomedical and energy research and development.

Limerick Institute of Technology

The research community at LIT has continued to grow year-on-year. Over 200 people are actively engaged in LIT in innovative applied research in partnership with industry, supporting international operators as well as indigenous players. At any one time LIT has approximately 150 projects in hand in partnership with industry, funded from over sixty different funding sources, supporting the growth of business and employment. In 2014, the number of postgraduate research students at LIT passed 100 for the first time. Since the publication of LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020, LIT has significantly developed its critical mass and capability via a number of dedicated research centres and groups that are supported through the LIT Graduate School.

Five centres attract substantial external funding: the Shannon Applied Biotechnology Centre (Shannon ABC, active under Horizon 2020), the Controlled Environment Laboratory for Life Sciences (CELLS, active under Horizon 2020), the Applied Control for Distributed Renewable Energy Systems Group (ACORN, active under Horizon 2020), Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (active under Horizon 2020) and Limerick School of Art and Design (LSAD, e.g. under the Limerick City of Culture programme, active under Horizon 2020 and HERA Creative Europe Programme). This has led to increases in the total research funding envelope and in postgraduate research numbers, putting LIT higher up the IOT rankings for knowledge transfer through research.

Emerging opportunities under EU Horizon 2020 are being actively pursued, building on existing strengths and international networks. Other recently established research centres and groups are: Interactive Systems and Games Technologies Research Centre, ACADEmy in Art and Design which is

active under Erasmus Plus, Analytical Sciences Research Group, Built Environment Technology and Educational Research Group (BETER), Energy Management and Environmental Ecosystems Group (EmmE), Gender and Sexuality Research Group, Health & Social Research Group (HEALR), Loss and Grief Group, and new groups carrying out research in Enterprise and the Games sector.

4.7 Enterprise Networks

Chambers of Commerce

Chambers of Commerce provide support to enterprises and work to create an improved business environment for both new and existing businesses. They also provide employee training and upskilling, space and, importantly, information for businesses on the supports and services that are available to them. At a regional level, they work to provide networking opportunities and business information events and work with key influencers and decision-makers on behalf of their members on issues that are impacting on their businesses.

There are seven Chambers of Commerce in the Mid West region:

- Limerick Chamber of Commerce
- County Tipperary Chamber of Commerce
- Roscrea Chamber of Commerce
- Thurles Chamber of Commerce
- Nenagh Chamber of Commerce
- Ennis Chamber of Commerce
- Shannon Chamber of Commerce

Irish Centre for Business Excellence (ICBE)

ICBE is a non-profit, peer-to-peer business network established by leading companies in Ireland for the purpose of promoting business excellence and sharing best practice, specialising in the manufacturing and service sectors. ICBE is based in Limerick and is active across the Mid-West region, with both Skillnets and Employment Related Services including Job-Seekers Support Program (JSSP), Momentum, Begin Again and Foot-in-the-door.

ICBE manages four of the region's Skillnets: Innovation and Lean Sigma, Business Excellence, Aviation Finance Finuas, and Aviation and Aerospace.

4.8 Local Development Companies

Integrated Local Development Companies are not-for-profit companies that target the areas of greatest need in the country, to provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and to promote social inclusion across a number of measures including: Services for the Unemployed, Community Development and Community Based Youth Initiatives. There are five Integrated Local Development Companies in the Mid West region:

- Clare Local Development Company, Ennis, Co. Clare
- Ballyhoura Development, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick
- PAUL Partnership, Limerick City
- West Limerick Resources, Newcastle West, Co. Limerick
- North Tipperary LEADER Partnership, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

The Local Development Companies provide a range of services to clients, including services to support the development of enterprise throughout the region. The Local Development Companies work as closely as possible with the LEOs and have successfully progressed some clients to LEO supports. The Companies also provide supports to clients under the Back To Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP), which are funded by the Department of Social Protection and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government respectively.

4.9 Other Bodies supporting enterprise in the Mid West region

Teagasc

Many farm families are interested in diversification opportunities to improve their income and sustain the farm into the future. While the priority on many farms is to improve the technical performance of the existing farm enterprises, on others there may be opportunities to add value to the farm output or to diversify into other activities.

Teagasc *Options* Programme can help farm families to take a serious look at the viability of the farm and farm household and provide them with information on a variety of diversification ideas. The programme is implemented mainly through a series of 'Farm Options' workshops in the Teagasc Regional Management units, in conjunction with local development and training agencies. In 2012 over 500 people attended 13 of these courses nationwide and received invaluable advice from a range of specialists and entrepreneurs in basic farm finance, idea generation, rural tourism, organic farming, forestry, artisan food production, direct selling, applying for LEADER grant aid, farm social supports, basic business planning and more. On completion of the course, over 60 % of course participants had obtained at least one new idea to generate more income and put a plan to pursue their idea.

The Teagasc *Options Plus* programme partners with external agencies to provide a range of courses and information to meet the skills needs of farmers and their families to help them access the off-farm labour market or supplement family farm income through either on or off-farm diversification opportunities. Teagasc, with its nationwide network of offices and advisory staff will partner with skills and enterprise support agencies including the ETBs, LEOs, Department of Social Protection, Local Development Committees and third level institutions in providing elements of training courses such as those related to farm financial planning, business planning, farm and household cash-flow management and direct selling.

Succeed in Ireland Initiative - ConnectIreland

Succeed in Ireland is a Government-supported initiative to create new jobs by harnessing the power of the global diaspora to attract into Ireland, through the diaspora, foreign companies that are expanding internationally. The initiative provides financial rewards to those that help attract new, sustainable jobs into the country. *Succeed in Ireland* complements the work of IDA Ireland and is delivered under contract by ConnectIreland.

Over the lifetime of the *Succeed in Ireland* initiative, 2,500 companies have been introduced to the programme. 48 companies involved in internationally traded services have been approved by IDA Ireland under the programme and these companies hope to create over 1,300 jobs. A further 78 companies are considering locating to Ireland and will continue to be in dialogue with IDA Ireland and ConnectIreland.

In 2014, ConnectIreland began running a more regional and community focused campaign and introduced their Community Action Plan. The overall objective of the campaign is to create visibility and awareness jointly with the 31 City and County Councils of the key role that communities can play in job creation through the use of the ConnectIreland mechanism. Each county is encouraged to appoint a local ambassador who will champion the campaign in their area. The Community Action Plan is an ongoing campaign that has already yielded company introductions in several counties. ConnectIreland is also running an initiative to encourage Higher Education Institutions at regional level to create and engage an alumni network. A structured network will support the goal of reminding alumni of the advantages of returning to Ireland's regions to do business.

ConnectIreland's **Connectivation** competition asks members of Third Level institutions to submit engagement models to assist in increasing the audience of the ConnectIreland message and ultimately raise further awareness of the advantages of 'doing business' in the region and the importance of the link between diaspora relations and increasing FDI. The competition will be looking for an understanding of both the areas of diaspora engagement and FDI by competitors.

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland is Ireland's national energy authority. SEAI's mission is to play a leading role in transforming Ireland into a society based on sustainable energy structures, technologies and practices and help advance Ireland to the vanguard of the global green technology movement.

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement. It has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development, promotion and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.

Chapter 5: Strengths and Opportunities

Strengths

Enterprise Mix The Mid West has a vibrant and diverse enterprise mix and has earned a reputation as an established and proven location for international business. The region also supports rich clusters of ICT, Aviation and Medical Technology companies. This has supported the development of key centres of knowledge in Advanced Manufacturing, Sales and Customer Support, Sub Supply Chain and Logistics, and Advanced Research and Development activities. Further sectoral strengths include Agri-food and Agri-Tech, Pharma and MedTech Sports Industry and the Green Economy.

Education and Research Assets The region has competitive advantage in its highly educated and skilled workforce, high ranking Third Level Institutions and a well-developed, productive and collaborative engagement between industry and education providers in the region.

From a research perspective, the region has a strong track record of collaboration and engagement between industry and Higher Education Institutions, underpinned by world class research centres of scale.

The Shannon Consortium, collaboration between the University of Limerick, Limerick IT, IT Tralee and Mary Immaculate College provides an excellent example of collaborative action between stakeholders, both within the Mid West region and, on a cross-regional basis, across to the South West region. The Consortium liaises with other educational stakeholders in the region, such as the Education and Training Boards and adult learning providers, to ensure a coherent and focused approach to advancing the social and economic goals of the region, which encompasses the Limerick-Shannon Gateway and the Tralee-Killarney Hubs.

Connectivity and Access The existing road network, together with Shannon Airport, as an international gateway to the Mid West and adjoining regions, provides excellent connectivity and the potential to support further economic growth within the region by acting as a conduit for tourism and exports.

Shannon Airport, as well as being a gateway for business and tourism, is a key driver for regional economic development. The airport has always been innovative, being historically renowned for transatlantic flights, the invention of duty free and, more recently, the first Customs and Border Protection located outside the USA.

The Shannon Estuary has a long established history of facilitating major industries. Shannon Foynes Port has grown to become Ireland's second largest port operation, handling the largest vessels entering Irish waters, while the Estuary itself is multi-functional, as the waters and adjoining lands support a range of functions, uses, communities, activities and environmental resources/ assets, which all bring character, prosperity and vibrancy to the area.

Property Solutions for Enterprise The provision of property solutions for enterprise plays an important role in nurturing start ups, growing SMEs and attracting FDI. The Mid West has a wide range of property solutions available for enterprise, from campus incubation facilities, to large scale serviced business parks, such as the Shannon Free Zone, the National Technology Park Limerick and Tipperary Technology Park.

Tourism Excellent connectivity, inclusion in the Wild Atlantic Way and the Ancient East heritage trail and the range of exceptional natural, cultural, heritage, recreational and sporting tourism assets across the Mid West region, offer potential to increase visitor numbers and length of stay to support economic growth across all counties within the region.

The Mid West region also has a compelling business tourism offering, with Shannon Airport located in the heart of the region and a strong corporate base, which will help attract more corporate meetings. In addition, Foynes Port has significant port infrastructure that could be used to capitalise on opportunities provided by the growth of the cruise ship industry.

Aviation The Mid West region has many key competitive advantages in terms of aviation and aviation related activity. The infrastructural advantages of Shannon airport, home to Ireland's largest runway, along with its adjacent portfolio of commercial property, significant landbanks zoned for aviation activity, combined with the significant pool of aviation and aerospace talent and strong research capability in the region, demonstrate the scope to grow a cluster of activity in the aviation and aerospace industry sector.

Energy The Mid West possesses world class renewable energy potential, with some of the best wind speeds in Western Europe and a long Atlantic coastline, which, together with existing energy infrastructure assets, presents excellent opportunities for investment in wind, wave, tidal, hydro and biomass energy.

Sport The region's sporting reputation and key sporting infrastructure assets provide valuable growth opportunities for all aspects of sport, including performance, training, events and sports tourism.

Opportunities

Attracting investment and talent to the region Building on recent significant FDI investments in areas such as Biopharma, Financial Services and ICT, the Mid West can further enhance its reputation to attract international business and talent, pursuing new investments in proven sectors of strength such as Aerospace and Aviation and marketing the region's excellent quality of life offering.

Education The Mid West has an unrivalled track record for close collaboration between education providers and industry to build skills within the region. Across a range of sectors, including Precision Engineering, MedTech and Agri-Tech, higher and further education providers are collaborating with industry in developing programmes of study that will provide 'job ready' graduates for enterprise

within the region. The establishment of the Shannon Region Skills Forum provides the opportunity to capitalise on the energy and success of these collaborative initiatives and position the Mid West as the best location in Ireland for integrating skills provision with enterprise requirements.

Innovation Opportunities to build on the significant research assets within the region include increasing awareness and take up of innovation supports, supporting further collaboration between researchers and industry and through supporting innovation start ups through campus incubation centre.

Access and Infrastructure The existing road network and Shannon airport provide excellent connectivity and the potential to support further economic growth within the region by acting as a conduit for tourism and exports. Combined with the deep water facilities in the Shannon Estuary and the significant land bank in the Estuary, this provides significant opportunities in the area of tourism, shipping, freight handling and logistics.

Property Solutions for Enterprise Additional investment planned by Shannon Group Commercial Properties and Mid West local authorities will enhance the existing property portfolio and add to the region's value proposition to enterprise.

Tourism Tourism offers significant potential for the creation of new jobs across a variety of locations, both rural and urban, across all counties in the region. There is significant potential to capitalise on opportunities in the growing and high value business tourism sector and also on for the development of further tourism offerings in areas such as culture, water based recreation and the cruise ship industry.

The development of a Mid West Conference and Exhibition Centre, providing a world class and dynamic conference centre in the region, is set out as a potential strategic area for job creation in Chapter 14 of the Plan.

Aviation The Aviation and Aerospace sector has the potential to play a significant role in the future enterprise growth in the Region. It is a strong and growing sector in the Mid West region, with a significant cluster of 45 companies, employing some 1,600 people in and around Shannon.

Shannon International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) will work with Enterprise Ireland, IDA and third level and further education institutions to act as a catalyst to support this cluster to grow and support the expansion of aviation activities in Shannon into areas such as R&D, Design and Manufacturing and Aircraft Recycling. The establishment of a National Aerospace and Aviation Institute in Shannon is set out in Chapter 14 as a potential area for job creation.

Energy Work is underway to develop the Shannon Estuary, home to some of the world's best wind, wave and tidal resources, along with energy infrastructure assets, to capitalise on its high capacity to deliver employment growth through development of its renewable energy potential.

Sport Sporting infrastructure in the region offers opportunities to drive activity based tourism and increase sports related start ups in the region. There is strong potential also to win international sporting events and sports FDI. The development of a sports cluster in the region is set out as a potential strategic area for job creation in Chapter 14 of the Plan.

Shannon Estuary The strategic location and natural resources of the Shannon Estuary provides an opportunity for industrial development, including port and harbour facilities, in appropriate locations that will improve connectivity and promote the tourism and recreation assets of the Estuary.

Chapter 6: Driving Entrepreneurship

A strong theme identified by stakeholders during consultation was the need to enhance communication to start ups and existing enterprises of the supports, services and opportunities available, both from the State and from industry, to support enterprises at every stage of their lifecycle.

Key ambitions to drive entrepreneurship in the Mid West region are to

- Increase the number of start ups in the region by a minimum of 25% through promoting and encouraging entrepreneurship through targeted programmes and initiatives;
- Target an increase in employment in the region by 10 to 15% over the period to 2020, resulting in the creation of 23,000 more jobs compared to 2014;
- Improve access to finance for SMEs to support them to grow and scale;
- Enhance awareness and take up of enterprise supports.
- Develop a pipeline of start ups with potential through the vigorous deployment of the suite of start up programmes – training, mentoring, New Frontiers, Competitive Feasibility and Competitive Start.

Enterprise Ireland will drive an increase in the numbers of start ups and HPSUs in the Mid West through rigorous deployment of a suite of enterprise supports, including:

- Running a Mid West Competitive Feasibility Fund to assist new start up companies
- Roll out of an enhanced New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme to maximise its positive impacts on entrepreneurship in the region
- Providing incubation space and wrap up supports, such as mentoring and modern office and research environments through campus Incubation Centres, to support innovative enterprises and stimulate business success
- Promoting national supports available to provide access to finance to start ups and existing businesses and aim for increased take up of these supports

Each of the **Local Enterprise Offices** in the Mid West will:

- Drive an increase in the number and survival rate of start ups through driving regional participation in Start Your Own Business courses and a suite of training programmes such as Accelerate, Hi Start, Export Awareness, Lean, and Mentoring
- Develop a pipeline of young entrepreneurs through Student Enterprise programmes
- Maximise collaboration with Community Enterprise Centres to assist start ups and existing businesses to grow and develop
- Step up the take up of national schemes that can help enterprises grow such as Microfinance and Jobsplus

Access to Finance

InterTradeIreland will:

- promote access to finance for Start-Ups through workshops under their “Funding for Growth” initiative, equity awareness events, equity advisory clinics and the annual Seedcorn Competition, aimed at early and new start companies, which is run on a regional basis across four regions, including Munster.

Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) also runs the LIT enterprise ladder programme, the first seed-fund specifically for start-up companies at an Irish Institute of Technology, which provides funding of between €10,000 and to €25,000 to qualifying companies.

Entrepreneur Development

‘New Frontiers’ is a national entrepreneur development programme funded and coordinated by Enterprise Ireland and delivered locally by Institutes of Technology that offers participants a package of supports to help accelerate their business development. In the Mid West region, the programme is delivered locally by Limerick Institute of Technology in partnership with IT Tralee and the University of Limerick. A cohort of 13 participants was recruited for the 2014 programme in Limerick Institute of Technology. In 2015 11 entrepreneurs commenced phase 2 of this programme. Enterprise Ireland will implement findings from the review of the New Frontiers Programme in order to maximise its positive impact on entrepreneurship in the region.

The Nexus Innovation Centre is a growing community of international entrepreneurs located at the University of Limerick. Nexus enables accelerated development of national and international start-ups with global reach as well as commercialisation of academic research, resulting in the creation of new businesses and jobs. In 2014, 149 high-quality jobs were generated through Nexus Innovation Centre companies, leading to a total investment in Nexus companies of €6.4 million to date. Employment in these companies increased by 36% in 2014 from companies trading in the international high potential start up arena with ambition to grow. Looking forward to 2016, Nexus will, in collaboration with Kemmy Business School, roll out its pilot Student Enterprise Initiative aimed at developing 3rd level entrepreneurs. LIT will further develop its capacity and presence as a leader in third level enterprise supports. In addition, Enterprise Ireland has funded the Nexus Innovation Centre at UL and the Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre at LIT.

Start Up in Residence Programme

Computer technology company Dell runs an Entrepreneur-in-Residence programme in the U.S., under which organisations receive free office space for a year at one of Dell’s campuses along with a range of business-ready solutions including notebooks, servers and storage. They are also provided with mentorship, advice and access to Dell’s professional networks and events, as well as having full access to Dell’s Customer Briefing centre and other on-site facilities.

University of Limerick will work with Dell to explore the potential of expanding their Start-Ups in Residence Programme within the Mid West region, with the aim of providing local companies with the benefit of Dell’s technology and marketing expertise to help ensure their success.

Incubation Space for Enterprise

The provision of suitable incubation space plays an important role in nurturing and growing start ups and supporting enterprise at local and regional level. Having this business infrastructure in place allows start ups to focus on starting and growing their core business.

During the consultation process, stakeholders identified a need to undertake a review of space and property solutions for enterprises in the region, from very early stage pre start-up incubation facilities through to scaling up to full manufacturing capacity, with a view to identifying and addressing any gaps in provision of incubator space. A review will be undertaken in the region, aimed at finding out what is currently available, where there are gaps and identifying how they can be addressed under the Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme.

Innovate Limerick will engage in the Construction of the Limerick Innovation Hub in Roxboro Limerick, which is due to commence in 2015. This will provide 35,000 sq.ft of stage two enterprise/incubation space for start ups and growing companies. Innovate Limerick are also in the process of adding an additional 150,000 square feet of Community enterprise space and recruiting a business development manager whose function will be to coordinate all of the community enterprise centres in Limerick.

Limerick City & County Council currently has 400,000 sq.ft of enterprise space under development. The Council has a number of key strategic sites under development including the Limerick Innovation Hub, Cleeves Riverside Park, the Opera Site, Hanging Gardens and Colbert Station.

Shannon International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) has also identified Incubation as a key pillar of the strategic model which is required to formalise and further develop the Aerospace & Aviation Cluster in Shannon. Establishment of an Incubation Centre within the Shannon Free Zone, specifically dedicated to Aerospace & Aviation activity (in similar manner as other highly successful Aerospace & Aviation Clusters have done globally) will be a significant catalyst for growth of this cluster.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
Entrepreneurship and start ups			
1	Drive and encourage entrepreneurship in the Mid West Region through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops and New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme	Ongoing	Enterprise Ireland
2	Run a Competitive Feasibility Fund for the Mid West in 2015 to assist new start-up companies. Approximately 10 innovation-led projects will be approved under this call	2015	Enterprise Ireland
3	Each of the Local Enterprise Offices in the Mid West region will aim to increase employment in its baseline through increased start-ups and the scaling of existing clients. Annual Business Plans will be developed, setting out clear targets and	2015-2018	Local authorities/EI/LEOs

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	<p>objectives to support start-ups and enterprises in their region. Key aggregate targets for the Mid West LEOs for 2015 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €1.907 million will be available in grant assistance and enterprise development supports • 20 Start Your Own Business courses will be run, for over 220 participants • 3 Export Awareness Initiatives to be delivered to approx. 25 participants • 150 clients will be assigned Start-up/ Business Development mentors • Over 100 women will participate on core LEO training programmes (Start Your Own Business, Accelerate, Hi Start, Export Awareness, Lean, Mentoring) • 43 schools to participate in Student Enterprise programme • Over 68 new applications for Online Trading vouchers • Assist over 24 MFI loan applications <p>These targets will be further developed in 2016 and 2017.</p>		
4	The Local Enterprise Offices will maximise collaboration with the Community Enterprise Centres to assist start-ups and existing businesses to grow and develop.	Ongoing	Local authorities/EI/LEOs, Community Enterprise Centres
5	Enterprise Ireland will implement the findings from the review of the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme in order to evolve the programme to maximise its positive impacts on entrepreneurship in the region.	2016	Enterprise Ireland
6	University of Limerick will explore possible collaborations around Start-up in Residence programmes	2016	UL. Mid West CEO Forum, EI, UL Fab Lab, Nexus
7	Enterprise Ireland will evaluate proposals under the €5m million Community Enterprise Initiative	2015	Enterprise Ireland
8	Enterprise Ireland will evaluate proposals under the €5 million Competitive LEO fund	2015	Enterprise Ireland

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
9	Run a national pilot competitive entrepreneurial development programme to target up to 50 female entrepreneurs based outside of urban centres.	2015	Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
10	The local authorities in the Mid West region, as in other areas, will each develop and publish a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), setting out, for a six-year period, objectives and actions to support economic development and local and community development in their administrative regions.	2015	Mid West local authorities
11	The five 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 work with the LEOs, with a view to progressing clients to the LEO services.	Ongoing	Local Development Companies, Local authorities/EI/LEOs
12	Local Development Strategies for the delivery of the LEADER programme over the period 2015-2020 will be developed.	2016-2016	Local Development Companies, Local Community Development Committees
13	As part of the Startup Gathering initiative to promote and encourage an increase in entrepreneurship and start-ups, a Gathering event will be held in Limerick in October 2015.	October 2015	Startup Gathering, Innovate Limerick, LIT, Limerick LEO
14	Mid West Region CEO Forum, working in close collaboration with each Chamber of Commerce in the region and enterprise agencies, will establish a Mid West Enterprise Engagement Platform, to increase awareness and take up of national and regional enterprise supports (public and private). The platform will act as a conduit and communication channel for existing businesses to learn about relevant supports, services and opportunities that are available to them. Each Chamber will be directly involved in communicating with existing businesses in its area, as it already has an established relationship with them as Chamber members. The platform will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer online information and business events • Provide referrals to Local Enterprise 	2015-2016	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Chambers of Commerce, local authorities/EI/LEOs, LIT, UL, Innovate Limerick, Local authorities, Banks, Revenue, DSP, EEN

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	<p>Offices in the first instance and then, if required, referrals can be directed to particular Agencies and Departments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow organisations/providers to upload their respective grants, incentives, programmes and competitions onto a centralised system; • Connect businesses with appropriate enterprise supports. 		
15	Communicate to business the opportunities that exist from EU funds.	2015-2019	EI, Regional Assembly, IBEC, Chambers, DJEI, IDA, Local authorities/EI/LEOs, HEI
16	As part of its Age Friendly County Programme, Clare County Council will pilot a scheme to create a network of retired business people to act as mentors to new entrepreneurs in the early stages of setting up a business.	2016	Clare County Council

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
Access to Finance			
17	InterTrade Ireland will run its annual Seedcorn Competition on a regional basis, to give companies the opportunity to improve their investor readiness and greatly increase their chances of raising equity. Local companies will have the opportunity to compete on a regional basis for a prize of €20,000. The regional winner can go on to compete for overall prizes of €50,000 and €100,000.	2015-2019	InterTradeIreland
18	Promote national supports available to provide access to finance to start ups and existing businesses	Ongoing	Mid West local authorities/LEOs/ Enterprise Ireland
19	InterTradeIreland will host 8 workshops under their "Funding for Growth" initiative in the Mid West region to promote all traditional and non-traditional sources of finance to local businesses, as well as providing an opportunity to meet with a corporate finance expert. (Target 200 participants)	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland, InterTradeIreland

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	InterTradelreland will also deliver a series of equity awareness events at regional level including the unique equity advisory clinics where companies can meet with an equity expert, business planning workshops and venture capital case studies.		

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
Ensuring the availability of work space for entrepreneurs			
20	Undertake a review of incubation space and property solutions within the region, from very early stage pre start-up incubation facilities through to scaling up to full manufacturing capacity, finding out what is available on a County basis where there are gaps/shortages, identifying how they can be addressed, and the impact of the provision. This review will incorporate an inventory of work space which was recently completed for Tipperary.	2015-2016	Mid West local authorities/EI/LEOs, Shannon Group Commercial Properties, UL School of Architecture (SAUL), Innovate Limerick
21	Shannon International Aviation Services Centre and Shannon Group Commercial Properties will examine the feasibility of establishment of a dedicated Aerospace & Aviation Incubation Centre within the Shannon Free Zone.	2015-2016	Shannon IASC, Shannon Group Commercial Properties

Chapter 7: Supporting Business to Grow and Scale

A core objective of this Action Plan is to assist companies in the Mid West region to grow and scale, in order to increase job creation and contribute to the regional and national economy. Companies based in the region supported by the Enterprise Agencies are a valuable base to grow; with EI supporting 430 enterprises, IDA supporting 116 client companies, and the LEOs supporting 507 enterprises. Growing a business requires management and entrepreneurial skills as well as supports to access new market opportunities to grow the business.

Key ambitions under this chapter of the Action Plan for Jobs for the Mid West are to:

- Assist companies in the Mid West to achieve scale and grow internationally by capitalising on exporting opportunities;
- Increase employment in the existing base of companies by strengthening their capacity to scale up their business and win new markets. The existing base of over 1,000 enterprises supported by the agencies, which now employ over 30,000 people will be a particular focus of this effort
- Assist companies in the Mid West in tendering for opportunities to supply products and services to the public sector and to multinational companies.

Accessing International Markets

Success in export markets is crucial to the long-term growth of Irish enterprises and the Irish economy. The relatively small size of Ireland's domestic market means many companies looking to grow and scale their business must look to international markets for growth.

Enterprise Ireland will:

- Run export events, workshops and programmes to help new and early exporters to develop the tools and techniques to succeed in export markets.
- Support companies in the Mid West to achieve scale and grow internationally by building capability, accessing opportunities for new and existing markets and ideas, providing resources and finance, and influencing their business environment.
- To ensure that Irish business owners and managers have the essential capabilities and capacity to support ambitious international growth strategies, Enterprise Ireland will provide supports that address gaps in client capability and capacity, in key functional areas such as Leadership, Skills Development and Competitiveness Building.
- To ensure that Irish companies have adequate and appropriate access to funding to meet their international growth aspirations, Enterprise Ireland will provide funding directly in the form of equity and funding for expansion, research and development and training.
- To support client companies enter new markets, Enterprise Ireland will provide supports to assist companies with internationalisation plans, including access to the supports provided by Enterprise Ireland's International Network of overseas offices, International Trade Missions, Sales and Marketing Review tools and financial supports such as the Market Access Grant and the Business Links programme.

It is important to note that the nature and level of support offered to Enterprise Ireland client companies will depend on the individual company's development needs and is assessed in consultation with their assigned development adviser from within Enterprise Ireland.

Local Enterprise Offices will support local business to grow and scale through its suite of programmes including mentoring, marketing and training supports.

InterTradeIreland will support businesses throughout the island of Ireland to take advantage of cross-border trade and innovation opportunities, including the provision of supports to help companies pursue export opportunities to Northern Ireland.

In addition, all Enterprise agencies will work with other business networks and stakeholders to help enterprises develop and grow.

Public Procurement

The presence of three local authorities, along with decentralised Government offices and major healthcare services in the region, represents a significant public sector purchasing base for companies supplying products and services. Although public sector procurement is governed by clear rules to ensure access and transparency, there are opportunities for regionally based companies to bid for supply of services and goods.

Enterprise Ireland, InterTrade Ireland and LEOs will work with SMEs in the region to support them in tendering for opportunities to supply products and services to the public sector.

In addition, IDA Ireland and Enterprise will continue to work closely on initiatives such as the Global Sourcing Strategy, which aims to create new global supply chain opportunities for EI client companies through initiatives such as networking events for indigenous and FDI companies.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
Supporting Existing Enterprises to Grow and Scale			
22	Enterprise Ireland will run one "Get Export Ready" workshop in the Mid West Region in 2015 to outline supports available to drive development of local enterprises who are considering an export agenda.	2015	Enterprise Ireland
23	Enterprise Ireland will run one "Exploring Exporting Workshop" in the Mid West region for early and pre-export companies, to explore the export opportunities for their companies.	2015	Enterprise Ireland
24	The LEOs will utilise and make available a number of online resources such as local and national LEO websites, Nubie.ie, and SME online tool	Ongoing	Local authorities/EI/LEOs

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
25	Build on the Global Sourcing & Collaboration initiative and increase activity in this area.	2015-2018	Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland
26	InterTradeIreland will promote its Acumen and Elevate programmes in the Mid West region.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland
27	InterTradeIreland will host a “Going North” workshop targeting 50 participants.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland
28	InterTradeIreland will set a target of at least 9 Acumen approvals to investigate and pursue export opportunities in Northern Ireland.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland
29	Support the development of early-stage ICT businesses by establishing mentorship and support	Ongoing	Local authorities/EI/LEOs, HEIs
30	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.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland
31	Shannon Chamber, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and British-Irish Chamber of Commerce, will deliver a half-day conference ‘Doing Business in Britain’.	2015-2016	Shannon Chamber, Enterprise Ireland
32	Implement the National Mentoring Strategy in the region by supporting networks and increasing the provision of mentoring sessions for businesses on the region		Local authorities/EI/LEOs

Procurement Opportunities

33	InterTradeIreland will deliver 4 public tendering workshops for SMEs in the Mid West over the period 2015-2016 and will provide relevant training for local small businesses in the region. (Target 100 participants).	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland in partnership with local LEOs & other relevant local organisations
34	InterTradeIreland will promote public tendering opportunities to SMEs in the region including cross border public sector opportunities, consortia building for larger contracts and below threshold contracts.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland, Local authorities/EI/LEOs

Chapter 8: Fostering Innovation

Innovation is a key driver of economic growth. Innovation enables enterprises to develop new products and services for the global marketplace, boost productivity and create competitive advantage.

During the consultation process, stakeholders considered there was potential to capitalise on existing research & innovation strengths in the region and promote greater take up of research supports to strengthen collaborative links between firms and higher education institutes in the region and promote a culture of innovation.

Key ambitions of the Mid West Action Plan for Jobs in this area are:

- to identify new sources of industrial growth and job creation and achieving competitive advantage for industry in Ireland by leveraging the innovative capacity of the Irish research community
- increase the innovation activity of enterprises in the region and develop their collaboration with the region's world class research institutes to foster innovation, supporting companies to develop new products, services and processes
- to get research leaders and Higher Education Institutes to maximise the impact of research on the enterprise base and the competitive advantage of the region

Research Assets

Key research assets within the region include the University of Limerick (UL), with a strong track record in working with companies to undertake collaborative research at all levels.

The University of Limerick hosts 2 large SFI funded Centres and 3 large scale Technology Centres, funded by EI and IDA Ireland:

- The Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre (PMTC), located in UL, is focused on delivering solutions to contemporary issues currently facing the pharmaceutical industry. PMTC provides access to a wide range of core capability and skills in continuous processing, mathematical modelling, statistics and process optimisation.
- The Irish Centre for Composites Research (IComp) provides world class innovative R&D, consultancy and networking opportunities for industry throughout Ireland across sectors such as aerospace, renewable energy and construction, where there are opportunities to use composite materials and associated technologies.
- The Dairy Processing Technology Centre (DPTC) is a centre of excellence for dairy processing research and innovation and will position Ireland as a world leader in dairy innovation. The Centre, supported by a €25million investment from Enterprise Ireland, will help to fuel growth in the Irish dairy sector both regionally and at national level, which offers great potential to grow regional employment. The research performed at DPTC focuses on cost efficient processing, facilitating a step change in environmental sustainability and creating a pipeline of science and technology-based manufacturing platforms for dairy ingredients.
- The Synthesis and Solid State Pharmaceutical Centre (SSPC) represents a significant combined Science Foundation Ireland and industry investment of €42 million. Its mission is to position

Ireland as a global hub of pharmaceutical process innovation and advanced manufacturing. The SSPC is the largest research collaboration in Ireland, and one of the largest globally, within the pharmaceutical area and leads the way for next generation drug manufacture. Areas of research span the entire pharmaceutical production chain, with a focus also on developing more environmentally sustainable methods for drug manufacturing and reducing manufacturing costs.

- Lero Irish Software Research Centre brings together leading software research teams from Universities and Institutes of Technology in a coordinated centre of research excellence with a strong industry focus. Lero has raised the level and profile of Irish software research with such effect that it is now one of the best known and most highly regarded software-related research centres in the world. Lero interfaces with industry, state agencies, educational bodies and international collaborators to identify and solve industry problems and generate new software based products and services.



Ireland Development Centre (IDC) Ramps up to Support Worldwide Operations. Johnson & Johnson Services, Inc. created up to 100 new jobs through the establishment of their Ireland Development Centre (IDC) based in the University of Limerick Enterprise Corridor. The IDC is located within a hub of key research and innovation centres including: Lero – The Irish Software

Research Centre, Nexus Innovation Centre, Computer Science and Information Systems Department of UL and The Bernal Project- the centre of excellence for science and engineering. Health and pharmaceuticals are among the research strengths of the University of Limerick with an ecosystem of innovation and excellence providing a pipeline of highly skilled graduates and a network of multidisciplinary researchers in these fields who will play an important part in the success of this initiative. The establishment of Johnson & Johnson Development Centre on the campus with the creation of high value jobs is an excellent example of the benefits a research-driven institution with a focus on real-world impact can bring to the country.

Image caption: (L-R) Mark Devine, Director, Ireland Development Centre welcomes Alex Gorsky, Global CEO, Johnson & Johnson, Steve Wrenn, VP Johnson & Johnson Global Application Services, Kathy Wengel, VP Johnson & Johnson Supply Chain to the Ireland Development Centre (IDC), University of Limerick this year.

Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) is the fourth largest Institute of Technology in Ireland and works with companies seeking to undertake collaborative research, exploit commercialisation opportunities, or who wish to work with LIT to develop initial ideas or solve technology challenges. Research focus includes: Applied Science; Food; Built Environment; Art, Design and Gaming, Animation, Media, Entertainment and Software.

Research centres within LIT include:

- ACADeMy, the LIT centre for research into Art, Curatorial Studies, Applied Design and Art and Design Education, which is based in the Limerick School of Art and Design, nominated in 2013 as one of the top 50 fashion schools in the world;
- Built Environment, Technology and Educational Research (BETER), a research focused group which supports built environment higher education;
- Food Development Service (FoodDS), a food development, improvement and innovation service aimed at the food SME sector, which provides a centre of excellence in food research, capable of food development and innovation to the benefit of the Regional and National economy;
- The Games Entertainment Technologies Research Group comprising researchers with expertise in Gaming, Animation, Media, Entertainment and Software (G.A.M.E.S) and a focus on the research needs of digital content producers within the Digital Games, Animation and Media industry sectors;
- CHIMERA, a multidisciplinary group of scientists with demonstrated research excellence in all forms of microbial cell factory research.

Shannon Applied Biotechnology Centre (Shannon ABC), part of the Enterprise Ireland funded Technology Gateway National Network, acts as an access point for enterprise, facilitating access to wider research resources and infrastructure across the State.

Another key research asset is the pool of highly educated graduates from the region's third level institutions, many with skills relevant to the high technology enterprise base within the region. UL has a student population of approximately 13,000, while LIT has approximately 6,500 students across all its campuses, the majority of whom are pursuing courses in the area of Science, Engineering and IT.

In addition, the National Technology Park in Plassey is home to a growing number of high tech and knowledge based companies.

Supports for Innovation

Enterprise Ireland will play a key role in supporting research and innovation in the Mid West. In addition to providing in-company research supports, Enterprise Ireland will:

- operate a range of programmes to help companies undertake collaborative research with third level researchers, leading to jobs and sales of innovative products and services from technologies and ideas developed in Irish research institutions
- promote outreach activities to industry, aimed at driving greater industry engagement in collaborative research

In addition, Limerick City and County Council is the first Local Authority in the Country to establish a special purpose innovation company to act as an innovation broker to an existing semi-state, private and national service providers. Innovate Limerick will aim to increase innovation activity and act as a delivery mechanism for a range of projects outlined in Limerick 2030 Plan and the Action Plan for Jobs.

InterTradeIreland will:

- promote its Fusion programme in the region, which helps embed innovation capability in SMEs through the introduction of new product and process development opportunities
- drive participation in its Challenge programme, which provides SMEs with the opportunity to learn how to develop a culture of innovation.

An example of a successful Fusion programme in the Mid West is set out below:



Burren Smokehouse Innovates with FUSION

The Burren Smokehouse in Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare is an artisan producer of smoked fish products, supplying to worldwide high-end customers within the specialist deli, restaurant and retail sectors. Through InterTradeIreland's FUSION programme, the company set out to develop a unique product offering which enhanced the company's portfolio of premium smoked salmon products. It generated an artisan product in which control over the processing of the salmon and the controlled application of acacia honey & sea salt achieve a shelf life extension of 25% minimum over a standard product, whilst delivering the premium eating quality expectation of the high-end consumer.

IDA will continue to roll out its Research, Development and Innovation Programme to incentivise client companies in the Mid West to develop new processes and products.

Campus Incubation

An important aim of the plan will be to enhance the impact of Enterprise Ireland's Campus Incubation Centres through wrap-up supports including mentoring, learning from other entrepreneurs and modern office and research environments, which help to stimulate business success.

There are two Enterprise Ireland funded Campus Incubation Centres in the Mid West Region:

- The Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre established in 2006, one of seven Limerick Institute of Technology's on-campus incubators for innovation and growth driven business start-ups in the Mid West region of Ireland, provides training and programmes to help enterprises get their business off the ground. Since 2009 alone this centre has supported the creation of 279 jobs. LIT offers supports to new enterprise through the distinctive LIT Enterprise Ladder, accommodating the full spectrum of low to high risk and reward profiles. LIT will aim to roll out the LIT Enterprise Ladder across its campuses, involving numerous partnerships with relevant State agencies.
- The Nexus Innovation centre based within the UL Enterprise Corridor will provide incubation space, entrepreneurship programmes and support for start-up companies. Nexus also offers an entrepreneurship training programme and, earlier in 2015, hosted a series of "Start up Mania" workshops, to bring together innovators, entrepreneurs, leaders and students to support the start up ecosystem in Limerick.



Nexus Start-Up Success

Based at the **Nexus Innovation Centre**, UL, YellowSchedule is a cloud-based Online Appointment Management & Client CRM tool aimed at the private medical market. YellowSchedule offers real time confirmations from patients and by automating much of the admin around scheduling alongside reducing no-shows increase the billable hours of their average customers by 22%. YellowSchedule is aimed at the export market and over 90% of their customer base is in the US.

Current customers include Go Daddy, the University of Manchester, UCLA, Axa Financial and Dublin City Enterprise and Training Board. YellowSchedule was awarded the Limerick Chamber award for the 'Best Emerging Business' 2014, the Irish Internet Association Net Visionary Award for the 'Most Indispensable Cloud Service for SMEs 2013' and the Vodafone Startup Awards 'Online Startup of the Year 2013'. YellowSchedule have had a number of successful funding rounds including support from Enterprise Ireland. To date over 750,000 appointments have been made through YellowSchedule.

YellowSchedule was awarded the Limerick Chamber award for the 'Best Emerging Business' 2014, the Irish Internet Association Net Visionary Award for the 'Most Indispensable Cloud Service for SMEs 2013' and the Vodafone Startup Awards 'Online Startup of the Year 2013'. To date over 750,000 appointments have been made through YellowSchedule.

LIT has developed its capacity and presence as a leader in third-level enterprise supports to maximum potential, with six centres fully operational and one more under construction across the Mid West region. These centres are run in partnership with e.g. Enterprise Ireland, the new Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), Chambers of Commerce, community development agencies or local authorities and are named as follows:

- Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre, main campus, Limerick;
- National Franchise Centre, Limerick City Centre;
- Thurles Chamber Enterprise Centre, LIT Thurles Campus;
- Croom Community Enterprise Centre, Croom, Co Limerick;
- The Red Door BIC, Newcastle West, Co Limerick;
- Questum Centre, Clonmel;
- Irish Fashion Incubator, Limerick City centre (in progress).

This range of enterprise centres provides extensive coverage across the region. The impact of the centres to date, supporting the creation of nearly 600 jobs, also helps to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship amongst students through practical assignments and internship opportunities.

To ensure sustainable operation of the centres and to be able to offer additional financial supports of client companies subject to eligibility criteria, in 2012 LIT launched the € 1million Enterprise Ladder Fund in Limerick which has so far attracted private sector donations of over €600,000, and this was followed by the Tipperary based Ryan Entrepreneurship Fund which now stands at nearly €250,000. They provide a rich resource to take advantage of the Regional Calls being run as part of the APJ Regional Initiative.

Furthermore, LIT will drive an increase in applications under the Innovation Voucher and Innovation Partnership schemes, creating fruitful synergies between academic departments and enterprise.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
35	Enterprise Ireland, through the Technolgy Transfer Offices, will promote outreach activities to industry	Ongoing	EI
36	Enterprise Ireland will facilitate a Regional Innovation Process to get more regional enterprises to be research active and to plug into the research capability of the region	2015	EI, UL, LIT
37	The Technology Gateway Network will continue to carry out industry outreach. Within this, the Shannon ABC Technology Gateway, based jointly in Limerick and Tralee Institutes of Technology, will hold an industry open day in 2015 to showcase its applied research capability and promote greater industry engagement in collaborative research.	Ongoing	Shannon ABC (LIT), EI
38	Evaluate the business case for appointing a dedicated Enterprise Engagement lead to evaluate SME needs and map to HEI innovation offerings.	2015-2016	UL, LIT (including Tipperary Questum Centre), ITT
39	Engage with 2 nd level students through events and social media to develop awareness of opportunities in IT, Engineering, Manufacturing, and Aviation etc in the region.	Ongoing	Limerick for Engineering, Limerick for IT, EI
40	InterTradeIreland will promote the Fusion Programme to SMEs in the region and will set a target of at least 5 Fusion approvals in 2015/16.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland
41	InterTradeIreland will provide access to its Challenge programme to SMEs in the region.	2015-2016	InterTradeIreland

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
42	Link, develop and market innovation space in the city and region - Nexus, Hartnett Centre, LIT Enterprise Ladder, Roxboro, Croom.	2015-2016	Innovate Limerick
43	Develop an Innovation Hub in Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership as a progression space for start-ups and develop outreach activities in the region.	2015-2016	Innovate Limerick, local authorities, Chambers, EI
44	Consider scope for projects in Limerick/Mid West for innovative solutions under Smart Cities or Smart Ageing and pilot a project in each area for the region in the lifetime of the plan.	2015-2016	Local authorities, HSE, EI, UL, LIT, Irish Smart Ageing Exchange, Innovate Limerick, Limerick Chamber
45	Recognising the significant activity and potential for agri-innovation, create linkages for farming sector to relevant offerings from development agencies.	Ongoing	Teagasc, Innovate Limerick, Local authorities/EI/LEOs
46	IDA will continue to roll out its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies in the region to develop new processes and products.	Ongoing	IDA Ireland

Chapter 9: Attracting and embedding Foreign Direct Investment

A key objective of the Action Plan for Jobs: Regional strategy is to win new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the regions by using and developing the region's competitive strengths to offer a supportive environment for the growth of those enterprises. It is, however, important to note that FDI, whilst extremely important to economic development nationally, is not the only means to economic development. Indigenous companies and sectoral opportunities in areas such as tourism and agri-food all offer significant potential for enterprise development and employment growth across the region.

Key ambitions for the Mid West in terms of attracting and embedding FDI are to:

- Attract more investment to the region: over the next 5 years, IDA is aiming for a 30% to 40% uplift in projects, to a total of 66 investments within the region
- Collaborate with existing FDI client companies in the region to sustain, grow and expand their business presence in Ireland;
- Construct an Advanced Technology Building in Limerick in 2017;
- Target new inward investment opportunities by marketing the region as a location for FDI by aviation and aerospace companies.

IDA will:

- work closely with the existing base of employers to encourage additional investment, particularly in activities such as R&D, customer support and back office functions
- work closely with Shannon Group Commercial Properties in the provision of suitable property solutions for potential investors to the region and with educational institutions in the region to develop the skill sets necessary to attract high value-added employment to the county
- work with the occupants of the National Technology Park, recently acquired from Shannon Commercial Properties on a site masterplan programme
- acquire Raheen Business Park (57 hectares) from Shannon Group Commercial Properties and develop a site plan in conjunction with the client companies and stakeholders including Limerick City Council
- construct an Advanced Technology Building in Limerick in 2017 as part of IDA's regional property initiative. This key infrastructure, along with the skillset available in the region and a strong business, innovation and education infrastructure, will act as key selling point for the region

IDA and Enterprise Ireland also co-operate on a local level to support FDI and enterprise development, through actions such as networking events for indigenous and FDI client companies and the promotion of regional supply chains to potential FDI clients.

Building on the Shannon Aviation Business Development Task Force report (2012) which underpinned the Government decision to separate Shannon Airport, Shannon Group's International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) division will actively market Ireland, and in particular the Shannon

aviation cluster, as a location for FDI by aviation and aerospace companies. This sector-specific global targeting is complementary to, and conducted in conjunction with, the IDA's broader activity.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
47	IDA will target at least 66 investments for the Mid West over the period 2015 – 2019; an uplift of 30%-40% in projects compared to the strategy for 2010-2014.	2015-2019	IDA Ireland
48	IDA will continue to collaborate with existing clients under its Transformation program, encouraging them to invest in new activities, innovation and to win new mandates.	2015 - 2019	IDA Ireland
49	The construction of an Advanced Technology Building will be undertaken in 2017, as part of the IDA regional property initiative.	2017	IDA Ireland
50	IDA is in the process of acquiring Raheen Business Park (57 hectares) from Shannon Group Commercial Properties. IDA will develop a site plan for Raheen and a masterplan for the recently acquired NTP in conjunction with key stakeholders including Limerick City and County Council.	2015-2018	IDA, Limerick City and County Council
51	Limerick City and County Council and the private sector will collaborate to accelerate the development of the iconic city centre "Hanging Gardens" site as a landmark quality office offering for both multinationals and indigenous clients.	2015-2017	Limerick City and County Council, Private Sector
52	Limerick City and County Council will support the delivery of enterprise and office solutions that will come on stream from Limerick 2030.	Ongoing	Limerick City & County Council, Innovate Limerick, Limerick Marketing Company
53	Shannon Group Commercial Properties will market the new and refurbished property options that they are putting in place over the next 2-3 years.	2015-2018	Shannon Group Commercial Properties, Clare County Council
54	Building on the already successful track record in aviation related activities in the Mid West, IDA will work with the relevant stakeholders to build a value proposition to support the attraction of additional investment.	2015-2017	IDA Ireland, Shannon Group Commercial Properties, IASC, EI, Limerick & Shannon Chambers of Commerce

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
55	Building on the success of companies such as Northern Trust, Gilt, GECAS and AerCap in developing successful 2nd site locations in Limerick and Shannon, IDA will build a value proposition to attract additional investments in the services sector.	Q2 2016	IDA Ireland, IASC/ Shannon Group Commercial Properties, Private Sector, Chambers of Commerce, Limerick Marketing Company
56	IDA Ireland will proactively update its online marketing “Invest in” series to include “Invest in the Mid West”.	2015-2016	IDA Ireland
57	Tipperary County Council will identify and prepare an appropriate marketing programme in relation to property solutions suited to prospective clients.	2015-2016	Tipperary County Council, Shannon Group Commercial Properties
58	IDA will appoint a new Marketing Executive for the region.	2015	IDA Ireland
59	IDA Executives based overseas will visit relevant companies in the region to enhance their knowledge of the region to market it to potential inward investors.	End 2015	IDA Ireland
60	Appoint a 'Relocation Advisor' to market the region to attract new talent / FDI and provide assistance in relation to sourcing accommodation, education, healthcare etc.	2015-2016	Mid West local authorities, working in close collaboration with Chambers of Commerce
61	Develop a Regional Connect Ireland Plan that is integrated with the local authorities' enterprise development and job-creation activities and formalise the name of a nominated officer from each county in the region for the roll-out of the Plan.	2015	Connect Ireland
62	Announce and run the Connectivation competition, inviting third Level students to share their ideas for the future development of the Succeed in Ireland initiative.	2016	Connect Ireland, HEIs

Chapter 10: Building Sectoral Opportunities

Sectors of strength which can be built upon in the Mid West include Manufacturing, Tourism, Agri-food and Agri-tech, Pharma and Med Tech, Aviation and Aerospace, Sport, Design, Culture and the Creative Industries and Energy and Marine.

Key ambitions for the Mid West in this area are:

- Strengthen the important sectoral clusters in the region: Aviation, Lifesciences, Engineering and Internationally Traded Services
- Increase the value of agri-food exports by 85% by 2025 by supporting food start-ups to grow and scale and enhancing the marketing of the region's food and beverage products
- Grow overseas tourist numbers in the Mid West to 1.26 million by 2025, increase overseas tourism revenue in the Mid West to €375million by 2025, and grow employment in the sector by 25% to 2025

Manufacturing

The Mid West is recognised as a manufacturing power base. The sector plays a crucial role in the economy of the Mid West, representing 17% of employment in the region. There is significant potential to build on the region's strengths in this sector to grow jobs within the region.

The Mid West has a particularly strong track record as a centre for manufacturing excellence and is home to many well known companies such as Regeneron, J&J, Ethicon Bio Surgery, Optel Vision, Amax Technologies, Analog Devices, J&J Vistakon, Cook Medical, Zimmer, Molex, Stryker, Element Six and Proctor and Gamble; all key employers within the region. The region also has a strong third level infrastructure supplying well educated and highly skilled graduates for the manufacturing base within the region, as well as research centres focused on manufacturing including SSPC, IComp, PMTC, DPTC, as referenced earlier and the Enterprise Research Centre (ERC), based in the University of Limerick, which is conducting leading edge research on the challenges facing current and next generation enterprises.

Key ambitions for the Mid West Action Plan for Jobs in the area of Manufacturing are to

- Encourage existing manufacturing companies to scale, innovate and grow;
- Deliver targeted educational initiatives aimed at meeting industry demand for highly skilled graduates;
- Develop a stock of high quality office and manufacturing buildings to facilitate potential FDI and EI clients in the manufacturing sector in the Mid West.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
63	Enterprise Ireland will target manufacturing companies in the Mid West region to scale, innovate and develop international markets.	Ongoing	Enterprise Ireland

64	LIT will roll out a level 7 programme (with conversion to level 8) in Precision Engineering, which was recently developed in conjunction with the Precision Turned Parts Manufacturing Association.	September 2015	LIT, Precision Turned Parts Manufacturing Association
65	UL will roll out a MSc Mechatronics (Level 9) programme, designed as a progression programme for Level 8 electronic, mechanical, or computer engineering graduates	January 2016	UL
66	Shannon Group Commercial Properties will commence a development program of new offices and advanced manufacturing units in Shannon suited to prospective FDI clients.	2015	Shannon Group Commercial Properties
67	Shannon Group Commercial Properties will commence an upgrade program of existing offices and manufacturing units in Shannon to ensure that these units are suited to prospective FDI and other clients.	2015	Shannon Group Commercial Properties
68	Shannon Chamber, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and member company Molex, will run a lean workshop for companies in the region. A participation rate of at least 80 companies will be targeted.	2016	Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Chamber and Molex
69	Shannon Chamber, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and member company Modular Automation will run an R&D workshop for companies in the region at Intel Shannon. A participation rate of up to 80 companies will be targeted.	2016	Shannon Chamber and Enterprise Ireland
70	In the context of the Ibec Manufacturing survey host a series of regional seminars in association with AIB including one in the West/Mid-West.	2015-2017	Ibec, AIB

Tourism

The Mid West region has a unique and varied landscape, with the Cliffs of Moher and Loop Head on Clare's Atlantic coastline featured as 'Signature Discovery Points' on the epic 2,500km Wild Atlantic Way. Other significant tourist sites in the region include Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, the Burren, Adare, the Lough Derg amenity area and the coastal walks around Clare's Atlantic coast. Total revenue generated from overseas visitors to the region in 2013 amounted to €248 million.¹¹

¹¹ Fáilte Ireland, *Regional Tourism Performance 2013*

The Wild Atlantic Way offers significant potential to secure more international visitors to the region. Fáilte Ireland is currently devising a Wild Atlantic Way Strategy for 2016-2019 and will explore the potential for the development of Wild Atlantic Way loops and spurs as part of this plan, to encourage visitors to stay longer to explore other areas and experiences in the region. While the Wild Atlantic Way brand has just been launched, Fáilte Ireland intends that it will mature over time to meet the needs of visitors, the local community and culture, the environment and the tourism industry and become synonymous with great experiences of our Atlantic heritage, culture, landscapes and seascapes in a high quality environment.

The Shannon River Corridor offers strong potential for the development of water-based and outdoor recreation, in areas such as boating, angling, wildlife watching and walking. The Lough Derg Roadmap, a comprehensive 4-year strategy, will develop Lough Derg as a key destination for superb water based activities combined with a range of very high quality walking, cycling, heritage, culture and food experiences that will entice the domestic and international visitors to stay longer. There are also a number of world-class golf courses in the region, while the Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trail is the largest trail network of its kind in Ireland.

The region also has strong product in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) sector enabling it to deliver association conferences, corporate meetings, incentive travel and participative events.

The cruise ship industry, one of the fastest growing tourism sectors, is becoming an increasingly important opportunity area for Ireland. Research commissioned by Failte Ireland in 2010 highlighted that cruise ships made 202 calls to Irish ports that year, carrying over 200,000 passengers. There is an opportunity for the Mid West region to increase its attractiveness as an international cruise destination, through a more integrated marketing of its tourism offering and also through collaboration at an international level with other ports and cruise operators to establish the Mid West as an international cruise destination.

The Mid West region has a particularly strong cultural offering, with an outstanding array of cultural assets such as the concert hall and Irish Chamber Orchestra at the University of Limerick, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD), Limerick City Gallery of Art, the Glór Music Centre in Ennis, Limerick City's Hunt Museum, Clare Museum in Ennis, The Source Arts Centre in Thurles, Lime Tree Theatre Limerick, Foynes Flying Boat Museum and a number of nationally and internationally known Heritage sites. Clare will capitalise on the unique cultural heritage of the region, promoting Clare as 'County of Culture' in 2016 and working with Tourism Ireland and Failte Ireland to market the cultural attractions within the county.

Events continue to be an important part of the region's tourism offering. An exciting and varied programme of successful festivals will be hosted in the Mid West over the lifetime of this plan, including a Taste of Lough Derg, hosted in Tipperary, Clare and Galway, the Burren Food Fair, the Limerick Film Festival, and the Terryglass Literary Festival in Tipperary.



Fig 6: Cliffs of Moher

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann will be hosted in Ennis in 2016 and will attract a significant number of visitors to the region through the festival itself and also the year-long programme of events developed around it. It is estimated that this event, which will be complemented by a year-long programme of events, will attract in the region of 450,000 visitors, generating an economic benefit of more than €34.9¹² million in direct expenditure for the local economy.

Limerick was the National City of Culture in 2014, and will bid for the European City of Culture 2020, which if successful, will bring considerable numbers of tourists/ revenue to Limerick and the wider Mid West Region.

The Mid West region has a strong product in the MICE (meetings, incentive, conference and exhibition), or business tourism sector, providing opportunities to capitalise on global growth in this sector. Limerick has a growing reputation as an option for international associations to meet, while the Mid West region as a whole has a strong corporate base which will help to attract more corporate meetings, in addition to experiences and products that lend themselves to securing a much larger part of the incentive business. The Shannon Region Conference & Sports Bureau is a very successful public / private partnership focused on the MICE sector and will aim to attract such events to the counties across the Mid West Region, using the strength and reputation of the aviation and aerospace, pharma, and MedTech sectors and academics at UL.

The region's sporting reputation also helps to win events. Fáilte Ireland has recognised a need to develop more opportunities outside Dublin for MICE business and has recently appointed a researcher in the UK to identify opportunities, an initiative the region as a whole will benefit from. In addition another researcher in North America will look at opportunities in that market for

¹² Economic Impact of the Fleadh Cheoil, 2010, Fitzpatrick Associates. It should be noted that numbers attending the Fleadh have increased significantly since 2010.

corporate and incentive business which will have positive impact on the Mid West region. This is a very important business sector and this work will be an important element in terms of ensuring a regional balance in this lucrative business sector.

It is very important that strong product development continues in the Region's tourism infrastructure which is aligned to a cohesive marketing programme featuring the Region's excellent accessibility from outside and within Ireland, its strong product and accommodation base, and its attraction to each of the key Fáilte Ireland market segments – Great Escapers, Culturally Curious and Social Energisers. There also needs to be a close alignment of the marketing activities of public and private sector bodies involved in tourism promotion and the active tourism trade that exists in the Region

Key ambitions to sustain and grow jobs in the Tourism sector in the Mid West and provide new commercial opportunities for businesses in the region are to:

- Capitalise on the Tourism assets of the region, which include a large section of the Wild Atlantic Way, as well as Greenways, Blueways, the Shannon Waterway and Lakes, and the offshore islands, which contributed to attracting 956,000 overseas visitors to the region in 2013 and €248m revenue generated from overseas visitors in the same year. This will grow overseas tourist numbers in the Mid West to 1.26m by 2025, increase overseas tourism revenue in the Mid West to €375m by 2025, and grow employment in the sector by 25% to 2025
- Enhance the marketing of the compelling tourism offering in the region, in line with Fáilte Ireland's brand experiences; a distinctive proposition could capitalise on areas of strength such as its heritage attractions, natural amenities, inclusion in the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East, potential for activity based tourism, and the urban core of Limerick City. Route development and connectivity through Shannon is also crucial to continued progress in the tourism sector;
- Develop further tourism offerings in areas such as water based recreation, convergence with the food and beverage sector and offerings based on the cultural and sporting heritage of the region;
- Support the development of relevant further education and training to build capability within businesses in the tourism sector.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
71	Fáilte Ireland will examine, as part of the Wild Atlantic Way strategy for 2015-2019, the development of a series of loops off the Wild Atlantic Way to encourage greater spread of visitors, alleviate pressure from high traffic areas and present complementary visitor experiences	2016-2017	Fáilte Ireland
72	Fáilte Ireland will identify opportunities to present the region's cultural and sporting heritage to visitors, in line with key strategic areas such as the Wild Atlantic Way and	2016-2019	Fáilte Ireland

	Business Tourism and Events. Clare County Council will work with Fáilte Ireland to develop marketing material for the 'Culturally Curious' market segment.		
73	Tipperary County Council will work with the new Tipperary County Tourism Board to commence the preparation of an all-county tourism strategy.	2016	Tipperary County Council, Tipperary County Tourism Board, tourism providers
74	Roll out the Lough Derg Roadmap to develop Lough Derg as a key destination for water based activities in Tipperary, Clare and Galway, combined with a range of high quality walking, cycling, heritage, culture and food experiences.	2016	Lough Derg Marketing Group
75	Progress the development of Shannon Blueway (Multi Activity Trail) in Clare, Tipperary, Galway and Offaly.	2015	Waterways Ireland, local authorities
76	Support the establishment of a cruise hire base in Killaloe, Co. Clare.	2016-2017	Waterways Ireland
77	Fáilte Ireland will provide a suite of Business Supports to build capability in the tourism sector in the areas of Visitor Experience, Digital and Sales.	2016-2019	Fáilte Ireland, SOLAS
78	Prepare a Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for Holy Island, which was recently acquired by Clare County Council.	2015-2016	Clare County Council/ OPW
79	Provide a visitor services building at Doolin Pier following on from the completion of the new €6m pier at Doolin in 2015	2015-2017	Clare County Council
80	Progress the next phase of the Loop Head Lighthouse visitor experience project to further support the economic development in the wider area.	2015-2016	Clare County Council/ Commissioners of Irish Lights
81	Complete initiatives under the Lough Derg Stimulus Fund at various locations on Lough Derg.	2015-2016	Clare County Council/ Tipperary County Council/Fáilte Ireland
82	Host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Ennis, Co. Clare	2015-2017	Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann/Clare County Council

Agri-Food and Agri-Tech

A new agri-food strategy, Food Wise 2025, has recently been developed for the coming decade. This sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the development of the agri-food sector to 2025 with a strong focus on maximising the development of the industry in all sectors and geographic areas. Its vision of 'Local Roots Global Reach' is based on the knowledge that this sector is embedded in local rural communities and that the continued efficient production of environmentally-friendly product will drive direct and indirect employment in local areas as well as achieving export growth on global markets.

Food Wise 2025 envisages a growth projection of 23,000 direct jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain, and an increase in the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion by 2025 if the actions identified in the Report are implemented. Much of this growth will be driven by sectors which are particularly strong in the Mid West.

ABP Food Group recently completed a €50 million redevelopment of its facilities in Cahir, Co Tipperary. The redevelopment, which represents a strong vote of confidence in the Agri-food industry, has created 152 new jobs to date with more expected in the future.

Relevant research assets in the Agri-food sector include Limerick Institute of Technology's Food Development Service, aimed at the food SME sector, which provides a centre of excellence in food research to the benefit of the regional and national economy and University of Limerick's Dairy Processing Technology Centre, a strong, long-term industry academic collaborative partnership that will support the long-term growth development of the dairy sector.

SMEs and start ups with a potential to upscale will be the driving force behind increased employment levels in the agri-food and agri-tech sector, both nationally and within the Mid West region. Public and private sector bodies play a key role in supporting food enterprises and start ups in the food and beverage sector in the region. For example, the *Food Academy Start* training programme, a collaboration between Bord Bia, the region's three Local Enterprise Offices and Supervalu, provides integrated support and training to food companies as they progress on their journey of growth from start-up to national distribution and export.

Key ambitions for the Agri-Food and Agri-Tech Sector in the Mid West are:

- to encourage food entrepreneurs
- to support food start ups to grow and scale through targeted supports and enhanced marketing of the region's food and beverage products.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
83	Through FoodWise 2025, achieve an 85% increase in exports over the next decade	Ongoing	Bord Bia, DAFM, EI

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
84	Create regional links between food suppliers & tourism providers to develop an integrated approach to rural & agri-business development.	2015-2017	Leader, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc (Moore Park), Local authorities/EI/LEOs
85	Develop a range of new tourism, food and beverage offerings to develop an integrated approach between tourism providers, rural, marine & agri-businesses.	2015-2017	Faillte Ireland, BIM, Bord Bia, DAFM
86	To ensure a good quality pipeline of food entrepreneurs, run a pre Food Works clinic in the region in 2016.	2016	Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, Teagasc
87	Target an increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme and progress a number of companies in the region to the next level - Food Academy Advance.	Ongoing	Bord Bia, LEO
88	Teagasc will continue to support and increase the level of farm diversification in the Mid West through their Options programme and their pilot <i>Opt-In</i> web portal	Ongoing	Teagasc
89	Enterprise Ireland will target food companies in the Mid West to scale and innovate in line with national policy	Ongoing	EI
90	Promote the uptake of Food Innovation Vouchers	Ongoing	Enterprise Ireland, DAFM
91	Bord Bia will work with retailers to increase shelf space for local produce	Ongoing	Bord Bia
92	Bord Bia will work with LEOs to assist food and drink companies in the Mid West to be included in the Tesco Taste Buds programme	2015	Bord Bia, LEO
93	Examine the potential to Implement a project to engage and support traditional and artisan food-producing SMEs across the Mid West region	2016-2017	Local authorities/EI/LEOs, Bord Bia, Innovate Limerick
94	LIT will roll out a level 7 programme (B.Eng). in Agricultural Mechanisation, developed by LIT in collaboration with Pallaskenry Agricultural College. This programme builds	2015	Limerick Institute of Technology

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	on the successful level 6 programme currently run by LIT and Pallaskenry Agricultural College.		

Pharma and MedTech

The Mid West region's many excellent assets in the LifeSciences sector ensure it is well placed to take advantage of growth opportunities in this sector. The region's key enterprise assets in this area include companies such as Regeneron, Cook Ireland, Vistakon, J&J, Stryker Orthopaedics and Zimmer. The sector is supported by world class research centres in the region such as the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre (PMTC), the Synthesis and Solid State Pharmaceutical Centre, Lero – Irish Software Research Centre and the Irish Centre for Composites Research (IComp), based in University of Limerick.

The region also benefits from its proximity to Galway, which has a strong base of companies and research capabilities in the MedTech sector, and Cork, with its complementary strengths in Pharmaceuticals. In terms of existing sectoral networks, GMIT, NUI Galway and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) are founding members of MetricIreland (Medical Technologies Research and Innovation Consortium) which acts as a single contact point for MedTech enterprises and is funded by the Regional Assembly and five HEIs, including University of Limerick, IT Sligo and Athlone IT. There is potential for enterprises in this sector to develop joint initiatives to enhance the regions capabilities.

The key ambition is to grow the Mid West region's job creation potential in this sector through:

- Investment in relevant skills to support enterprise growth in the sector;
- Strengthening existing sectoral networks to provide an opportunity to facilitate productive interaction between companies, and between companies and research institutes, to facilitate, for example, convergence between medical technologies and ICT, leading to advanced innovations in products and services.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
95	Limerick Institute of Technology will roll out an industry specific biopharma programme, developed in conjunction with Regeneron and Ethicon.	2015	LIT, IDA
96	Limerick Institute of Technology will roll out a new programme (B.Sc. in Medical Technology), which will be delivered by LIT in conjunction with Barrington's hospital.	2015	LIT, Barrington's Hospital
97	Explore the potential for convergences and clustering of research centres within the Mid West Region and across the Mid West, West	Ongoing	SSPC, Curam, Lero, APC, Insight UCC,UL, NUIG, IDA

and South West regions.

Aviation and Aerospace

Aviation and Aerospace is a key sector within the Mid West region, with significant potential for growth. There are many unique assets and infrastructure in Shannon and the wider region that can be capitalised on to sustain and grow employment in this sector. These include:

- Market-leading capabilities in Aircraft Leasing and Maintenance;
- Significant infrastructural advantages offering competitive edge:
 - Shannon airport, with its 3,200m runway, capable of landing the largest aircraft,
 - a significant landbank zoned for aviation related activity;
 - a commercial property portfolio adjacent to the airport under development by Shannon Group Commercial Enterprises, and
 - a deep sea port for international marine transport of large components;
- 45 existing companies in the region operating in this sector, than span the whole value chain of the aviation industry and employ some 1,600 people;
- Shannon Free Zone, the largest multi-sectoral Business Park on the Atlantic Corridor, home to 100+ companies, employing over 7,000 highly skilled employees, with over €3 billion in trade every year;
- A significant pool of Aerospace and Aviation Skills and Educational Courses, providing skills and talent within the region.
 - University of Limerick (UL) offers a wide range of graduate and postgraduate programmes, encompassing an aerospace degree programme; M.Eng. in Aeronautical Engineering; Corporate MBA in Aviation Management and B.Sc. in Aircraft Maintenance and Airworthiness Engineering. UL's 500+ graduates include the Wing, Cabin and Fuel Systems Architects for the A350-1000, and Boeing's Engineer of the Year 2010;
 - In addition, Limerick Institute of Technology offers courses at Level 6 (certificate) through to Level 10 (PhD) whilst also catering for craft apprentices and adult and continuing education;
 - Shannon Training Centre, part of the newly established Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) offers training in transportation, distribution and logistics;
- Strong research capability— the Irish Centre for Composites Research (ICOMP), an EI/ IDA-funded Technology Centre based in University of Limerick provides world class innovative R&D and networking opportunities for industries such as aviation and aerospace, that use composite materials and associated technologies. UL has won more than €25 million in aerospace research funding and collaborated with every major aerospace company in Europe.

Shannon International Aviation Services Centre

The recently-formed Shannon International Aviation Services Centre (IASC – part of Shannon Group plc) has responsibility to put in place a formal management structure for the cluster of 45 companies in the region within this sector, better define it, identify gaps & opportunities, and work with both Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to assist the cluster to grow. In this context, the large amount of

development land available within and around Shannon Airport and the taxation advantages of the Shannon Free Zone are key assets. 95% of the current activity of this cluster is engaged in Aircraft Leasing, Operations and Maintenance, but significant opportunities exist to attract Aerospace Engineering-related activities, such as R&D, Design, and Manufacturing, as well as Aircraft Recycling. Demand for such activity will be driven by the growth of the global Aviation market itself, which forecasts that the world fleet of commercial aircraft will double in size during the next 20 years, with Aircraft Original Equipment Manufacturers selling aircraft worth in excess of \$5 trillion and Value-Added Service Providers additionally providing €trillions of services in order to keep those aircraft flying. IASC are currently developing a new strategy due for early 2016.

Key ambitions for this sector are to build on the region's key competitive strengths in this area to sustain and grow employment in the aviation and aerospace sector in the Mid West, through:

- The formation of a cluster group of aviation and aerospace industries in the region to support collaboration between existing enterprises in the region and to act as a key reference point for attracting further investment in the sector;
- Enhancing the infrastructure in the region to support growth of existing enterprises and to act as a key selling point to attract further investment in the sector. Consideration will be given to the establishment of an Aerospace and Aviation Institute to be located at Shannon Airport, to provide a strategic growth engine for Shannon/ the Mid West as an Aerospace and Aviation Global Centre of Excellence.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
98	Bring the regional Aviation sector together to form a cluster group to support collaboration and growth in the sector.	2015	IASC/EI/IDA/ Ibec - Financial Services Ireland (FSI) and Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland (FAEI)
99	Develop a marketing package summarising Irish aerospace manufacturing capabilities.	2015	IASC in collaboration with EI and Ibec - Financial Services Ireland (FSI) and Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland (FAEI)
100	Develop a marketing package to promote Ireland/Shannon for global aerospace/ aviation firms.	2015	IASC in collaboration with IDA and Ibec - Financial Services Ireland (FSI) and Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland (FAEI)
101	Develop a business plan for the establishment of an Aerospace and Aviation Institute to be located at Shannon Airport.	Ongoing	UL, IASC, Shannon Training Centre (ETB), LIT, Shannon Group

			Commercial Properties, Shannon Chamber, EI and Ibec - Financial Services Ireland (FSI) and Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland (FAEI)
102	Clare County Council will consider means by which it can support the development of aviation related activities through financial incentives and other supports	2015-2017	Clare County Council

Sport

The Mid West is recognised for its rich sporting heritage and reputation. The region is well served by several major indoor and outdoor sports facilities including Thomond Park, Gaelic Grounds, Semple Stadium, horseracing tracks in Limerick and Thurles and facilities at University of Limerick such as the National 50m Swimming Pool. There are also a number of world-class golf courses in the region, including links courses at Lahinch and Doonbeg and the renowned parkland course at Adare Manor. County Tipperary is also a major centre for the thoroughbred horse industry.

The region's Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trail Network is the largest of its kind in Ireland, and has successfully hosted several international mountain biking events, such as the Single Speed World Championship in 2011 and the European Mountain Bike Marathon Championship in 2014.

In 2011 the highly coveted title of 'European City of Sport' was awarded to Limerick city, in recognition of the quality of sporting venues, events and programming it offers. Limerick 2030, the Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick, will aim to build on this success in a renewed 'place proposition' for the city, in which leisure, culture and sport are positioned as strong and animating features of the area. In Tipperary, the 'Thurles Sports Fest' will continue to be a major event for the town, both socially and economically. A €3million investment to develop the Limerick Institute of Technology Sports Lab in Thurles, offering state of the art technology in Sports Strength and Conditioning, was opened in 2015 and will support the development of the sports sector within the region.

Fáilte Ireland's Event Ireland Unit and Shannon Region Convention and Sports Bureau work in partnership with the objective of growing international bed nights through the events sector. This is achieved by identifying, bidding and winning events for the region. A range of practical and financial supports aimed at supporting individuals and organisations at every stage of the bid process are available. These include financial contribution towards;

1. Event feasibility activity/research;
2. Bid document production and design;
3. Travel and accommodation costs to present the bid;
4. Site inspection costs;
5. The event itself if confirmed for the region.

The ambition for the Mid West Action Plan in this area is:

- to build on the existing excellent infrastructure to develop and grow this sector
- position the Mid West as an economic destination for FDI, sports tourism events and sports businesses.
- increase the number of sports and sports tech start ups that can offer employment potential across a range of roles and skills levels, from coaching, nutrition, physiotherapy and retail to development of innovative products such as activity tracking devices.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
103	Pursue the development of a sport business cluster in the Mid West region, utilising the sports facilities at the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology's Sportslab and the Strength and Conditioning centre in Thurles, Tipperary.	2015-2016	House of Sport, local authorities, UL, Innovate Limerick.
104	Develop business plan to position the region as an economic destination for FDI, sport tourism event led activity and sport business start ups.	2015-2016	House of Sport, Fáilte Ireland, Mid West local authorities, UL, LIT, EI Innovate Limerick, Limerick Chamber
105	Pursue the creation of a start up and enterprise ecosystem for sports-related start ups, leveraging the educational, training and vocational opportunities in the region.	Ongoing	House of Sport, UL LIT, EI, Innovate Limerick

Design

It is well established internationally that innovation is the key to value-driven competitive advantage and that the search for sustainable growth is driving innovation at an ever quickening pace. To deliver that sustainable growth, innovation needs to both create new products and new markets and also to deliver ever improving value, based on existing user needs. Design can be the basis of innovation but, more crucially, it integrates both the development and the marketability of new products and processes.

Design is pervasive, impacting across all business sectors, indigenous and foreign, from manufacturing to the creative economy, and in all regions of the country. In this context, the objectives of Design policy are: to encourage more SMEs to utilise design as competitive factor, to develop the design sector in Ireland and to promote Ireland's creative economy and design excellence as part of our enterprise and innovation culture.

Design opens up valuable opportunities for businesses, from increased sales, to a stronger business identity, to managing business processes to ensure they are as cost-effective as possible. Building on key design assets such as:

- the Limerick School of Art and Design (LIT), a world renowned art and design centre;

- the UL School of Architecture and the Design and Manufacturing Technology Departments;
- 'FabLab' – a 3D printing and digital fabrication technology space in the University of Limerick; and
- 'WeCreate' – a unique technology and creative workspace located in the Cloughjordan Ecovillage that offers access to a FabLab, community workspace, and co-working spaces, available to local makers from all disciplines

offers potential to sustain and grow employment and export potential for the Irish design sector into the future; and to work with enterprises across the Mid West and other regions to encourage investment in design as a key component of competitiveness, innovation and enterprise growth.

In addition, Limerick Institute of Technology and the WeCreate Workspace have developed a Springboard course in 3D printing and Embedded Systems to provide students with the opportunity to gain technical skills in CAD, additive manufacturing/ 3D Printing, electronics and embedded systems, using the digital fabrication equipment located at the WeCreate Workspace and Fab Lab in Cloughjordan, Tipperary.

The International Fashion Incubator Limerick will open in Merriman House (Limerick City centre) and will foster enterprise and creativity in fashion through research and development, education, enterprise development and industry training. This initiative develops from the history of fashion achievement and excellence at Limerick School of Art and Design, part of Limerick Institute of Technology. The Fashion Design programme is ranked in the global top 50 and graduates approximately 30 students each year, most of whom embark on international careers. There is an opportunity to leverage that reputation to the benefit of the city and the regional economy.

In addition, Limerick Institute of Technology and the WeCreate Workspace have developed a Springboard course in 3D printing and Embedded Systems which will provide students with the opportunity to gain technical skills in CAD, additive manufacturing/ 3D Printing, electronics and embedded systems, using the digital fabrication equipment located at the WeCreate Workspace and Fab Lab in Cloughjordan, Tipperary.

Enterprise Ireland's Research & Innovation programmes such as New Frontiers, Innovation Partnerships, Innovation Vouchers and Commercialisation Fund are accessible for projects that include design as an integral purpose and/or intent. A targeted marketing approach will be used during the year of ID2015 to ensure relevant clients are aware of the potential to access these supports and their relevance to design. The Competitive Start Fund for Design is a key element of this.

Key ambitions for the design sector over the lifetime of the Mid West Action Plan are:

- to brand the region's design strengths and assets
- to improve awareness of design as a key component of competitiveness and innovation.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
106	Convene a group in the region of relevant actors to conduct a scoping exercise to identify the opportunities for a regional design strategy linked to manufacturing and product design.	2015-2016	LSAD (LIT), UL, Limerick Design Network, EI
107	Use 'Year of Design' to promote strength of LIT School of Art and Design (LSAD) and UL Degrees in architecture, and product and design.	2015	LSAD (LIT), UL, Limerick Design Network, Innovate Limerick, EI, UL's FabLab
108	Brand regional design strengths specifically to manufacturing companies, and the future of Limerick City as a City of design culture.	2015	LSAD (LIT), UL, Limerick Design Network, Innovate Limerick, EI, UL's FabLab
109	Pursue the expansion of University of Limerick's FabLab to support Design Incubation & Research.	2015-2016	UL, Limerick Innovate

Culture and the Creative Industries

In 2014 Limerick was the first designated Irish City of Culture. The year was extremely successful in raising the profile of the city and the region; over 3,000 events took place in the city as part of 156 projects with an estimated audience of 1.8 million people. In addition to the social and cultural impacts, the year long programme of events also served to boost the region's economic recovery. A recent economic impact assessment¹³ estimated that almost €44million was generated as a result of a €12million investment in the City of Culture programme (of which €7.5million represented Government investment), benefiting not only the arts and culture sectors but also hospitality, retailing and services across the region. Limerick is now looking to build on the success of this event and is preparing a bid to host the European Capital of Culture title in 2020.

Key statistics from the *Grant Thornton Economic Impact Assessment of the City of Culture 2014 Programme* illustrate the potential significance of a thriving cultural scene:

- The programme budget of €10m generated additional in-kind and other financial supports of €2m;
- This invested sum of €12m translated into a minimum of €13.4m in direct and induced benefits, with an additional €30m generated in hospitality and other relevant sectors across the Mid West region – totalling almost €44m. The programme reached an estimated audience of 1.8m people;

¹³ Grant Thornton: *Limerick National City of Culture 2014: Economic Impact Assessment*, April 2015



Fig. 7: Limerick City of Culture (source: Limerick Post)

- There was substantial business support for the cultural programme – 85% of respondents felt that the events had a positive impact on the image and perceptions of the city and region;
- 60% of business respondents also experienced increased activity levels during 2014 which was sustained into 2015, against a backdrop of a reduction in the live register generally;
- Media coverage was evaluated by Kantar Media at €14million AVE, with a positive halo effect on the city and wider region.

The Limerick 2030 Plan identifies the creative industries as one of the potential growth sectors for the city and the Mid West region as a whole. The aim of the Mid West Regional Action Plan is to build on existing cultural assets such as Limerick School of Art and Design (LIT), Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick music and performing arts programmes and facilities within Mary Immaculate College, the Clare Museum in Ennis, the Hunt Museum, pop-up art galleries run by young artists and designers and the successful year of Limerick as the first national City of Culture in 2014.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
110	Complete bid for EU Capital of Culture 2020 to attract visitors to the region and generate economic benefit.	2015/2016	Limerick County Council, EU Culture Capital Steering Group, Director of Limerick bid and team

111	Explore the possibility for a 'Cultural Work Fellowship' as a pilot scheme.	2016	Steering Group and Director of EU Culture Capital bid and team
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Energy and Marine Renewable Energy

The Mid West region is ideally positioned to become the centre for sustainable energy in Ireland, based on its natural resources, existing infrastructure, availability of skilled labour and its strength in research & development and innovation.

The region's natural assets in wind and wave¹⁴, together with existing energy infrastructures, offer great potential for the development of alternative/ renewable energy projects within the region, benefiting the environment, while generating much needed employment opportunities and reducing costs for industry.

A test bed for marine energy is located off the Clare coastline and there is potential within the county for the development of wind farms and a biomass heat and energy plant. The Clare County Renewable Energy Strategy 2014 - 2020 aims to build on these and other strengths in the region to position the county as the national leader in renewable energy generation, supporting energy efficiency and conservation and assisting Ireland's green energy target. Clare County Council has adopted a progressive Wind Energy Strategy which has facilitated the approval of developments which, when combined, will provide in excess of 250MW of energy for connection to the national grid. Construction is due to commence on an 80 MW development at Mount Callan, Co. Clare in 2016 that will involve an overall investment of €200million.

North Tipperary County Council was a leader in the establishment of the Tipperary Energy Agency in 1998 and will continue to support the Agency with a view to maximising the use of sustainable energy within its own activities but also supporting the wider community to reduce their energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy.

ESB WestWave Project has been awarded €23 million by the European Commission under the EU New Entrant Reserve (NER300) funding mechanism. It is the only Irish project to receive funding under this scheme. The project team is already developing the site at Killard, near Doonbeg, Co. Clare and procuring technology designs to deploy the pioneering wave energy generators. Construction is expected to start in 2016 with ocean power being generated in 2018. WestWave will be the first wave energy project connected to grid in Ireland by 2018, generating an initial 5MW (equivalent to the electricity consumption of households in nearby Kilrush and Kilkee) of clean renewable electricity from the plentiful wave energy resource available off the west coast of Ireland.

At national level, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) aims to make Ireland a recognised global leader in sustainable energy. It will run a range of programmes and schemes in the Mid West region to assist businesses, public sector bodies, homeowners and communities to achieve

¹⁴ The Mid-West was identified as having the highest potential generating capacity of renewable energy in the country, in a 2009 report (Eirgrid Grid: A Strategy for the Development of Ireland's Electricity Grid for a Sustainable and Competitive Future, 2009)

energy savings. As energy is a significant cost for industry, improving energy efficiency within the region will improve the competitiveness of businesses and support job creation. The SEAI will work to build capacity with the Mid West region to deliver sustainable energy projects and to leverage funding for local investment.

Also at national level, EirGrid, a state-owned company, is responsible for the consistent and reliable transmission of electricity that homes and businesses in the Mid-West can rely on. Earlier this year EirGrid published a draft strategy for developing Ireland's national grid. Central to the draft strategy is the provision of a strong and reliable electricity supply to the regions. This will ensure that Mid-West and the other regions are equipped for investments by both energy intensive indigenous and multinational companies seeking to locate or expand in the region.

Marine / Ports

The land and marine-based Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary has been completed by a multi-agency steering group comprising the local authorities along the estuary, relevant Government Departments and the Shannon Foynes Port Company. The Plan identifies key strategic marine related development sites and has been incorporated into the relevant local authority Development Plans.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
112	Initiate a research facility in marine renewable energy and marine robotics at Limerick Dock.	2015-2016	UL (MaREI), Shannon Foynes Port Company, Limerick City and County Council
113	Promote and assist the delivery of cost savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for businesses and public sector organisations in the region.	Ongoing	SEAI in partnership with Mid West local authorities
114	Work with SEAI to develop and promote Sustainable Energy Communities model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars.	2015- 2017	Mid West local authorities, SEAI
115	IDA will collaborate with Shannon Foynes Port Company and other stakeholders to maximise the benefits that will accrue arising from the recently announced €50million investment programme by SFPC which is aimed at transforming the Shannon Estuary into a major national and international trading hub with particular emphasis of exploring opportunities in the area of clean tech and renewable energies.	Ongoing	SFPC,IDA, Clare County Council, Limerick Chamber

116	Pilot Newcastlewest as a Renewable Energy Town.	Ongoing	Mid West local authorities, Chambers, SEAI, UL
117	Develop a Green Energy Hub on the Lisheen Site near Thurles, Co. Tipperary.	2016	Tipperary County Council, Tipperary Energy Agency, EI
118	Implement the Shannon Estuary Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for strategically zones sites on the Shannon Estuary.	2015-2017	Mid West local authorities/ Shannon Foynes Port Company
119	Clare County Council will consider means by which it can support the development of marine related activities in the Shannon Estuary.	2015-2017	Clare County Council
120	Ensure that the electricity transmission grid in the Mid-West is strengthened to enable maximum investment by industries that rely on large energy consumption.	Ongoing	EirGrid

Clusters

Economic clusters that connect firms and supporting infrastructures are recognised as a valuable source of much needed innovation and knowledge transfer and as key economic drivers within regions. Actions to support the development of clusters, where appropriate, within the Mid West region and across other regions are set out below:

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
121	Innovate Limerick will co-host the International Cluster Conference to share best practices in cluster development, to promote knowledge exchanges and identify future opportunities for clusters as drivers of competitiveness.	2015	Innovate Limerick, in association with the Science and Technology Centre of the canton of Fribourg,
122	Evaluate the business case for undertaking an Economic Profile study of enterprise in the region, to gather baseline information on the number of enterprises, age of enterprises, numbers employed by sector, employment clusters by geography, training and skills needs (current & future) & export markets by country. The valuable information will give the local authorities, LEOs, IDA, EI, Chambers, HEIs, and employers (both existing and potential) an understanding of the nature and	2016-2017	Mid West CEO Forum will lead this project, working in collaboration with Chambers of Commerce, Mid West local authorities and relevant agencies

operation of the local (county) & regional enterprise base and will help identify opportunities to establish clusters and networks and develop targeted support for distinct business clusters.

Chapter 11: Skills enhancement and labour market activation

Ambitions for the Mid West Region in this area are:

- Position the Mid West as the best location in Ireland for integrating skills provision with enterprise requirements. The availability of a highly educated 'jobs ready' workforce in the region will encourage further investment in areas such as ICT and MedTech, which are already strong and growing employment sectors in the Mid West;
- to build the skills of the region by fostering better engagement between education providers and employers in the region;
- to ensure that the Mid West Region has a strong supply of talent, as well as sustainable pipelines of graduates in the STEM disciplines and the hospitality sector to support enterprises in the region to grow and scale;
- to address the need to provide young students with the necessary information about career opportunities in the region to make informed choices about career planning and provide opportunities for young people to enable them to continue to live and work in their local communities.

The Mid West region is well placed to capitalise on its strong educational infrastructures to meet the skills needs of enterprises within the region. University of Limerick's 70% graduate employment rate for 2013 primary degree-holders is 19% higher than the HEA's most recently-available national average figure (51% for 2012), while in 2013/14, 89% of Limerick Institute of Technology graduates secured employment or further study opportunities and over 50% of those managed to secure employment in the Mid West region.¹⁵ These impressive figures demonstrate the relevance of the skills base to enterprise needs within the region.

Significant reforms are also underway in the education sector, aimed at ensuring the availability of high quality skills at all levels and encouraging and facilitating deeper engagement between enterprises and the education system. Key elements of these reforms include:

- The establishment of a network of Regional Skills Fora to promote greater engagement between publicly funded education and training providers and employers in building skills within a region
- The development of higher education clusters to better serve the needs of regions
- Through the development, supported by SOLAS, of a Further Education and Training sector that is more responsive to the needs of learners and employers the Education and Training Boards in Limerick & Clare and Tipperary will play an important role in the provision of further education and training at regional level including development of new apprenticeships and traineeships

Consultations with stakeholders highlighted the importance of matching skills supply and demand within the region. Another key priority voiced by stakeholders during the consultation on this Action Plan was the need for enhanced engagement between education providers and enterprise to ensure

¹⁵ Source: Annual HEA surveys "What do Graduates Do?"

that graduates emerging from all levels of our education system are "workplace ready" and have an appreciation of entrepreneurship as a career option. In response, and building on existing successful collaborations including the Shannon Consortium, the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Clare and Limerick ETB, Tipperary ETB and Skillnets have come together with business organisations, the enterprise development agencies, local authorities and other key local stakeholders to establish the Shannon Region Skills Forum.

The Forum will provide a framework for the education providers and key enterprise stakeholders to work together in identifying and addressing the skills needs of the region. It has established a number of initial objectives including, to develop a collective understanding of the labour market and enterprise profile of the region, in order to inform programme development and ensure that provision is aligned with emerging needs. Annual and sector-specific events are envisaged commencing in spring 2016.

It is also proposed to address how to help employers better understand the full spectrum of education programmes and services available in the region and how to access them. The Forum will also support the development of existing and developing sector specific initiatives in the region such as Limerick for Engineering and Limerick for IT.

IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will also continue to work closely with educational institutions in the Mid West region and as members of the Shannon Regional Skills Forum to develop the skill sets necessary for current and future enterprises based in the region.

Encouraging Entrepreneurship

At primary and secondary level, the important role of education in promoting an entrepreneurial mindset is now widely recognised. A key objective of the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship is to support the development of entrepreneurship in the education system.

Encouraging and promoting an enterprise culture among the student population is an important area of activity for the Local Enterprise Offices. Nationally, over 20,000 students a year will participate in the various LEO supported programmes implemented in the education sector at both primary and secondary level including:

- Student Enterprise Awards - Second Level;
- Exploring Enterprise - Second Level;
- Bi Gnothach Enterprise Programme - Primary Level.

At third level, University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology will support the development of entrepreneurship through facilitating students to undertake business/research projects with SMEs and stakeholder groups.

Promoting Career Options within the Mid West Region

Influencing second level students in terms of career choices is a key element of the skills agenda, particularly in terms of encouraging take up of science and maths and promoting the wide range of career options within the region, from careers in sectors such as hospitality and agri-food, to ICT, MedTech and tourism. A widely held view during consultations centred on the need to inform and

encourage second level students of the range of opportunities and careers within SMEs and FDI companies in region. It was suggested that enterprise within the region could engage with second level pupils, their parents and their teachers to highlight the range of career opportunities within the region.

In order to help meet future skills needs in enterprises within the region, as well as providing opportunities for young people to continue to live and work in their local communities:

- Mary Immaculate College will run IT summer camps for Children, Hour of Code Workshops, CPD for teachers and a Lego Innovation studio for children
- UL and Lero will run a range of competitions, training initiatives and summer camps to promote ICT to students and teachers.

‘Limerick for IT’

In January 2014 major industry in the Limerick area of the Mid West region, including General Motors, Johnson & Johnson and Kerry Group, together with the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Limerick City and County Council and IDA Ireland, formed a unique IT skills partnership, ‘Limerick for IT’. This initiative has already created 220 new ICT jobs

An opportunity exists within the region to build on the success of this model (led by Johnson & Johnson Vision Care through a close collaboration between education providers and industry) to identify skills needs and deliver conversion courses and events aimed at increasing the pipeline of graduates in the ICT Sector. The primary focus is to assess future skills needs in order for multinationals located in the region to secure further operational mandates and activities, thereby creating a virtuous circle of emerging skills and jobs. The key deliverable of the partnership is the generation of a pipeline of job-ready IT graduates to meet global and national needs.

Limerick for IT has generated an energy around collaborative and productive regional partnerships at all levels that has the potential to be replicated across other sectors and to apply at a Mid West level what is already a tested and proven job delivery mechanism, to harness all of the sector’s existing IT resources in all areas of the region and further enhance the region’s capabilities and brand nationally and internationally. The FDI industry in Limerick believes that the initiative has the potential to create 1,000 IT jobs in the next 3 years.

‘Limerick for Engineering’

Building on the success of Limerick for IT, a group of more than 20 manufacturing engineering companies from the Limerick region, in collaboration with University of Limerick and Limerick Institute for Technology, has established a network to focus on increasing the pool of suitably qualified graduates (apprentices, technicians & engineers) from local educational institutions.

An information evening about careers in engineering held in May 2015 attracted over 1,200 attendees and is the first of many such events that is planned in the region.

Limerick for Engineering could be extended across the whole Mid West region, to address skills shortages across the region.

Labour Market Activation

Unemployment in the Mid West currently (Q2 2015) stands at 11.2%. A key priority for the Government is to support persons who are unemployed to get back into the workforce. Alongside the measures in the national and regional Action Plans for Jobs to help create new employment opportunities, the following actions will be taken:

- The Department of Social Protection, through its Intreo (Employment Services) Centres across the region, will provide support for both Jobseekers and Employers, including benefits entitlements, advice on training options and assistance in securing employment/employees
- Enterprise Ireland and IDA will collaborate with DSP by promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst their client companies

Addressing Skills Needs

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
123	Develop the Shannon Regional Skills Forum to foster better engagement between education providers, employers and other regional stakeholders, on an ongoing basis, to collaborate in building the skills of the region	2015 and ongoing	Members of the Shannon Regional Skills Forum (UL, LIT, LCETB, TETB, Skillnets, Limerick, Clare and Tipperary LAs/LEOs, IDA, EI, Chambers of Commerce, DSP, IBEC, HSE)
124	Roll out of new National Apprenticeship Model, including expansion into new sectors such as aviation.	2015 and ongoing	ETBs, LIT, Education & Skills Providers, EI, IDA
125	Consider potential to roll out 'Mid West for IT initiative', to address ICT skills shortages/opportunities within the region, building on the 'Limerick for IT' skills initiative pioneered by a collaborative industry/academia working group, that has been very successful in delivering jobs for the region and building incremental skill sets pipelines.	Ongoing	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Shannon Regional Skills Forum
126	Mid West CEO Forum to explore with other interests how the successful 'Limerick for Engineering' skills initiative can be extended to incorporate all engineering firms across the Mid West region and how it can be extended across other sectors such as tourism, food and hospitality, chemical engineering and biopharma.	Ongoing	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Shannon Regional Skills Forum, Industry Networks, SPCC, Fáilte Ireland, Irish Hotels' Federation

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	IDA and EI will inform clients of the opportunities that will arise from these initiatives.		IDA, Enterprise Ireland
127	Promote the newly launched Graduate Placement Programme through Enterprise Ireland's Shannon regional office to support the placement of graduates with SME companies.	2015	Enterprise Ireland
128	Develop a pilot scheme in the region to address languages deficit. Use Mary Immaculate College facilities to upskill people in Languages outside school hours.	2016-2017	Mary Immaculate College
129	The Local Enterprise Offices will collaborate with Skillnets to ensure a streamlined approach to training offerings in the region.	Ongoing	Local authorities/EI/LEOs, Skillnets
130	Explore areas of collaboration and mentoring through the existing networks and the development of communications of current training supports available in manufacturing.	Ongoing	Ibec Training, Skillnets and Apprenticeships, Limerick Chamber Skillnet
131	Ibec to hold extensive training programmes covering a range of sectors through Skillnets and Springboard.	Ongoing	Ibec Training, Skillnets and Apprenticeships, Limerick Chamber Skillnet

Developing the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
132	Develop entrepreneurship skills across all levels- primary to third level education and CPD for teachers on entrepreneurial education, in particular primary and second level teachers.	2016-2017	Local authorities/EI/LEOs, Mary Immaculate College, education and skills providers
133	Roll out the student-enterprise initiative piloted at Nexus targeting 3 rd level entrepreneurs.	2016	Nexus Innovation Centre, Kemmy Business School.
134	Roll out the UL Practicum model to facilitate students to undertake business/research projects with SMEs and stakeholder groups. Explore the opportunity to link this with LIT and LEOs.	2016-2017	UL, LIT, Local authorities/EI

135	Schools, colleges and companies to collaborate on regional competition for entrepreneurs, such as 'BizWorld' or 'BizFactor'.	Ongoing	Mid West Region CEO Forum in conjunction with members of 'Limerick for IT' Forum, Mary Immaculate College
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Creating awareness of Career Choices and Opportunities within the region

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
136	Influence career choices at young age through presenting to young students, parents, career guidance teachers, and the wider educational community to inform second level students of opportunities and careers within companies in the Mid West Region.		Chambers, Mid West Region CEO Forum, Shannon Regional Skills Forum, Education and Skills providers, career guidance counsellors, EI
137	Roll out online MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) to support students and parents in the transition from second level to third level.	2016-2017	Sligo IT, UL LIT, MIC, NUIG (Shannon Consortium and other HEIs, funded by National Forum for T&L)
138	<p>Building on the success of a recent initiative in Mallow, develop a community-based model for enhanced science and mathematics teaching and learning and establish the Mid West region as a location for innovation in teaching and learning in mathematics and science through:</p> <p>Developing a CPD programme for primary and second level teachers in the area of science and mathematics education;</p> <p>Enhancing community engagement with science and mathematics through community-led programmes such as the Limerick Festival of Science and Curiosity, Careers Poster Competition, RDS Primary Science Fair (being held in Mary Immaculate College in Jan 2016);</p>	2016-2017	<p>EPI-STEM¹⁶, University of Limerick, & Mary Immaculate College,</p> <p>NISE – National Institute for Studies in Education,</p> <p>Education and Skills Providers,</p>

¹⁶ Formerly the National Centre for Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning

	Developing awareness of careers in science and mathematics among primary and second level students and the public in general		
139	Promote the discipline of computing and ICT to students and teachers through a series of initiatives including competitions, training and summer camps.	Ongoing	Lero – Irish Software Research Centre, UL, Mary Immaculate College
140	Provide a toolkit, 'First Learnings Tool', to Transition Year coordinators to support students in identifying strengths, interests, and preferences and, using this, to find a fit with their choice of higher level courses. Disseminate Threshold Concepts project which supports second-level students with preparing for study in third level, following 2014/15 pilot.	2015-2016	UL LIT, MIC (Shannon Consortium projects funded by National Forum for Teaching and Learning)
141	Disseminate the 'Aiming Higher' publication to all second level schools within the Region. The purpose of the guide is to provide students and parents with valuable advice on making decisions on education programmes and career choices.	2015	UL

Labour Market Activation

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
142	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.	Ongoing	IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Department of Social Protection & SOLAS
143	Develop and market a searchable database of upskilling programmes available in the region, 'Upskill Midwest', which identifies programmes, the skills deficits they address, their level and provider to facilitate those interested in upskilling in finding all relevant information in one place.	2016-2017	UL, LIT, Regional Skills Forum, SOLAS

Chapter 12: Building Business Networks

The key objective for the Mid West in this area is to:

- Build strong enterprise networks around the region's ambitions to build competitive advantage, grow its enterprise base, and create the collaboration needed for the region to fulfill its potential

Business networks provide a powerful tool for entrepreneurs and enterprises to tap into advice and expertise, support deeper business-to-business collaboration and create supply chain opportunities. They also play an important role in supporting enterprise growth by bringing together groups of talented entrepreneurs and enterprises who are united around the idea of sharing, creating and developing new ideas within and across sectors.

Chambers of Commerce provide support to enterprises and work to create an improved business environment for both new and existing businesses. They also provide employee training and upskilling, office accommodation and, importantly, information for businesses on the supports and services that are available to them. At a regional level, they work to provide networking opportunities and business information events and work with key influencers and decision-makers on behalf of their members on issues that are impacting on their businesses.

In addition to Ibec's national remit, Ibec works at regional level to develop local engagement between business communities and public bodies to enhance the business environment and build business networks. Ibec's regional network, which includes a Limerick office in the Mid West, will hold conferences, member fora, HR fora, training programmes, networking and briefing events at both regional and sectoral level.

The Irish Centre for Business Excellence (ICBE) is active across the Mid-West region, providing a platform for companies to share knowledge and best practice across all business functions, specialising in the manufacturing and service sectors. ICBE will organise a series of networking events throughout the year, assisting members in meeting their learning, education and development needs and supporting members in implementing transformation strategies in their organisations.

Cross-regional networks offer an opportunity to develop networking and collaboration between regions, improve connectivity across regions and provide enterprise with a wider knowledge and client support base. In the Mid West, the Shannon Supply Network is an industry-led initiative that will continue to promote, develop and connect companies in the Mid West and South West.

Stakeholder consultations identified scope to build on existing networks, such as the Chambers of Commerce within the Mid West region, to support both sector specific and broader regional networks, with the latter identified as being of particular value to start up companies.

Strong industry leadership and ownership are fundamental to the success of business networks. Chambers within the region are actively engaging in developing actions to strengthen existing networks and will continue to leverage these networks to support issues and projects that are crucial to the development of enterprise growth in their locality.

Value-creating networks are also crucial in the public sector to maximise peer to peer learning and deepen collaborative working. Public sector bodies identified an opportunity to build on the collaborative approach used to support development of this Action Plan to deepen linkages across the public sector bodies in the region and support a cohesive effort to drive the enterprise and jobs agenda within the region.

The actions below are aimed at strengthening networks across the Mid West region, deepening collaborative working and connecting enterprises across the region to a wider knowledge and support base. Other opportunities around networking are also identified in Chapter 10 – Building Sectoral Opportunities.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
144	Expand the CEO Forum that is currently meeting in Shannon and run by the Shannon Chamber to the rest of the Mid West region, to undertake projects such as profiling what the various companies are doing in the region and identifying synergies and opportunities for collaboration.	2015-2016	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Regional Chambers
145	The Mid West CEO Forum, in close collaboration with industry interests, Chambers of Commerce and agencies, will establish an industry led Regional Manufacturing/ Engineering Forum. This Forum should encompass the Shannon Supply Network model and should encompass the current initiatives in place such as 'Limerick for Engineering' and the Precision Turned Parts Manufacturing Association. Specific actions under this initiative would involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events showcasing job opportunities in the different sectors; • Matching educational programmes with job opportunities and skillsets; • Global sourcing type event to open opportunities for local SMEs to sub supply to the MNC sector; • Profiling of companies in the region. 	2015-2016	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Chambers in the Region, LIT, UL, Mary Immaculate College, ETBs, , Shannon Supply Network, EI, IDA, Nexus
146	The Mid West CEO Forum to work in close collaboration with the freight/ logistics providers, industry interests, Chambers of		Mid West CEO Forum in collaboration with Chambers of Commerce,

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
	<p>Commerce and agencies to establish a Freight Forum. This forum will aim to promote a sustainable and efficient freight logistics sector across the region, optimising and realising the opportunities for growth across the Limerick-Shannon Gateway by utilising the region's infrastructural assets at Shannon-Foynes Port Company and Shannon Airport and the region's locational advantage mid-way along the Atlantic Corridor. The Forum would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together representatives from the freight and logistics sector and those that depend on the movement of goods; • Promote the provision of transport infrastructure that will improve the efficiency, reliability and sustainability of freight movements associated with the Gateway; • Develop a culture of collaboration and open innovation, sharing best practice and creation of a learning environment. 		Shannon-Foynes Port Company, Shannon Airport, Mid West local authorities and other relevant regional stakeholders to deliver this action.
147	<p>EI and IDA will work together to develop and implement an information/networking event across the region for EI and IDA clients.</p>	2016	IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland
148	<p>Organise a Mid West Student Enterprise Network to support Student Entrepreneurship.</p>	2016-2017	UL (Nexus, KBS, FabLab), LIT, MIC, local authorities/EI/LEOs, working in collaboration with Mid West Region CEO Forum.
149	<p>Mid West CEO Forum to work in close collaboration with the financial services industry, Chambers of commerce and agencies to establish a Mid West Region Financial Services Forum to encourage a culture of collaboration and facilitate sharing of best practice, with a view to developing and growing the sector.</p>	2016-2017	Mid West Region CEO Forum, Chambers, UL Kemmy School, CEO Forum
150	<p>Continue to operate Ibec sector specific regional networks including Pharma, Medtech and explore ICT</p>	Ongoing	Ibec, Chambers

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
151	Host business briefings, award programmes, member business evenings and networking events in the Mid West region	Ongoing	Ibec and Trade Associations (including IMDA, PCI, Irish Software Association, Meat Industry Ireland and Irish Dairy Association), Chambers
152	Hold a Regional Business Roadshow on a topic of relevance to business. (Ibec will also host a Regional Business Summit for Ibec members)	2016	Ibec
153	Continue to host HR forums through Ibec's regional offices for Ibec members	Ongoing	Ibec

Chapter 13: Marketing the region as an attractive place to work and live

The Mid West Region, with its rich living environment and excellent recreational, cultural, sporting and educational facilities, makes the region a great place to live, work and visit. Promoting these unique strengths of the region in the national and international marketplaces will support economic growth in the Mid West by attracting investment, talent and visitors to the region.

Consultation with stakeholders in the region identified scope for businesses and public sector in the region to work collaboratively to build on this approach to develop 'whole of region' marketing material, based on a strong regional brand such as 'Shannon Region', to provide a platform to promote the Mid West's value proposition to investors, tourists and potential residents.

There are a number of initiatives at county level that can be built upon and integrated with existing IDA and tourism marketing and promotion material to develop a coherent brand and marketing tool for the region. For example, *Tipperary.com* provides an overview of top tourist attractions, infrastructure, supports for enterprise, education facilities & skills base; the *Limerick.ie* website showcases Limerick as 'a great place to live, work and visit'; while the *Clare.ie* and *Clarecoco.ie* websites offer information for visitors and business respectively. In addition, Limerick City & County Council established the first local authority owned destination marketing company in 2013 with the formation of Limerick Marketing Company. The company's purpose is to position Limerick to attract mobile investment and visitors. It has a particular focus on marketing and promoting Limerick to local, national and international media, highlighting the investment opportunities that Limerick has to offer. The company collaborates closely with its key stakeholders in Limerick and the wider Mid West Region and its Board includes both public and private sector representatives in key economic sectors.

A distinctive proposition could capitalise on areas of strength such as its heritage attractions, natural amenities, inclusion in the Wild Atlantic Way, potential for activity based tourism, and the urban core of Limerick City. Such a coherent approach to promoting and marketing the region in the international marketplace would enhance knowledge of the unique strengths and assets of the region, which can be used by businesses and public bodies within the region, as well as by visitors and diaspora, to sell the region and spread the word about what the Mid West has to offer in terms of business opportunities, talent, lifestyle and visitor experience.

The local authorities will play a key role in supporting place-making and marketing of the region through their many activities around amenity, environment and economic and community development, working in collaboration with enterprise agencies and Regional Chambers and other stakeholders across the region.

Significant investment is being made in recreational and leisure facilities and other projects aimed at creating an attractive environment for people to live, work and learn in, all of which will help to enhance the attractiveness of the Mid West for business investment, talent and tourism.

The Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan (2013) envisages one of the largest capital programmes and largest regeneration programme in the State. The 10-year Plan includes €253million investment over the next ten years to revitalise communities in designated regeneration areas. The economic element of the plan will see €1m per annum invested in areas such as training, work experience, work placement and job creation. The University of Limerick School of Architecture has been working with Limerick City Council in terms of the rejuvenation of the 'Hanging Gardens' area of the City as a 'Georgian City' – into an Eco-City of the future, an international tourist destination, a great place to live and work with high quality office space as well as sustainable living space.

Ennis won the 2010 Tidy Towns Competition, has a thriving Arts scene and is a stronghold for traditional Irish music. Ennis achieved Purple Flag status (focused on the night time economy) in 2012 and successfully retained the status in 2015. Recreation facilities throughout the county have been significantly improved in recent years with further developments planned for 2015-2017, including a major €2million upgrade of the main GAA stadium in Cusack Park.

Like other regions throughout the country, the retail sector in the Mid-West has contracted in the downturn as consumer spending reduced. The most notable impact of the reduced activity in the retail sector is on the main streets of towns and villages of the region. A number of initiatives are being progressed across the region by local authorities and in partnership with various retail associations.

In order to increase footfall there is a need to focus, in particular, on improving the business environment in the City and town centres. In Ennis, an expansion area has been identified to provide for modern retailing needs in Ennis town centre, whilst preserving the historic fabric of the town.

Building on the strong social, cultural and community assets within the region, the following actions will be taken to support economic growth by attracting investment, talent and tourists to the Mid West region.

	Action	Timeline	Responsible bodies
154	The proposed Mid West CEO Forum will lead the process of develop 'whole of region' marketing material to sell strengths and value proposition of the Mid West region in terms of quality of life, skills base, education and research infrastructure, airport, deep sea port, cost of living, tourism; recreational and lifestyle assets and use this to promote the region as a great place to live and work.		Mid West Region CEO Forum, in close co-operation with local authorities, businesses, public sector agencies and Chambers of Commerce
155	Mid West CEO Forum to explore how the Global Limerick Network concept can be applied to the whole Mid West region and in	2015-2017	Mid West CEO Forum, Global Limerick Network Limerick City & County

	the process to reach out to people from/with connections to the region to attract skilled talent back to the Mid West region.		Council, Limerick Marketing
156	Limerick City and County Council will implement the regeneration programme set out in the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan to revitalise communities in the regeneration area.		Limerick City and County Council
157	Appoint a 'Town Centre Manager' to work collaboratively to design and implement a plan which will reinvigorate towns and cities and drive growth for the retail and hospitality sectors.		Limerick Chamber, working with Retail Excellence Ireland, as well as with the local authority, Limerick City Business Association and retail groups across the county and Limerick Chamber Skillnet.
158	Implement proposals for Ennis under the Urban Centre Grants Scheme operated by the Southern Eastern Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020	2016-2017	Clare County Council
159	Retain the Purple Flag destination for Ennis (2017) through further developing the night time economy and the opportunities for enterprise and economic development	2015-2017	Clare County Council/ Ennis Chamber of Commerce

Chapter 14: Potential strategic areas for further job creation

At the time of finalisation of this Action Plan, there were a number of emerging projects with potential for job creation and enterprise opportunity in the region in the future. These projects require further development by the promoters and are medium-term in timescale. Progress on these projects will be kept under review over the lifetime of the Action Plan and actions, as appropriate, may be incorporated into the Plan as they evolve.

Setting up of National Aerospace and Aviation Institute in Shannon (Aero-I)

The establishment of a national aerospace and aviation institute in Shannon was identified by stakeholders as offering significant potential for job creation and enterprise opportunity in the region.

The vision of this key strategic regional project is to assemble and align the many assets of the Mid West in the formation of a new Institute for Aerospace and Aviation education and research to:

- Address the education and skills requirements of the Irish Aerospace and Aviation industry,
- Build the region's international training capacity and play a central role in helping to plug the mounting skills gap nationally and internationally across Aviation and Aerospace now and in the future.
- Engage in research to support local industry,
- Create local jobs and attract new business to the region.

Opportunities

Ireland is internationally renowned as the leading location outside the USA for aircraft leasing and is home to most of the world's top aircraft leasing companies. More than 1,600 aircraft are directly owned, financed or managed in Ireland, representing over 10% of the world fleet.

- The number of airline passengers carried annually is predicted to double to 6 billion by 2030.
- The latest forecast from Airbus for 2014-2033 anticipates a demand for 31,350 new passenger aircraft and freighters at a value of US\$4.6 trillion.
- Global forecasts from the ICAO, Airbus and Boeing indicate a critical skills shortage due to the baby-boom generation reaching retirement age. The industry needs to replace an entire generation of staff while coping with a doubling of capacity over the next 15 years.

These figures illustrate the significant opportunities for companies in the sector and for education, training and research providers.

Existing Strengths

The Mid West region already possesses a number of key assets and infrastructure that can be built upon to capitalise on opportunities available in the sector sustain and grow employment in this sector.

These include:

- Market-leading capabilities in Aircraft Leasing and Maintenance, and the emerging aviation business cluster under development by IASC;
- Very significant pool of Aerospace and Aviation Skills and Educational Courses available in the region;
- Deep Sea Port for international marine transport of large components;
- World-Class Logistics to expedite international shipments;
- Expedited Customs Clearance for high-volume shipments and capability on-Site Bonded Warehouse Storage;
- A 3,200m runway at Shannon airport, capable of landing the largest aircraft; with the airport also benefitting from US preclearance and its designation as a cargo-hub and a Centre of Excellence for Business Aviation;
- Strong research capability -the Irish Centre for Composites Research (ICOMP), an EI/ IDA-funded Technology Centre based in University of Limerick providing world class innovative R&D capability in composite materials and associated technologies;
- For international business, the value proposition also includes availability of an English-speaking, flexible, mobile and highly-productive workforce, EU Membership, open access to the EU Internal Market, competitive R&D and tax offerings and direct International air Routes and US CBP Pre-Clearance from Shannon Airport;
- Significant land bank in Shannon, zoned for aviation-related activity.

Key Outcomes:

From an enterprise, skills and jobs perspective this would deliver the following outcomes:

- A new state-of-the-art training facility at Shannon airport for aerospace/aviation education and training, equipped with dedicated training aircraft, and the latest aeronautical education and training equipment; in close proximity to a live aircraft maintenance environment, of a standard that will draw students from across the globe to the Mid West region.
- A new Aerospace Institute of Ireland (Aero-I), would provide employment, attract revenue-generating students to the region and play a key role in attracting new Aerospace and Aviation companies to Shannon and the Mid West.
- A new, full-time UL presence at Shannon, enabling the creation of much closer links with the Shannon-based companies, and research activities aimed at strengthening their competitiveness, and attracting new companies to the region
- A dedicated marketing arm aimed at establishing strategic international partnerships and attracting international students to the Institute

The proposed new centre, Aero-I, could also be a key support pillar in an overall strategy to position Shannon and the Mid West region as the “Aerospace and Aviation Valley of Ireland”.



In summary, the proposed Institute would provide a much stronger alignment between education and the skillsets needs of the Aerospace and Aviation companies located in the Mid West Region, and the programmes which the various educational institutions can and will provide – providing a strategic growth engine for Shannon / Mid West as an Aerospace and Aviation Centre of Excellence, on a global basis.

Limerick for IT Initiative

The Limerick 2030 Plan¹⁷ identified the need for an information technology (IT) skills framework that will enable job creation and leverage the knowledge based economic potential of Limerick, given the importance of the ICT sector in the Mid West region. The plan specifically calls for ‘an employer led, sector-specific skills project, linked to Limerick’s growth sectors.

In January 2014, in response to this key challenge, major industry in the Limerick region, including General Motors, Johnson & Johnson and Kerry Group, together with the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Limerick City and County Council and IDA Ireland, formed a unique IT skills partnership, ‘Limerick for IT’.

Since its establishment, the initiative has created over 200 high skilled IT jobs and has been acknowledged as a major FDI skills innovation. Already a new branch of the programme is in development for technicians. The opportunity exists to build on the success of this model and to scale this initiative across the Mid West region, through the appointment of a ‘Mid West for IT/ Mid West for Engineering’ Cluster Manager and the funding of a development centre.

The FDI industry in Limerick believes that the initiative has the potential to create 1,000 IT jobs in the next 3 years.



What is the event about?

1. Learn about the huge range of careers in Information Technology (IT) and Computing
2. Understand which college courses prepare you for these IT/Computing careers
3. See some cool technology (Oculus Rift headsets, Blue tooth soccer, leap motion sensor etc.)
4. Talk to students, graduates, academics, and industry representatives

Who should attend?

- CAO students
- Parents
- Guidance Counsellors
- School Principals

Where When ?

Dell Computers,
Raheen Business Park,
Limerick,
March 5th 2015 @ 7:00pm

How do I register?

<https://eventbrite.ie/event/15694299071/>

Contact: Tom Murphy 087-9366661

“We are delighted to be a part of the Limerick for IT initiative. A key factor in Johnson & Johnson’s recent decision to locate a Software Development Centre in Limerick was the existence of a great partnership between both Colleges, local industry, Limerick City & County Council, Government and IDA Ireland. We really believe that Limerick can establish itself as a world-class hub for IT investment”

Barry O’Sullivan, Plant Manager at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Ireland

¹⁷ Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick

Code City

There is a global and national shortage of ICT professionals. For the foreseeable future, there is an annual shortfall of approximately 6,000 ICT graduates per year in Ireland. Some of this can be bridged through inward migration but there is still a gap of 1,000 between the number of graduates that we are producing annually and the required workforce of the ICT industry in Ireland. This trend is mirrored internationally.

To address this issue, there is an urgent need for pathways to produce 'industry ready' ICT professionals. Such pathways could be used to target youth unemployment both regionally and nationally by increasing the awareness of IT as a career and challenging the ambitions of this cohort. Code City has been developed by a sub-group of the successful 'Limerick for IT' initiative and involves representatives from UL, LIT, Vistakon, Dell, General Motors, Limerick City and County Council, IDA.

An opportunity exists to build on the success of 'Limerick for IT' to build an industry led, city centre campus that could complement the existing HEIs' ICT programmes but would be an industry connected education system focusing on providing an agile response to the sector's needs. This entity would address a range of connected targets building Digital Literacy (with a particular emphasis on coding) and adding value to the region's capacity to deliver job ready graduates. 'Code City' would have the following characteristics:

- A physical presence in Limerick city centre:
- Excellent IT connectivity
- Residential space for Boot Camps/International students
- A home for all stakeholders – industry, education (HEIs), DES, ETBs etc. It would serve as a location for contractors and advanced project demonstrators;
- Education from Coder Dojo to MSc to Doctorate (degree, diplomas or apprenticeship);
- Close collaboration between students and local business individuals;
- A strong entrepreneurial focus fostering creativity and innovation;
- An international focus;
- A forum for connecting.

From an enterprise, skills and jobs perspective, this would

- Create strong aligned job/work/industry readiness
- Help address youth unemployment
- Increase levels of digital literacy, within the Mid West region, including the number of coders
- Improve female participation rates in IT industries

Film Production Industry and Media Cluster

The recent announcement that a long-term lease agreement has been signed between Limerick City and County Council and Troy Studios (recently established by Ardmore Studios' CEO Siún Ní Raghallaigh) for the former Dell factory site in Castletroy has been identified as a potential catalyst for the development of a film and television hub in the region. The repurposing of the site will

involve the conversion of 340,000 square feet of factory space into high-specification film and television production studios.

The availability of state-of-the-art studio space in the country as a whole has been seen as a constraining factor in the development of the audio visual production industry in Ireland. The scale of the Troy Studios project is significant in the context of the nature and size of studio space currently available in the country as a whole; as a result this development will serve to establish the Mid West as a prime location for film and television production and opens up significant potential for media clustering in the region.

There is potential also to develop complementary facilities in Shannon and other areas throughout the region

Sports Cluster

Sport provides a niche economic opportunity that capitalises on the Mid West region's inherent strengths in this area. The Sports industry is an integral element of the Limerick 2030¹⁸ vision and builds on the national opportunity that the industry presents. The development of a sports cluster in Limerick and the Mid West could act as a catalyst for the formation of a national sport business cluster, based on the creation of direct and indirect employment opportunities.

The Sports Cluster will attract multinational investment to the region while fostering Micro enterprise and SME industry in sport related business. A five year target of 500 jobs is based on the creation of employment in the sub sectors of Sport, Business and Knowledge. Additional (Indirect) jobs will be created through the impetus the Sports Cluster can create for additional elements of the sector through the destination management of the region as a base for all aspects of sport including performance, training, events and sport tourism.

Limerick, & the wider Mid West Region, is the ideal location for the development of a sports cluster given that:

- Limerick was the first location in Ireland to earn the title of European City of Sport. Thurles has also awarded the European Town of Sport for 2012, which further emphasises the sports potential in the region.
- Limerick hosted the 2nd European Tourism Sports Summit in May 2015.
- Shannon Airport provides a base for FDI with access to the European market supported by proactive incentives and enterprise agency supports to locate in Ireland.
- The local sports infrastructure from UL to Thomond Park is comparable to any international location.
- The University of Limerick is home to some of the most innovative sports science and sports performance programmes.
- Fáilte Ireland regards counties in the region as outstanding outdoor activity locations.

¹⁸ Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan

The Limerick Royal/Digital Quarter & City Centre Innovation Centre

This project is a joint venture between Limerick Clare ETB and Innovate Limerick and has the potential to add a vital piece of enterprise development infrastructure in the heart of the Mid West region.

This proposal for Ireland's first combined cinema and digital media training facility will deliver jobs, economic, social and cultural benefits. Key benefits include:

- Possible anchor project for Georgian Area/Digital Quarter;
- Make Limerick more attractive for visitors;
- Daytime, night-time and weekend economy – Film festivals, Computer gaming tournaments;
- Improving Quality of Life offering for residents and investment;
- City Centre Regeneration;
- A forum for Limerick's 3rd level annual output of Digital Arts;
- Legacy from Limerick's year as National City of Culture 2014;
- Integral Part of LCCC's plan to work with Ardmore Studios; and
- Support for Limerick's application for European City of Culture 2020.

It will comprise:

- Four auditoria in City centre;
- Café/restaurant/bar;
- Media training facilities;
- Two Video Edit suites; and
- Equipment rental.
- 10,000 sq ft of advanced innovation space



Proposal to Establish a National Smart Ageing Exchange (ISAX) in Limerick

ISAX is a newly established independent network of industry, research institutions and government, aimed at accelerating and commercialising innovations for those global older consumer markets. Its founding members include Limerick City and County Council, UL, LIT, IBM, Glanbia, Home Instead.

It aims to make Ireland a strategic location and international test-bed for ageing-related research, product development and trialling of new solutions designed to address the opportunities and challenges of population ageing. Its central hub will act as a broker and catalyst, identifying opportunities for companies and academic institutions, forging collaborations between members and tailoring a range of supports to help them realise those opportunities.

This proposal emerged from the most recent convening of the Global Irish Economic Forum in 2013, which strongly endorsed the proposition that “Ireland become a world leader for smart ageing innovations” and this commitment was subsequently included in the Government's Action Plan for Jobs 2014 and 2015.

It has set targets for the number of new jobs, FDI and SMEs for 2020 – 5500 new jobs, 30 EI SME clients newly targeting this market and 20 new FDI companies. It will create jobs in a number of ways - through those employed in:

- the national centre and the start-up companies in the incubator units and Accelerator Programmes
- SMEs and larger companies expanding their product ranges to target the global market
- companies locating in Ireland in the National Centre and elsewhere availing of their expertise to test concepts and develop prototypes for new products

The Opportunity

Merrill Lynch has projected that by 2020 what they call the ‘longevity economy’ will be worth \$15tn. ISAX conducted extensive market research and completed a Feasibility Study in 2014 which showed that:

- i. A new global ‘silver’ economy is emerging, derived from dramatic increases in life expectancy, the relative wealth of the older consumer groups (accounting for 75% of net wealth and 55% of household expenditure) and governments’ need for innovations to address the complex challenges of population ageing – primarily health, care and pensions.
- ii. Companies face a number of barriers in targeting this market and the ISAX business model is designed to help address those constraints – such as poor market intelligence, difficulties testing concepts and prototypes with target consumer groups, the need for test-beds, the need for collaboration with research centres and government
- iii. Ireland is well placed and would have first mover advantage in targeting this new economy but it will require an innovative and agile partnership approach.

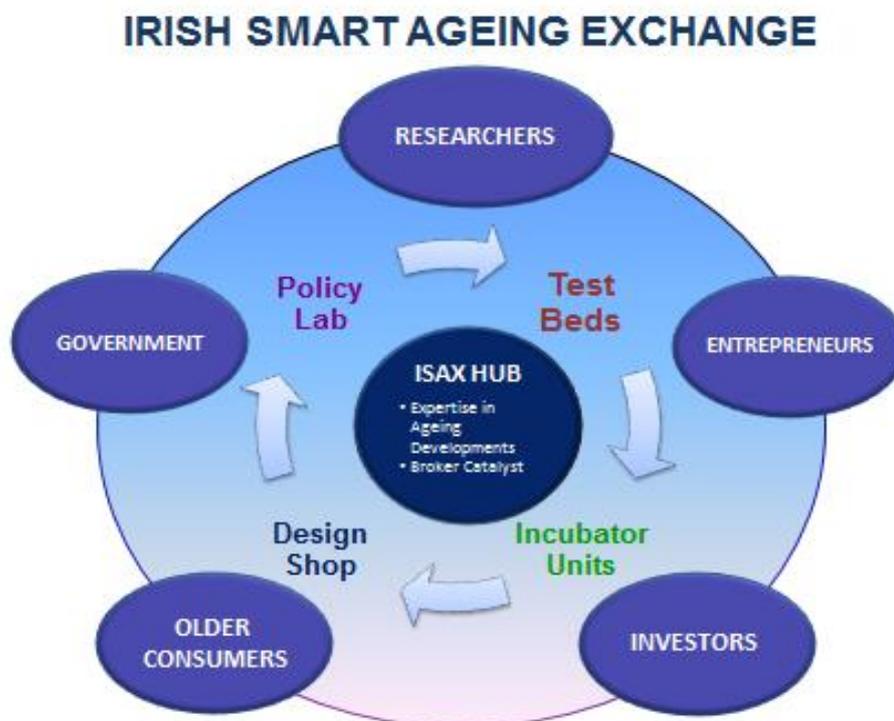
It also showed the opportunity to focus its programmes and job creating activities on the companies and research institutions in the Mid West region during its first phase – for example the Smart Ageing Supported Housing Programme.

Progress to-date

Since Jan 2015, ISAX has:

- Secured twelve founding members is on track to meet its target of 25 members by launch in late 2015.
- IBM which also plans its own Smart Ageing initiative, has selected Limerick as a Healthy Ageing City and will allocate a team of IBM consultants to realising this
- Limerick Local Authority has committed to providing the space for the National Smart Ageing Centre, comprising dedicated incubator units, the Design Shop and Exhibition Centre. It will also contribute €500k pa to the dedicated Smart Ageing Investment Fund
- Dell has offered to support start-up companies and to collaborate in developing a national Smart Ageing Data Exchange
- Glanbia will contribute their expertise in 'design thinking' and to developing the insights needed into changing consumer lifestyles and needs
- UL and LIT are committed to making specific contribution to ISAX's development, including locating post-graduates to the ISAX National Centre who will work across the seven sectoral areas and in design and consumer insights
- Tunstall and Home Instead Senior Care will provide access to the 40,000 homes they work in as part of building a national test-bed and will contribute client data (anonymised and suitably protected by protocols) to the National Smart Ageing Data Exchange.

Figure 7: ISAX



Mid West Conference and Exhibition Centre

Various studies have identified the potential of a Regional Conference and Exhibition Centre to develop the tourism and cultural industry in the Mid West region. The increasing competitiveness of cities and regions require such facilities to compete for creative investment and tourism investments.

The development of a Mid West Conference and Exhibition Centre would provide a world class and dynamic conference venue for the Mid West Region. Events held at the proposed centre would help to generate significant revenue for the Irish economy and would have a major impact on the local economy, with business tourists spending money on hotels, restaurants, entertainment, shopping, cultural experiences and tourist attractions.

Work is underway to secure funding towards the initial stages of developing the project, which is estimated to create 300 to 400 new jobs.

Chapter 15: Implementing Plan and Monitoring

Progress

The Action Plans for Jobs for the Mid West region has been developed following wide local stakeholder engagement, using a “bottom-up” approach, with actions coming from regional stakeholders including the private sector.

The Action Plan covers a three-year timeframe, 2015-2017, to allow for the process to take hold and develop, and to capture a more medium-term ambition for the regions. The Plan will be flexible and dynamic to allow additional actions and ideas to be added as they emerge over the period of the Plan.

Progress on the actions will be monitored on a 6 monthly basis by an Implementation Committee, and Progress Reports on the implementation of the Plan will be published twice each year. The Progress Reports will also identify areas for further action in a rolling framework.

All of the key regional stakeholders who have actions for delivery in the Action Plan will be involved on the Implementation Committee and will be asked to provide updates on the delivery of actions.

Given that strong business representation is also required to drive the enterprise and jobs focus of the Plan, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation will appoint locally-based Enterprise Champions to participate on the Implementation Committee and work with the public bodies on the implementation of the Plan.

The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation will also appoint the Chair of the Implementation Committee.

Notwithstanding the need for local buy-in and ownership of this Action Plan, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and innovation will continue to oversee the Plan at political level and facilitate updates to the Plan through membership of the Implementation Committee.

Processes put in place to monitor this regional Action Plan should complement other monitoring arrangements in the Local Government sphere.



An Roinn Post, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

The Action Plan for Jobs is an initiative of the
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation