

BORTHWICK'S PLAN OF ACTION FOR MID-WEST

In her new role as Programme Manager for the Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs, Economist Dr Órlaith Borthwick will be supported by three local authorities in Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. She talks to Elaine O'Regan about fostering a collaborative approach to create 23,000 new jobs across the region by 2020.

Dr Órlaith Borthwick, who has a PhD in Economics, takes up her new role as programme manager, having served as manager of the Mid-West Regional Skills Forum for the Department of Education and as Director of Policy and Interim CEO at Limerick Chamber of Commerce.

Her aim, she tells 'Council Review', will be to build on this experience in continuing to foster a collaborative approach to the implementation of the action plan, with strategic input from various private and public sector stakeholders.

"A number of collaborative cross-agency initiatives have already resulted in significant job creation in the region," says Borthwick. "Since the plan was launched in the fourth quarter of 2015, an additional 11,000 people are in employment in the mid-west and, at six per cent, our regional unemployment rate is below the national average."

Manufacturing, accounting for about 20 per cent of all jobs in the mid-west region, has proved a steady source of employment historically. Another healthy sector is tourism. "We have a strategic location along both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East and that creates a platform for the region to exploit future growth as the economy improves."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The food sector also holds potential for the region, fuelled by global population growth, according to Borthwick. "The demand for food is estimated to rise somewhere between 59 per cent and 98 per cent by 2050 as global population increases continue."

"This creates a significant opportunity for the mid-west to exploit the natural asset of our rich agricultural landscape and also provides new growth markets for our world-class food producers."

The Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs, an initiative set up by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in 2015, aims to create 23,000 new jobs for Clare, Limerick and Tipperary by 2020. Since the Action Plan was introduced in 2012, it has been one of the government's key instruments to support job creation.

An updated action plan is published every year, setting out clear actions and targets to help create positive conditions for job creation. Results are reviewed on a quarterly basis while regular progress reports are also published.



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The plan is a whole-of-government initiative with government departments and agencies working together to achieve agreed annual targets.

"The Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs has 159 actions, to be delivered across over 30 agencies and bodies, from Enterprise Ireland and the IDA to our education providers and business interests such as Chambers of Commerce and IBEC," Borthwick points out.

An Implementation Committee is in place with representatives from 34 regional stakeholders across the public and private sector. "The action plan is rather unique in directly

MID-WEST ACTION PLAN



Dr Órlaith Borthwick pictured with Barry O'Sullivan, who is chairing the Mid-West APJ Implementation Committee.

Key initiatives include:

- Responding to Brexit;
- Driving enterprise growth;
- Delivering skills for a growing economy;
- Promoting innovation;
- Stimulating regional growth;
- Enhancing competitiveness;
- Addressing new labour market challenges, and;
- Strengthening clusters and realising enterprise opportunities.

placing industry at its core; I am fortunate to have Barry O'Sullivan, General Manager at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, chairing the committee," she notes.

"He is a true visionary and has created a number of sectorally focused groups that work collaboratively to identify opportunities for future growth."

SECTORALLY FOCUSED GROUPS

O'Sullivan will oversee the committee's diverse range of industry champions, including Gerry Reynolds of Takumi Precision in Limerick, Clodagh Kavanagh of Abbey Machinery in Tipperary, and Birgitta Curtin of Burren Smokehouse in Clare.

Sector teams are also represented on the committee by key industry players, including Zimmer's John Lynch for manufacturing and Grassland Agro's Liam Woulfe for agriculture.

Northern Trust's Catherine Duffy is the committee representative for financial services. John Gleeson at General Motors is the representative for the ICT sector, and Michael Vaughan, owner of Vaughan's Lodge in County Clare, is representing tourism.

The Government has committed €50 million to support the successful delivery of initiatives contained within the regional Action Plan for Jobs. It is a unique programme that works across multi-stakeholder public and private agencies.

In the mid-west, these stakeholders include, not only the three local authorities in Clare, Limerick and Tipperary, alongside the Southern Regional Assembly, but also the IDA, Enterprise Ireland,

Intertradelreland and the Local Enterprise Offices.

Also involved are Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Teagasc while stakeholders in the educational sector include the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Mary Immaculate College, Shannon College of Hotel Management, and the Education and Training Boards.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Industry partners include the Chambers of Commerce, IBEC and Shannon Group. The Government Departments involved in the delivery of the plan include, not just the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, but also the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Social Protection.

In the first half of 2016, the Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs delivered 101 of the 103 actions due in that period, recording



APPOINTMENT TO FURTHER ACCELERATE SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY OF PLAN

On noting the impact the Action Plan for Jobs has had on the mid-west region, Mary Mitchell O'Connor who was then Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, believed the appointment of Dr Borthwick would further accelerate the successful delivery of the plan.

"Having met Órlaith at a meeting of the Mid-West APJ Implementation Committee, I was impressed by her professionalism, enthusiasm, and her deep knowledge of the mid-west region's economic strengths, challenges, and opportunity areas," the Minister said in mid March.

"The mid-west now has the fastest growing employment rate in the country, with an unemployment rate of 6% – a drop of 4.2% since the start of 2015. This represents fantastic progress for the region, and under Órlaith's leadership, this action plan will continue to build on this momentum.

"Órlaith's experience working with Limerick Chamber of Commerce and the Mid-West Regional Skills Forum has no doubt helped her to build a strong network of contacts and collaborators within the region. This will be key to delivering on, and adding value to, the Mid-West Action Plan," the Minister added.

Meanwhile, Barry O'Sullivan, General Manager at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, who is chairing the Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs Implementation Committee, believes that having a programme manager in place will open new economic possibilities for the region.

"The plan is a template for collaboration and Órlaith is in place to support the work of industry as they partner with public bodies, to identify step-change projects that can deliver a bright future and wealth of job opportunities for all who chose to live here."



Mary Mitchell O'Connor the then Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, pictured with the Mid-West APJ Implementation Committee in Limerick in December 2016. Pictured (l-r): Ger Dollard, Clare County Council; Dr Orlaith Borthwick, then Manager of the Mid-West Regional Skills Forum, Cllr Kieran O'Hanlon, then Mayor of the City and County of Limerick; Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor; Barry O'Sullivan, Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs Implementation Committee; Limerick City and County Council's Dr Pat Daly and Pat Fitzgerald, and Attracta Lyons, Tipperary County Council. (Photo: courtesy of Brian Gavin, Press 22).

a successful implementation rate of 98 per cent. In the same period, the Local Enterprise Office network in the mid-west approved just over €2.2 million in priming, feasibility and business expansion grants for 100 projects.

Three LEO projects in the region secured funding under Enterprise Ireland's €5 million Competitive LEO fund. The Enterprise Ireland Community Enterprise Initiative had seven successful applicants in the mid-west region, including Kilkee Tourism, Tipperary Culinary Delights and Kantoher Development Group.

Meanwhile, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA have built on their existing Global Sourcing and Collaboration initiative by hosting a workshop attended by 140 people, including 72 Enterprise Ireland and 26 IDA client companies.

"IDA Midwest have 12 Research and Development investments from client companies since the launch of Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs and have delivered 37 investments," says Borthwick.

KEY STRATEGIC FOCUS

A key strategic focus of the plan will be future-proofing the economy with a diversified employment base. "We are very aware of the globally competitive and shrinking geographic market in which we compete for jobs," says Borthwick.

"In the past, we became too dependent on cyclical sectors and mobile investments. A priority for the Midwest now is to ensure that we have a diversified economy and that we do not become overly reliant on one sector to drive future growth"

To date, €5 million has been delivered by the Midwest Action Plan for Jobs via the Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme, while a further €5 million has gone to the Local Enterprise Office Fund.

"It is envisaged that the balance of €40 million will be launched this year under a Regional Competitive Fund," she says.

"The Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs is currently assessing a number of potential projects that will make a step-change impact on job creation opportunities in the region. "We are also working across a number of different initiatives and groups and we have a team in place to ensure the mid-west is best placed to compete nationally to deliver jobs for region."