



Tionól Réigiúnach an Deiscirt
Southern Regional Assembly



TOWARDS A LEARNING REGION



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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The NPF and the RSES offer an ambitious proposition to address regional disparities and deliver effective regional development in Ireland.

Both the NPF and the RSES aim to deliver a 50:50 distribution of population, employment and housing growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions by 2040. This will radically realign the composition of Ireland's population, employment and housing stock, allowing the Southern Region to develop centres of scale which can provide a credible counterbalance to the Greater Dublin Area.



Delivering these targets and supporting effective regional development in Ireland will depend on several factors including significant investment in enabling infrastructure. Key to meeting the challenge required will be the transformation of our Human Capital base, namely our skills, talent and knowledge. This approach will support our Region's continued transformation towards a knowledge-based and high value economy; enhance the placemaking credentials of the Southern Region, while empowering our citizens through education opportunities. The ambitious policy framework of the NPF and the RSES have been met by a call to action by the Southern Regional Assembly, through the publication of this paper.

The over-arching vision of this paper is to grow the Southern Region's Human Capital base by moving towards creating a **Learning Region**. As a **Learning Region**, the Southern Region would actively strive for the delivery of:

1. Inclusive learning in the education system

2. Revitalised learning in families and communities

3. Effective learning for and in the workplace

4. Extended use of modern learning technologies

5. Enhanced quality in learning

6. A vibrant culture of learning throughout life

7. Sustainable Development

A **Learning Region**, in a formal sense, has never been created before, and fundamental to creating a **Learning Region** will be the development of an environment that places these seven principles at the centre of our Higher Education and Training (FET) and Community Education systems. Creating such an environment will be key to supporting the Southern Region in achieving the ambitious targets set out in the NPF and the RSES, allowing the Region to fulfil its strategic ambition of becoming one of Europe's most "Creative and Innovative", "Greenest" and "Liveable" Regions, ensuring no person or place is left behind.

To develop this paper a bottom-up approach was adopted. This incorporated an evidence-based approach using stakeholder interviews and quantitative analysis. This process provided a strong basis for the actions outlined.

Actions are formulated around three areas:

- 1. Actions that develop the Southern Region's skills, talent and education proposition through the Higher Education, Further Education and Training (FET) sectors and Community Education.**
- 2. Actions to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19, from a skills, Lifelong Learning and education perspective.**
- 3. Actions to support the existing Learning City initiatives in the Region and support the development of these initiatives to other urban centres and rural communities within the Southern Region.**

Key actions outlined include expanding the Learning City concept to the rest of the Southern Region by developing a Learning Region Network; with greater detail of this specific action outlined in Section 7. In total, there are 19 actions categorised under the headings of "Further Education and Training (FET)", "Higher Education" and "Community Education and Learning Regions", all of which aim to create an environment that places the seven principles of the "Learning Region" at the centre of our education system.

These actions are as follows:

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FET) AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1** Increase awareness and uptake of the ETBs services in the Southern Region, including:
 - i. The implementation of the Action plan for Apprenticeship 2021 to 2025.
 - ii. Promotion of the positive outcomes experienced by ETB graduates, in terms of progression to employment and Higher Education.
 - iii. Measures to improve the awareness of industry relevant courses that are provided free of charge and the flexible learning schedule of many ETB courses including weekend and evening courses.

- 2** Ensure the Region's ETB's teaching infrastructure and digital equipment is to appropriate international standard with sufficient capacity to support the education and training needs of a Region targeted for substantial population growth.
- 3** Ensure capital investment in the Southern Region's ETBs is aligned to strategically important skillsets and locally relevant skill specialities. The emerging Smart Specialisation policy should assist in informing this capital investment.
- 4** Ensure greater participation on FET courses relating to sectors experiencing skills shortages and sectors most affected by economic shocks (e.g. outbreak of COVID-19) through provision of adequate resources. Consideration should be given to activation mechanisms such as a training premium provided for individuals participating in FET courses connected to such sectors.
- 5** Improve participation in skills development courses by SMEs through the use of financial incentives to enterprises. This Action envisages a Pilot Scheme to be delivered through the ETBs and would specifically relate to training courses that cannot be provided free of charge.
- 6** Ensure adequate mental health services are available to FET learners to address identified needs in each ETB area.
- 7** Implement long term measures to embed programmes that enhance the Regions skill profile and address skill shortages, work readiness and Lifelong Learning issues. Adequate resources should be ring fenced for such skills initiatives.
- 8** Deliver on the outstanding Technological University (TU's) applications in the Southern Region and ensure all the Regions TU's can offer a more broad-based educational offering.
- 9** A borrowing framework should be agreed and developed for Technological Universities, while ensuring there is a timely review of the grant allocation model for all Higher Education Institutes.

- 10** Improve the research capacity of the Southern Region's Higher Education Institutes.
- 11** Provide greater support to improve the teaching infrastructure in High Level Institutions, particularly digital teaching and learning infrastructure.
- 12** Develop a common understanding and approaches to cluster-based economic development strategies to build on and support individual initiatives by the Regional Skills Fora and others. Clarity is needed on how training and upskilling (particularly in the context of Smart Specialisation) are embedded in cluster development and by whom these measures can be implemented best.
- 13** Increase the provision of Micro Credentials to potential workers and learners.
- 14** Ensure more students and workers across all sectors participate in educational courses and skills development that support the transition to a Low Carbon and Circular Economy.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND LEARNING REGIONS

- 15** Develop Waterford City as a UNESCO "Learning City".
- 16** Ensure appropriate resources are provided to the existing "Learning City" initiatives in Cork and Limerick to enhance their current activities and to encourage more engagement with their business communities.
- 17** Expand the "Learning City" concept to the rest of the Southern Region by developing a "Learning Region Network" (greater detail of the "Learning Region Network" has been outlined in Section 7).
- 18** Ensure adequate resources to support to the Southern Region's Community Education Sector and provide a sustainable long-term funding model for independent Community Education providers in the Region.
- 19** Support greater collaboration across education and learning sectors to develop identifiable pathways from Community Education.



This paper proposes the development of a **Learning Region Network**. This will be a regional, county and community network that will replicate the activities of the UNESCO "Learning Cities" initiatives within the Southern Region. Its objectives are to:

- Deliver on improved quality of life for all citizens and communities in the Southern Region by improving access to education and learning opportunities.
- Enhance our skills and talent proposition by developing a culture of education, Lifelong Learning and skills development.

The **Learning Region Network** should not be another layer in the established educational and learning framework of the Southern Region. It will instead be a supportive and organic network that links people and communities together to focus on a strategic area (or areas) in joint initiatives and actions; thereby complimenting existing structures and activities of relevant bodies. Developing learning and leaving no-one behind are the underlining principles and motivation of the Learning Region Network. Development of the Network requires the following:

- Appointment of a **Learning Region Co-ordinator** to implement the actions necessary to develop the Learning Region Network (sub-section 7.4).
- The facilities and support base of the coordinating organisation, namely the Southern Regional Assembly.
- The facilities and cooperation of key **Learning Region partners and stakeholders** including staff time to assist with working groups and organising and facilitating Learning Region events and meetings plus other supports such as printing, photocopying, assistance with communications, etc.

This paper is a co-creation and will evolve with its implementation and as new data becomes available.

As a co-creation, stakeholders will be central in implementation, as it's recognised that a Learning Region, must be built community-by-community involving partners in formal and informal learning.



SECTION

Introduction and Approach

1

1 Introduction and Approach

Lifelong Learning lays the foundation for sustainable social, economic and environmental development. It is increasingly relevant in today's fast-changing world.

Studies have shown that lifelong learners are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environments¹. Lifelong Learning has therefore a vital role to play in empowering citizens and effecting a transition to sustainable societies.

This paper identifies actions which will move us towards establishing a Learning Region. This means improving and developing the potential of Lifelong Learning and using it as a basis for national, regional and local policy implementation. Enhancing Human Capital in relation to education, upskilling and Lifelong Learning is a central theme. To establish the challenges and opportunities in growing this Human Capital base, this paper has examined Further Education and Training (FET), Higher Education and Community Education. This is a complex area, therefore emphasis is placed on issues regarding Lifelong Learning and how best to expand the existing Learning City initiatives.

The NPF and the RSES aim to ensure that there is a 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions, with 75% of the growth to be outside of Dublin and its suburbs. Both the NPF and the RSES aim to grow the populations of the Southern Region's cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford between 50% and 60% by 2040; with population targets of 30% outlined for each of the Region's 14 Key Towns.

Supporting a positive flow of capital and labour to the Southern Region is central to the radical realignment outlined in the NPF and the RSES. Growing the Southern Region's Human Capital base – by supporting providers of Higher Education, FET and Community Education – will support the supply of a skilled workforce, creating conditions necessary to deliver effective regional development in Ireland.



¹ UNESCO Learning Cities: <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities>



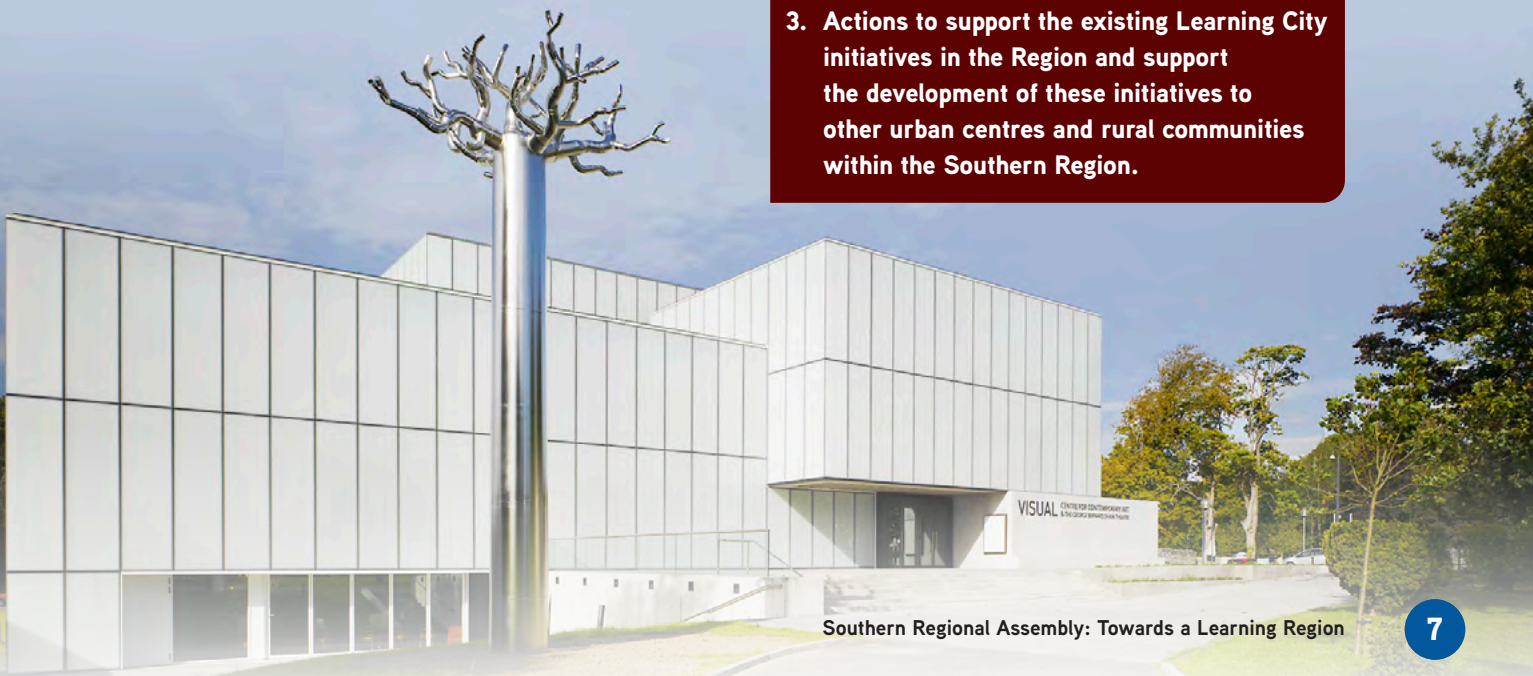
The ambitious policy framework of the NPF and the RSES have been met by a call to action by the Southern Regional Assembly, through the publication of this paper. Inspired by the Southern Region's existing UNESCO cities of Cork and Limerick, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and guided by RSES policy, the purpose is to maximise the growth of our Human Capital base by creating a **Learning Region**. This will be achieved by expanding the UNESCO Learning Cities principles to all parts of our Region and to deliver:

1. **Inclusive learning in the education system**
2. **Revitalised learning in families and communities**
3. **Effective learning for and in the workplace**
4. **Extended use of modern learning technologies**
5. **Enhanced quality in learning**
6. **A vibrant culture of learning throughout life**
7. **Sustainable Development**

A **Learning Region**, in a formal sense, has never been created before, and requires the development of an environment that places these seven principles at the centre of our Higher Education, Further Education and Training (FET) and Community Education systems. Creating this environment will be essential to supporting the Southern Region to fulfil its vision of becoming one of Europe's most "**Creative and Innovative**", "**Greenest**" and "**Liveable**" Regions, ensuring no person or place is left behind. The paper also supports the achievement of UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education – and achievement of national targets in this regard.

Actions have been formulated around three areas:

1. **Actions that develop the Southern Region's skills, talent and education proposition through the Higher Education, Further Education and Training (FET) sectors and Community Education.**
2. **Actions to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19, from a skills, Lifelong Learning and education perspective.**
3. **Actions to support the existing Learning City initiatives in the Region and support the development of these initiatives to other urban centres and rural communities within the Southern Region.**



This paper incorporates both an evidence-based approach through quantitative analysis but also extensive stakeholder interviews.

1. The first phase consists of a quantitative analysis:
 - i. **Section 3: Education Profile:** provides relevant statistics on the education sector in the Region.
 - ii. **Section 4: Regional Education Investment Profile:** provides an analysis of investment in the Region's Higher Education and FET providers.
2. **Section 5: Stakeholder Consultations:** involved in-depth interviews and consultations with stakeholders involved in the education and training sectors in the Southern Region including representatives of Universities and Institutes of Technology, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the three Regional Skills Managers, Social Justice Ireland, Learning City coordinators in Cork and Limerick, the Irish Learning City Network, Aontas and Skillsnet Ireland. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were held virtually.

Data analysis and stakeholder engagement provide a strong basis for the actions outlined in **Section 6**. The actions are framed to achieve the overall aims and the realisation of relevant Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) in the RSES (See Appendix A). A key action is expanding the "Learning City" concept by developing a **Learning Region Network**. Greater detail of the **Learning Region Network** has been outlined in **Section 7 "Developing the Learning Region Network"**.

The paper has been developed as a regional resource and as an implementation tool for the RSES. At a national level, the paper is intended to inform Government Departments and agencies on actions for the development of national policy approaches, strategies and initiatives.



This paper also provides a platform to implement existing policies. For example, there are clear synergies with the Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 document 'Our Rural Future', including the policy measures identified in Chapter 4: Supporting Employment and Careers in Rural Areas, and the priorities for the European Regional Development Fund 2021 to 2027.

Implementation is dependent on multi-agency co-operation and co-ordination and will be an iterative process and further updates may be required.

It is important that this paper is seen as a central step towards NPF and RSES implementation. The actions were identified based on enhancing Human Capital and a stronger knowledge economy proposition. This is an opportunity to ensure that economic objectives and population growth projections do not impact negatively on social deprivation but improves access to learning, enhances participation in society and ensures that no one is left behind.

In developing these actions, the contributions provided by education and training providers and relevant stakeholders across the Region have been pivotal. Section 5 captures these diverse opinions and the various comments made and should not be necessarily interpreted as the corporate view of the SRA. This document is a co-creation and will evolve with its implementation and as new data becomes available. As a co-creation, stakeholders will be central in implementation, as it's recognised that a Learning Region, must be built community-by-community involving partners in formal and informal learning.



SECTION

Regional Strategic Context

2

2 Regional Strategic Context

2.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The RSES establishes a statutory strategic development framework to deliver Project Ireland 2040 and its National Planning Framework (NPF). It provides a vision for the development of the Southern Region to become one of Europe's most "Creative and Innovative", "Greenest" and "Liveable" regions.



Strategy Statement no 10 “A Healthy and Learning Region” and no 5 “A Strong Economy” are particularly relevant to this paper.

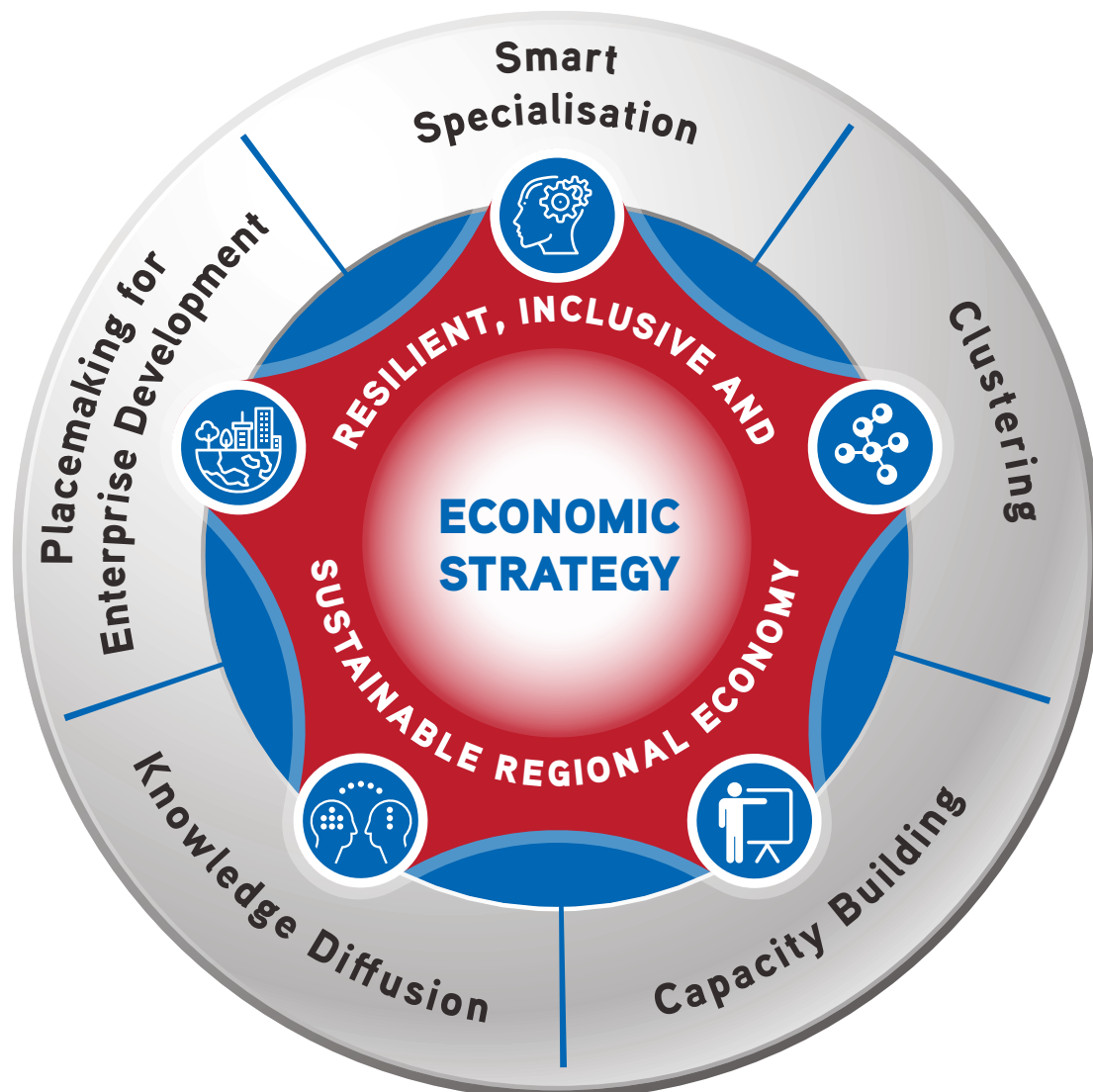


5. A Strong Economy



10. A Healthy and Learning Region

The RSES’s economic strategy, is based on five principles: “**Smart Specialisation**”, “**Clustering**”, “**Capacity Building**”, “**Knowledge Diffusion**” and “**Placemaking**”.





The policy basis for the establishment of the Learning Region is **RPO 186** and **RPO 190**.

RPO 186: Lifelong Learning

The RSES recognises the value and necessity for lifelong learning. It is an objective to support the further development of the Region as a Learning Region, support the expansion of the Learning City initiative to other urban and rural centers of population and support the initiatives of the Irish Network of Learning Cities and preparation and implementation of a Learning Region Strategy.



RPO 190: Lifelong Learning and Healthy City initiatives

It is an objective to:

- a) Foster an interagency approach to integrating Lifelong Learning and Healthy City initiatives across the Region as essential components as exemplified in Cork and Limerick's attainment of UNESCO Learning City status and extend the UNESCO Learning City status to Waterford city, to create a regional knowledge triangle as an explicit aim of the RSES;
- b) Support the Irish Network of Learning Cities and preparation and implementation of a Learning Region strategy.

While the RSES provides the strategic policy support, lasting change requires commitment and partnership at the local level. It is not the intention to replace existing structures but rather to complement them. The experience of Cork and Limerick as Learning Cities has proved that this can be achieved effectively. The promotion of learning at all levels and in all its guises is an underlining aim.

2.2 RSES Implementation and Lifelong Learning

The European Commission report *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* defines Lifelong Learning as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective”.

Lifelong Learning encompasses all levels and all parts of the education system and can be seen as a shared responsibility in working for the common good of our communities, promoted in all parts of society and in all areas where knowledge, skills and competencies are applied and developed.



Enhancing Lifelong Learning is an important tool for RSES implementation affecting different facets of regional policy. For example, it plays a significant role in promoting social inclusion, a healthy and sustainable society, economic growth, public safety and environmental protection. Providing a skillset that allows people to succeed in life, work and business is critical to securing greater resilience.

COVID-19 restrictions brought the importance of upskilling to the fore, particularly digital skills. This applies at all levels including upskilling older people, building capabilities within advanced technologies and high performing sectors² and developing skills pathways to bring businesses on their digital journey. The World Economic Forum’s report “The Future of Jobs”, identifies a major disruption to the scale at which upskilling and reskilling take place. Changes will range from significant job creation to job displacement and from heightened labour productivity to widening skills gaps. They call for broad, multi-stakeholder collaboration to develop and implement solutions.

The RSES responds by focusing on future proofing to address shocks to our society and economy based on the principles set out in the 2013 Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities:

- Inclusive learning in the education system
- Revitalised learning for families and communities
- Effective learning for and in the workplace
- Extended use of modern learning technologies
- Enhance quality and excellence in learning
- A vibrant culture of learning throughout life

A reoccurring theme identified during stakeholder consultation was the need for enhanced cohesion between the various education pathways and levels so that individuals can obtain qualifications and skills in a flexible way. There is also a challenge in communicating the broad range of upskilling supports available and better collaboration is required.

² These areas may be informed by the Smart Specialisation process that is currently been undertaken by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.



Positive initiatives were also highlighted. For example the **Action Plan for Apprenticeship**, (with appropriate resourcing), will be key to engaging more employers and enterprise partners in Apprenticeship programmes across industry.

Apprenticeships bring strong alignment between training and employment schemes and the labour market, allowing learners to build work-ready skills while growing talent for the organisation. Business is also a great incubator of talent, learning and skills development and must be supported to engage with the education and training system to support employee development and opportunities. The research and innovation programmes underway in HEIs across the Region diffuse new skills, new technology and new learning opportunities benefitting enterprises.

The Community Education sector meets the learning needs of a wide and diverse range of adults, families and communities across the Region many who have been outside of traditional formal education provision for generations.

The Southern Region is at a critical juncture given the pace of business transformation, digitalisation and new opportunities. Creating a culture of Lifelong Learning must become a priority. Embedding employability skills, resilience, and an appetite for Lifelong Learning across the Further Education and Training, Higher Education and Community Education systems is crucial.



SECTION

Education Profile

3

3 Education Profile

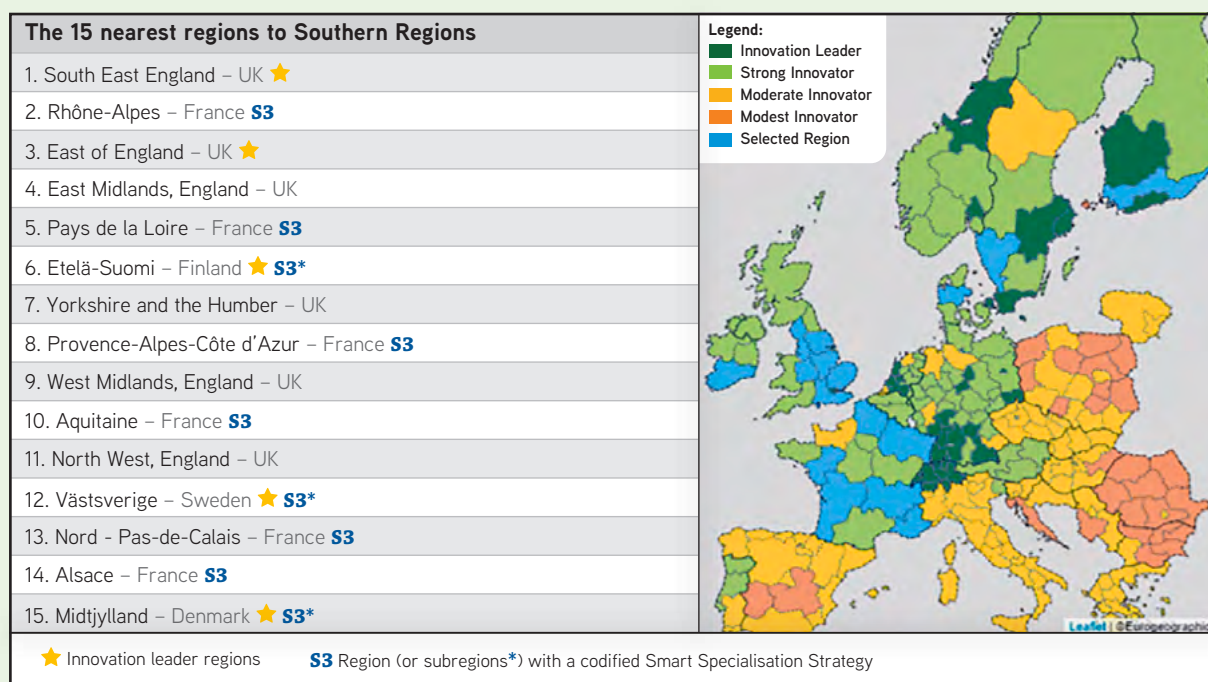
This section focuses on the following data sets:

- International Benchmarking
- Primary education / no formal education
- Early leavers from education and training
- Lifelong learning participation
- Further education and training beneficiaries
- Third level attainment rates
- Third level enrolments
- Third level education mobility
- Socioeconomic status of third level students

3.1 International Benchmarking

The *Regional Approach for development of a Smart Specialisation Strategy in the Southern Region* produced by BABLE on behalf of the Southern Regional Assembly, benchmarked the Southern Region to 15 regions which share similar structural conditions³. These regions are shown in Map 1 below:

Map 1: European Regions Comparison Map - Regions similar to the Southern Region



Source: (S3 Platform, 2020) – Benchmarking Regional Structure Rev. 2013.

³ The methodology jointly developed by Orkestra - Basque Institute of Competitiveness and the S3 Platform sets a list of 15 elements for the identification of regions with similar structural conditions, based on 7 dimensions: (1) Geo-demography – regional size, ageing, urbanisation, and accessibility; (2) Human Resources – educational level; (3) Technological specialisation – technological distribution and concentration (patents); (4) Sectoral structure – economy’s sectoral distribution, sectoral concentration, and industrial sectoral structure; (5) Firms – firm size; (6) Open-ness – trade openness; and (7) Institutions and values – multilevel government, social and institutional capital, and entrepreneurial / innovative attitudes.

Two indicators were used in the BABLE report to compare Human Capital across these selected regions: (1) population with tertiary education and (2) population participating in Lifelong Learning. The BABLE report has been updated by applying the recent Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2021⁴ information to compare the selected regions with the Southern Region. This comparison is displayed in Figures 1 and 2. The regions are divided into four classifications based on their overall innovation index score:

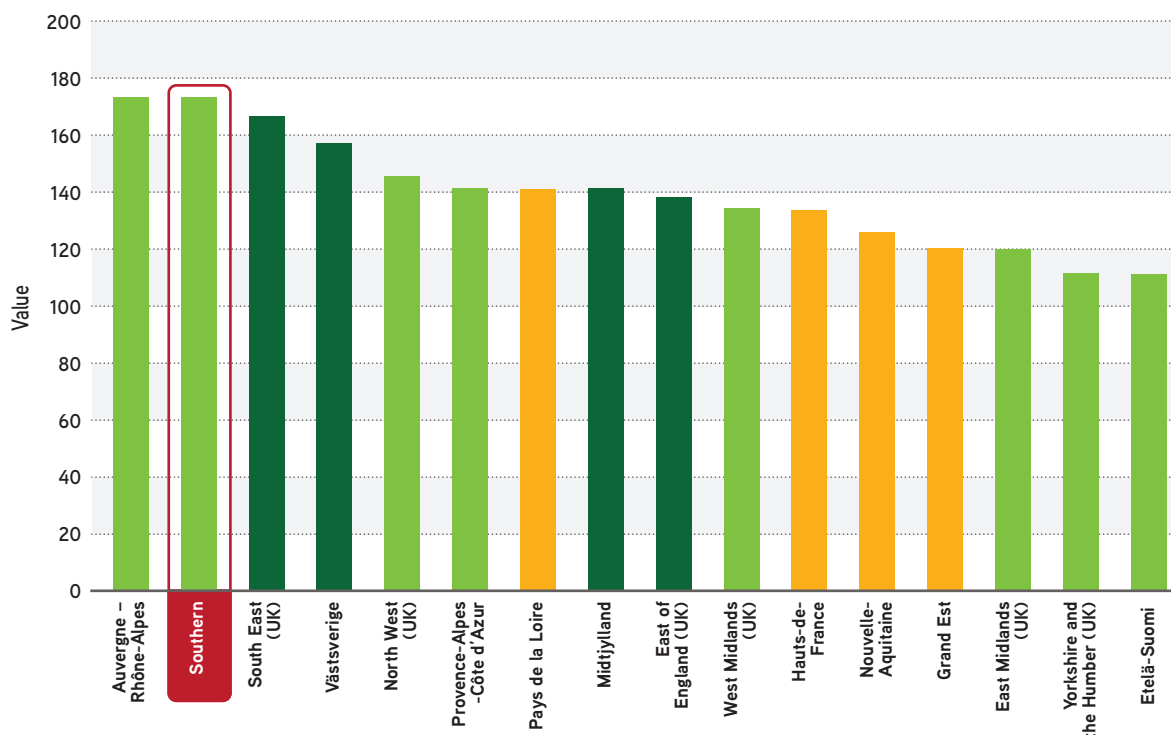
- **Innovation Leaders** are all regions with a relative performance more than 125% of the EU average in 2021
- **Strong Innovators** are all regions with a relative performance between 100% and 125% of the EU average in 2021
- **Moderate Innovators** are all regions with a relative performance between 70% and 100% of the EU average in 2021
- **Modest Innovators** are all regions with a relative performance below 70% of the EU average in 2021.



The Southern Region is considered to be a '**Strong innovator**'. Figures 1 and 2 provide comparative information on two 'human resources' indicators in the RIS. Figure 1 shows the percentage of population aged 25-34 having completed tertiary education. The indicator focuses on a narrow share of the population aged 25 to 34 and will relatively quickly reflect changes in educational policies leading to more tertiary graduates.

Figure 2 is a Lifelong Learning indicator that shows the share of population aged 25-64 enrolled in education or training aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competences⁵.

Figure 1: International Benchmarking: Population with Tertiary Education



⁴ The Regional Innovation Scoreboard assesses the innovation performance of European regions, providing a comparative assessment of innovation systems.

⁵ Number of persons in private households aged between 25 and 64 years who have participated in the four weeks preceding the interview, in any education or training, whether or not relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job.

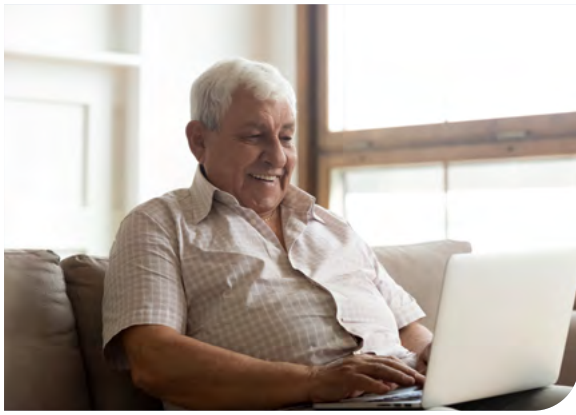
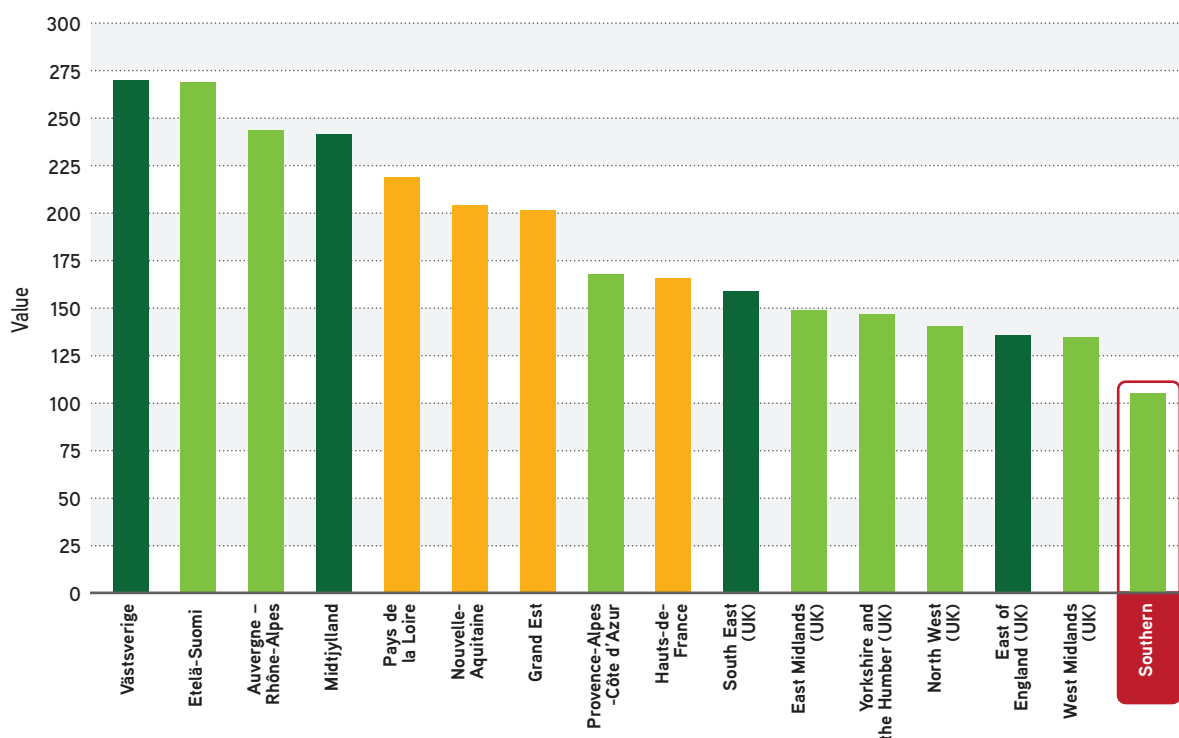


Figure 2: International Benchmarking: Population involved in Lifelong Learning

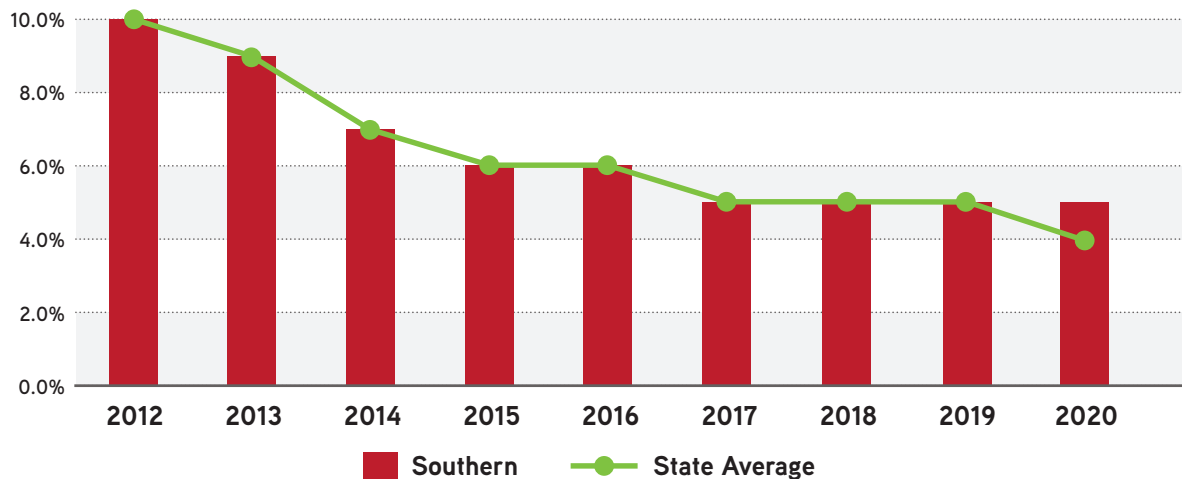


While the Southern Region ranks the second highest in population with tertiary education, it is last in Lifelong Learning and is a considerable distance behind the high performers. This is critical indicator, given the transformations expected in almost all industries with the disruption of new technologies and digitalisation. The data shows that the level of participation in Lifelong Learning is a major weakness in the Southern Region and there is a substantial gap to bridge to compete with European leaders.

3.2 Primary Education / No Formal Education

In line with national trends, the percentage of adults in the Region with no formal education or only primary level education has been falling dropping from 10% in 2012 – the first year in which regional data was available – to 5% in 2020.

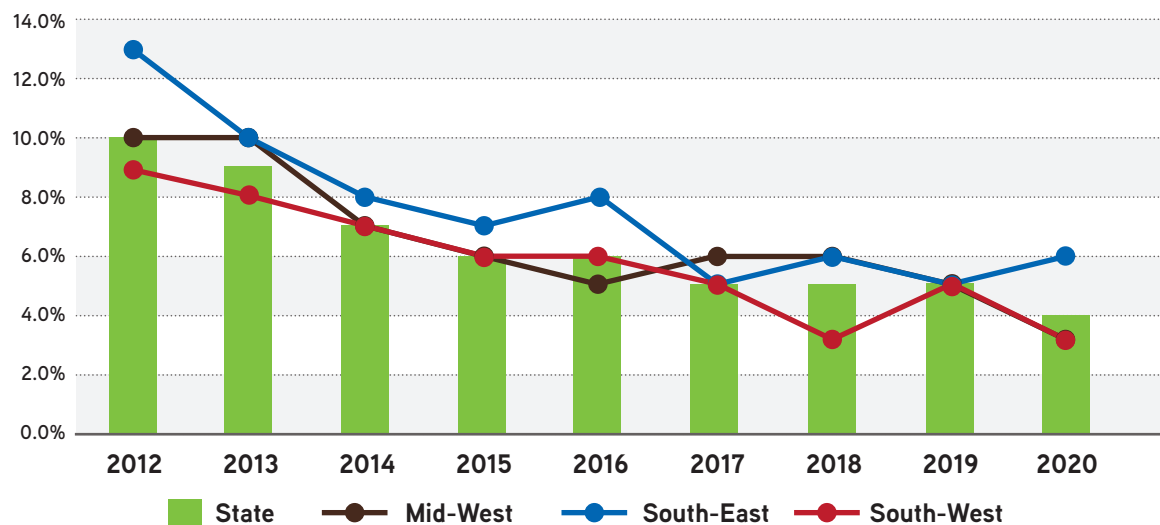
Figure 3: Percentage of adults that had no formal education or only primary level education, for the Southern Region and Ireland, 2012-2020



Source: CSO

In 2020, 6% of adults in the South-East and the Mid-East had no formal education or only primary level education, with the South-West recording 3%. Since 2012, the percentage of adults in this category has fallen in each sub-region, with the largest decline recorded in the South East, from 13% in 2012 to 6% in 2020.

Figure 4: Percentage of adults that had no formal education or only had a primary level education, for the sub-regions of the Southern Region and Ireland, 2009-2020



Source: CSO⁶

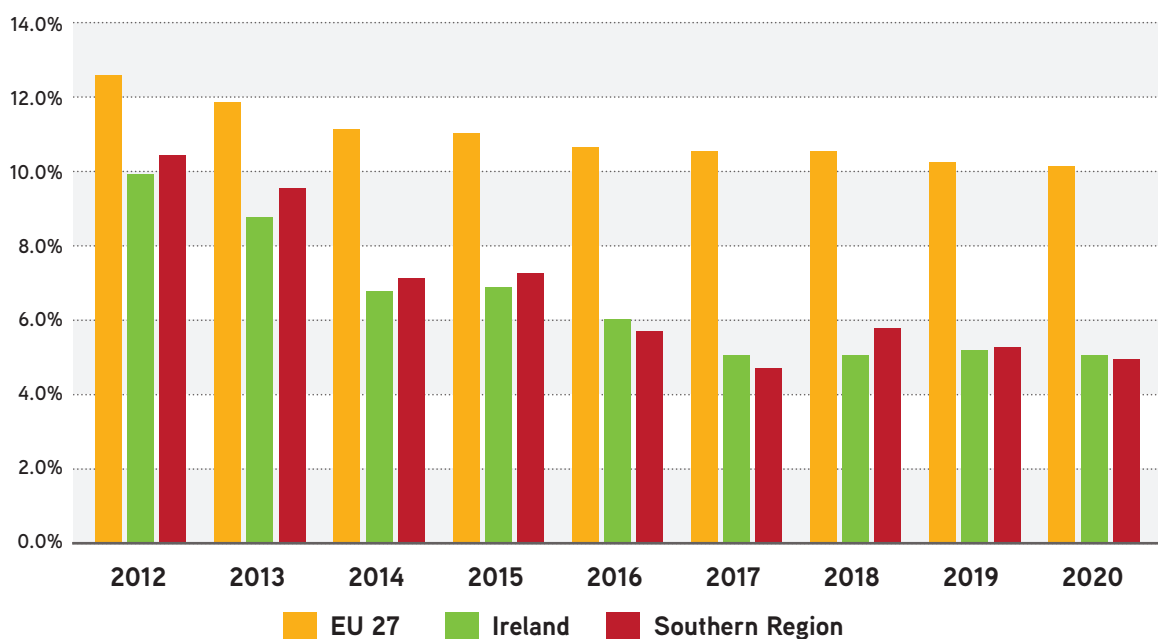
⁶ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2020/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/>

3.3 Early Leavers from Education and Training

Eurostat data refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has completed - at most - lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training as an 'early leaver'. The indicator recorded is the percentage of the people in this category, as a share of the total population aged 18 to 24⁷.

In 2020, 4.9% of young adults⁸ in the Region were in this category marginally below the State average of 5%, but 5.2% lower than the EU 27 average. The number of early leavers has gradually fallen from 10.4% in 2012 to 4.9% in 2019.

Figure 5: Early leavers from education and training in the Southern Region, Ireland the EU 27, 2012-2020



Source: Eurostat

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_training

⁸ Defined as a person aged 18 to 24

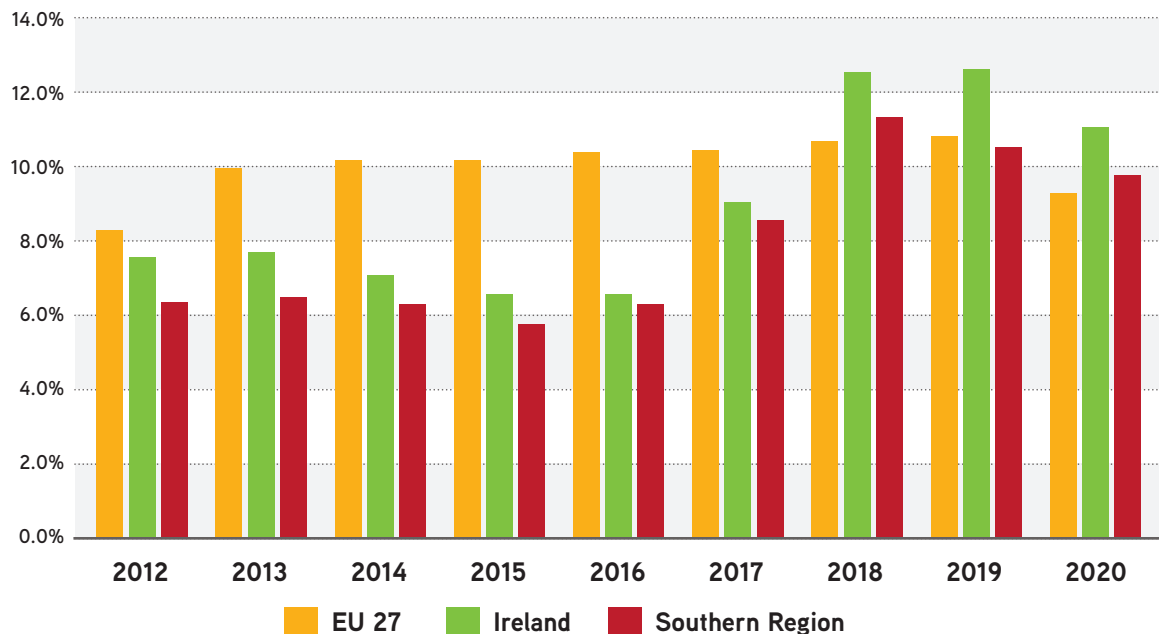
3.4 Lifelong Learning Participation

Lifelong Learning encompasses all purposeful learning activities, whether formal or informal, with such activities undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities.

As can be seen from Figure 6, 9.7% of adults in the Region took part in Lifelong Learning activities in 2020, which was below the State average of 11%, and marginally above the corresponding EU 27 average of 9.2%. The percentage undertaking Lifelong Learning has progressively risen since 2012, from 6.3% in 2012 to 9.7% in 2020; albeit participation rates were down

from 10.5% in 2019. This is in line with overall national trends. Encouragingly participation rates in the Region have now overtaken the EU 27 average in 2020. That said, the Region has consistently recorded the lowest participation rate of the three NUTS 2 Regions of Ireland since 2019.

Figure 6: Lifelong Learning participation rates in Ireland, EU 27 and the Southern Region 2012-2020



Source: Eurostat

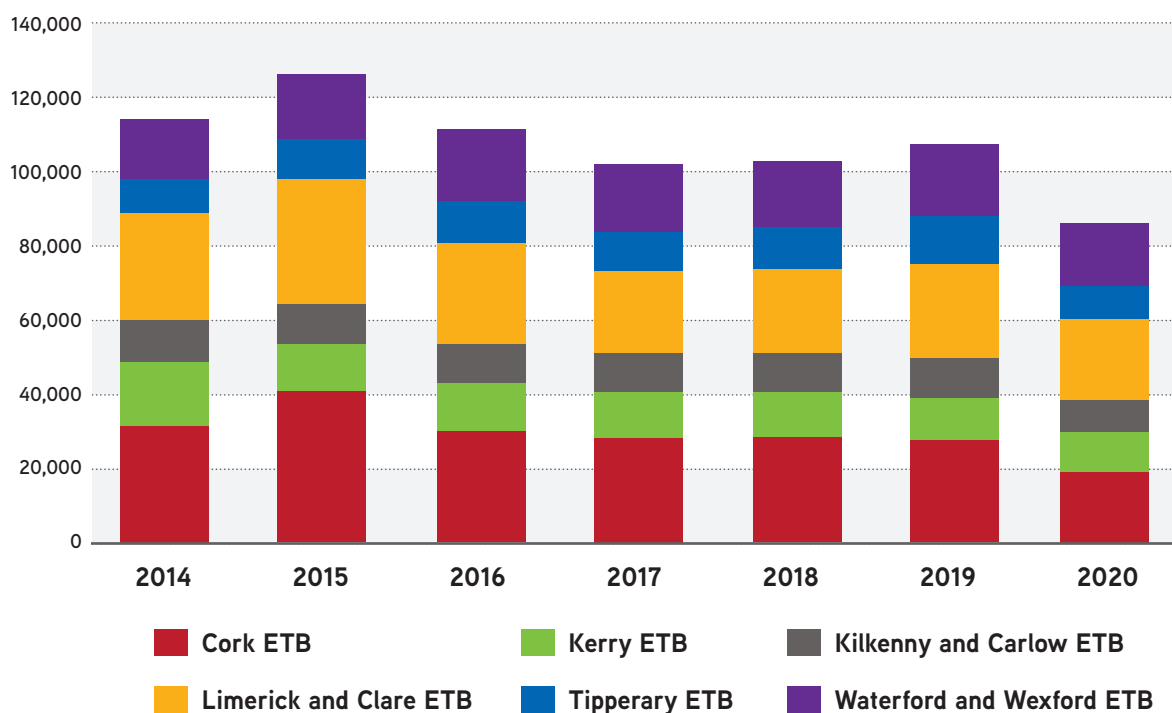
3.5 Further Education and Training Beneficiaries

In 2019 prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of FET beneficiaries registered in the ETBs based in the Region was 107,212, dropping to 85,730 in 2020, with the impact of COVID-19 being credited to this decline⁹.

Prior to COVID-19 the number in the Region was consistently above 100,000 in every year since the inception of the ETBs in 2013. Notwithstanding this recent decline, the figures highlight the importance of the FET sector to the Region's economy, skills profile and the level of Human Capital.

The Limerick and Clare ETB is the largest FET provider in the Region, with 21,707 registered FET beneficiaries in 2020. This was followed by Cork (19,589 beneficiaries), Waterford and Wexford (15,846), Kerry (10,594), Tipperary (9,238) and Kilkenny and Carlow ETB (8,756). Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, and since 2014, the Tipperary ETB has experienced the highest level of growth (+37.5%), followed by the Waterford and Wexford ETB (+23%).

Figure 7: The number of beneficiaries registered in each ETB based in the Southern Region, 2014-2020



Source: Department of Education

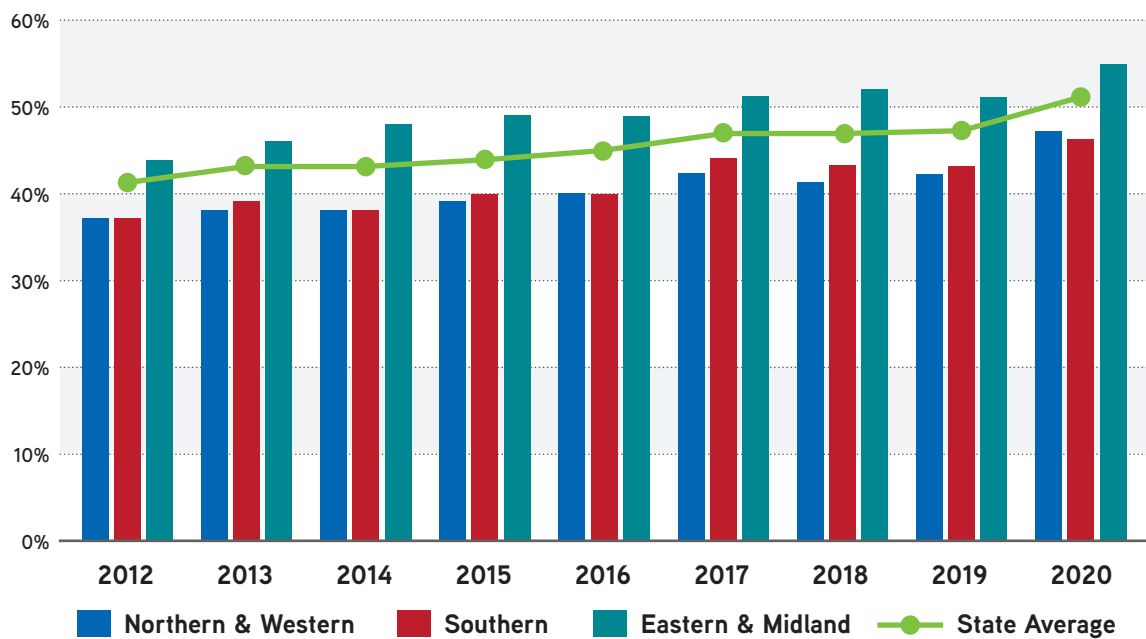
⁹ Consultations with the Department of Education suggest that this decline can be attributed to the fact that some courses simply could not be held remotely, or some users did not want to learn online.

3.6 Third Level Attainment Rates

In 2020, 46% of adults in the Region had a third level qualification, which was 5% below the national average of 51%.

Third level attainment rates have steadily increased, rising by 9% since 2012; the first year NUTS 2 data was available. The Eastern and Midland Region has the highest third level attainment rate in 2020 at 55%.

Figure 8: Third level attainment rates for the NUTS 2 Regions of Ireland, versus State Average, 2012-2020



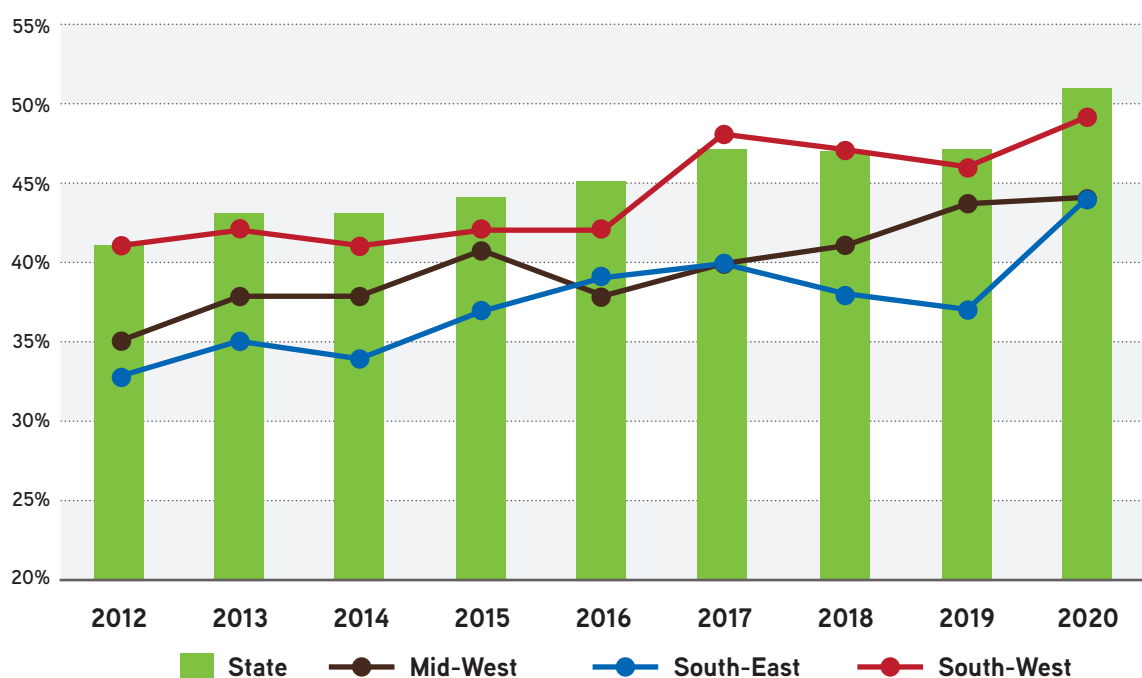
Source: CSO¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2020/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/>



Figure 9 shows third level attainments rates for the Mid-West, the South West and the South-East between 2012 and 2020. All three sub-regions recorded rates below the national average. The South West has the highest rate, with 49%. The Mid-West and the South-East both recorded 44%.

Figure 9: Third level attainment rates by the sub-regions of the Southern Region and Ireland, 2012-2020



Source: CSO

Rates in the South-East have decreased from 40% in 2017 to 37% in 2019 recovering to 44% in 2020. The South-West has the highest third level attainment rate in the region, with 49% in 2020, representing an increase of 8% from 2012. Third level attainment rates in the Mid-West have seen overall improvement across the period to 2020, noting declines which occurred in 2013 - 2014 and 2017 - 2019.

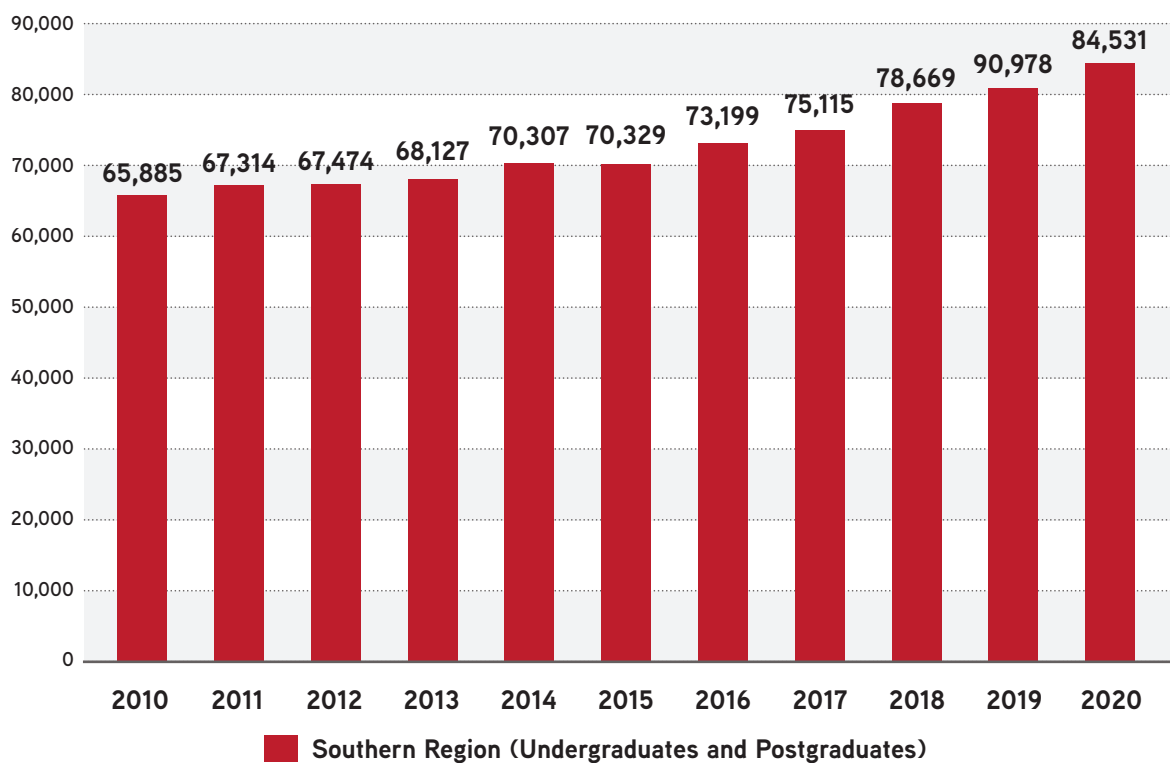
3.7 Third Level Enrolments

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) provides data on the following Higher Education Institutes in the Region:

- Munster Technological University
- University College Cork
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- University of Limerick
- Mary Immaculate College Limerick
- Waterford Institute of Technology
- Institute of Technology Carlow

As shown in Figure 10, enrolments have steadily increased from 65,885 in the academic year 2009 / 2010 to 84,531 in 2019 / 2020. This represents growth of 2.5%, marginally above the rate for the State (+2.1%).

Figure 10: Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in Higher Education Institutes in the Southern Region, academic year 2009/2010 to 2019/2020

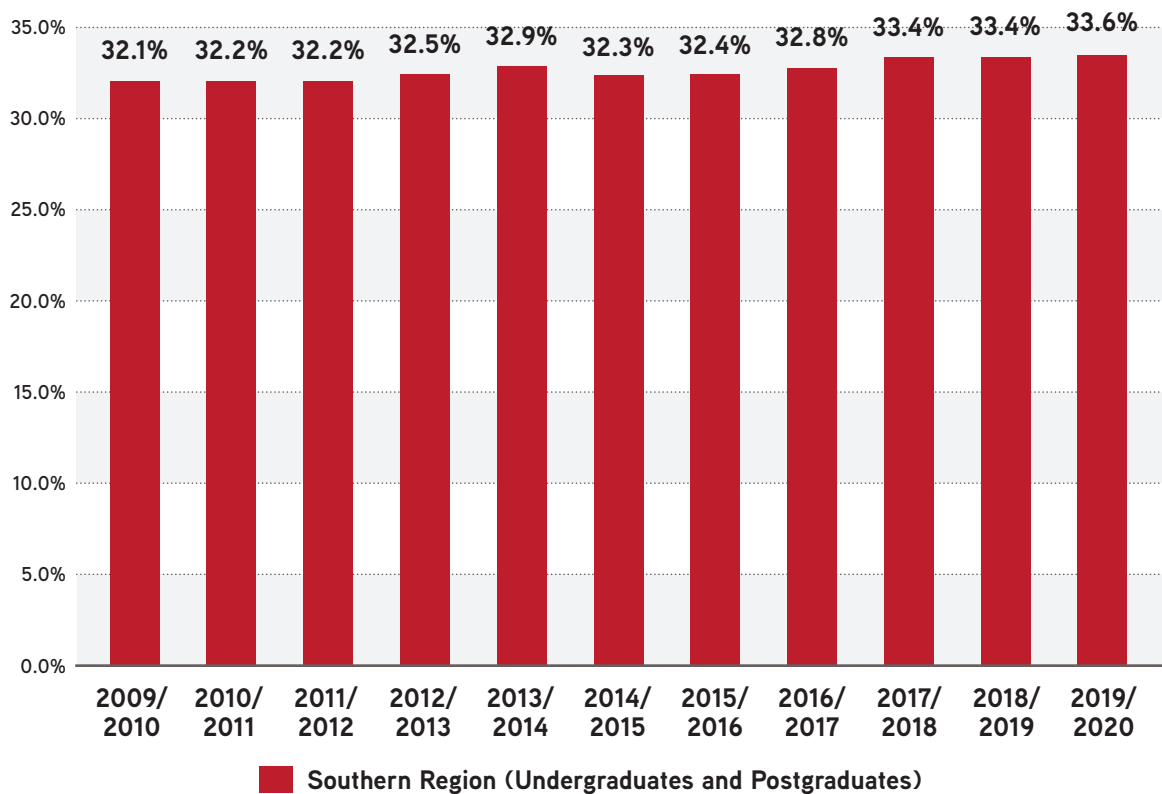


Source: Higher Education Authority¹¹

¹¹ Higher Education Authority enrolment data. Includes enrolments from undergraduates, postgraduates, FETAC Advanced Certificate, FETAC Certificate, and remote learners.



Figure 11: Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in Higher Education Institutes in the Southern Region, as % of total students enrolled in Ireland, academic year 2009/2010 to 2019/2020

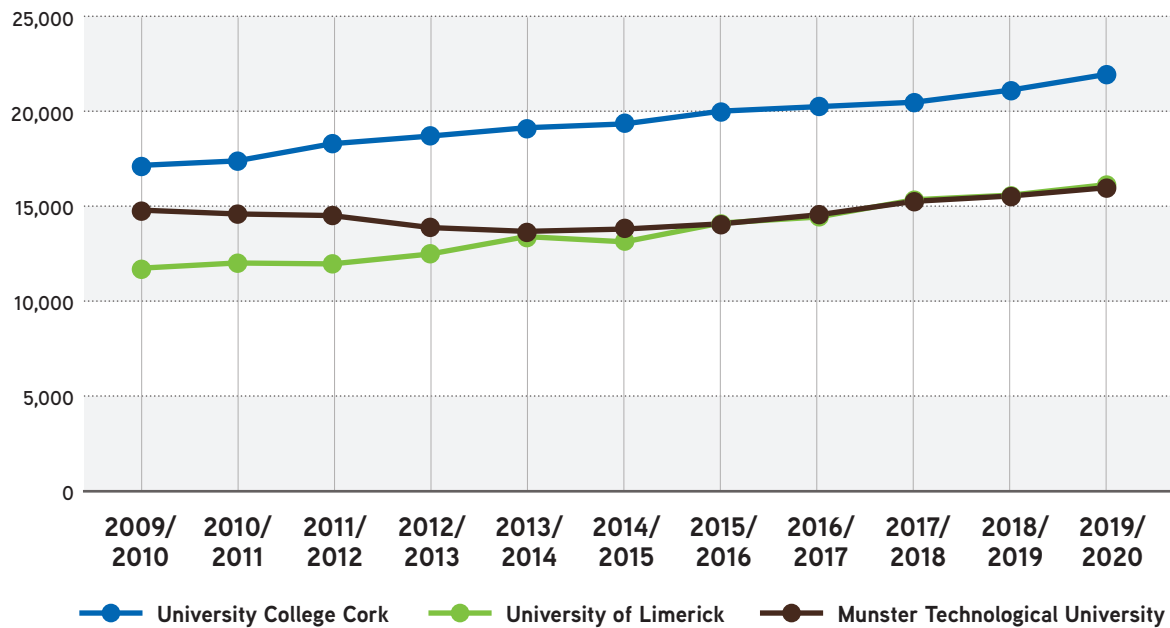


Source: Higher Education Authority¹²

Institute of Technology Carlow has experienced the highest average annual growth rate of 6.7%, followed by the Mary Immaculate College Limerick at 5.6%, and UL at 3.4%. The other colleges had average annual growth rates below 3%. The largest increase in enrolments was in UCC with enrolments up by 4,781, followed by the UL (4,546) and Institute of Technology Carlow (4,163).

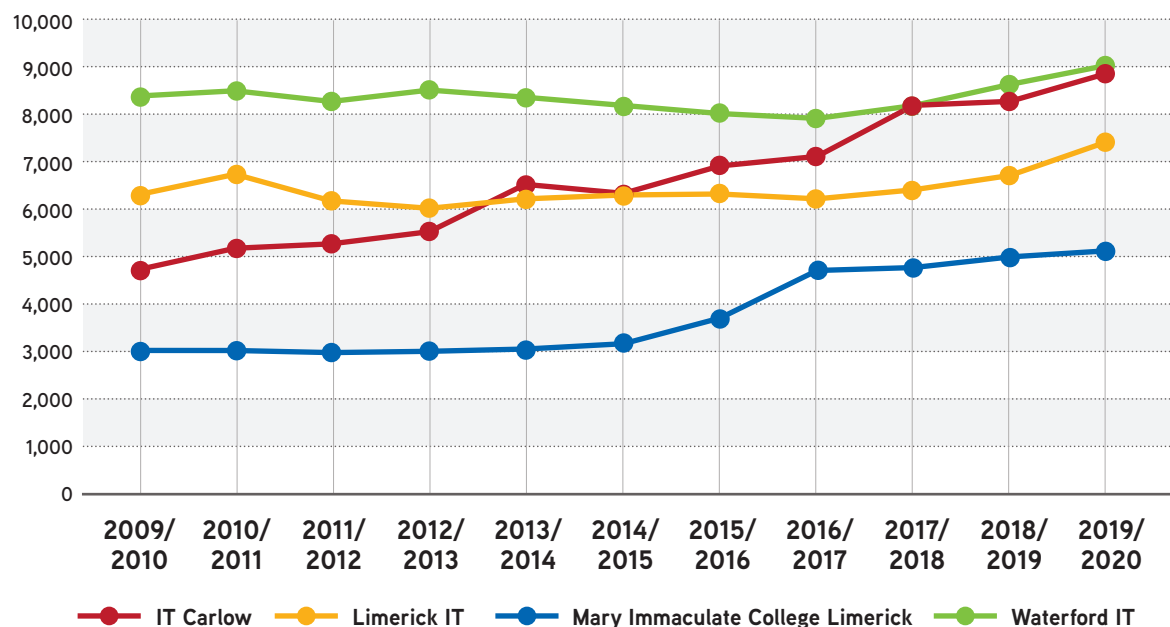
¹² Higher Education Authority enrolment data. Includes enrollments from undergraduates, postgraduates, FETAC Advanced Certificate, FETAC Certificate, and remote learner.

Figure 12: Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the Universities / Technological University based in the Southern Region, between academic years 2009/2010 to 2019/2020



Source: Higher Education Authority

Figure 13: Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the Institutes of Technology based in the Southern Region, between academic years 2009/2010 to 2019/2020



Source: Higher Education Authority

3.8 Third Level Education Mobility

As of 2018¹³, it is estimated that 76% of graduates from the South-West attended a HEI based in the South-West, 53% from the Mid-West attended a HEI based in the Mid-West, and only 28% from the South-East attended a Higher Education Institute based in the South-East.

In 2018 60% of graduates that studied in the South-West subsequently went on to work in the South-West with the corresponding figure 41% for the Mid-West and 36% for the South-East.

3.9 Socioeconomic Status of Third Level Students

Nationally, 10% of the Higher Education student population came from disadvantaged areas, whereas 20% came from affluent areas.

Within the Southern Region the proportion of students from disadvantaged areas are: University College Cork (6%), University of Limerick (8%), Mary Immaculate College and Cork Institute of Technology (both 9%), Tralee Institute of Technology (13%), Limerick Institute of Technology (14%), Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow (both 17%).



¹³ <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/graduate-outcome-data/class-of-2018-graduates-regional-mobility-sankey/>

SECTION

Regional Education Investment Profile

4

4 Regional Education Investment Profile

This section analyses investment to the Region's FET and Higher Education providers over the past decade¹⁴.

4.1 Further Education and Training Investment

The ETBs based in the Southern Region, include:

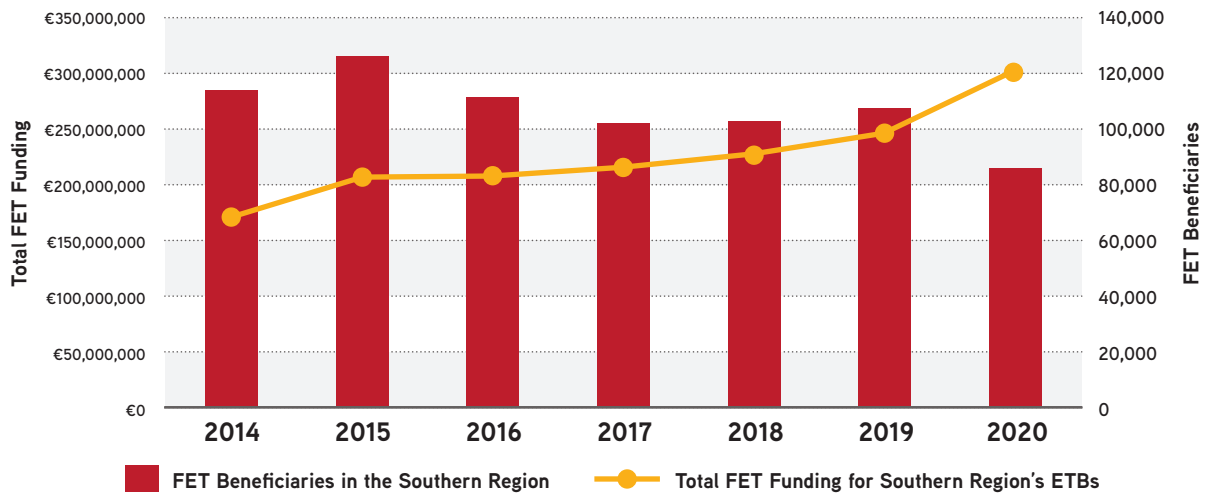
- › Cork ETB
- › Kerry ETB
- › Kilkenny and Carlow ETB
- › Limerick and Clare ETB
- › Tipperary ETB
- › Waterford and Wexford ETB

In 2020, government funding to the ETBs for FET activities was €790.2 million. This was an increase of 66.5% compared to 2014¹⁵. 38% or €302.8 million was provided to ETBs based in the Region, up 78.3% compared to 2014. The absolute level of funding to the Region's ETBs has risen in every year since 2014.

¹⁴ It should be noted that all figures presented in this section have been quoted in April 2021 prices, using the CSO's Consumer Price Index

¹⁵ ETBs were established in July 2013: <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Bodies-and-Committees/Education-and-Training-Boards-ETBs-.html>

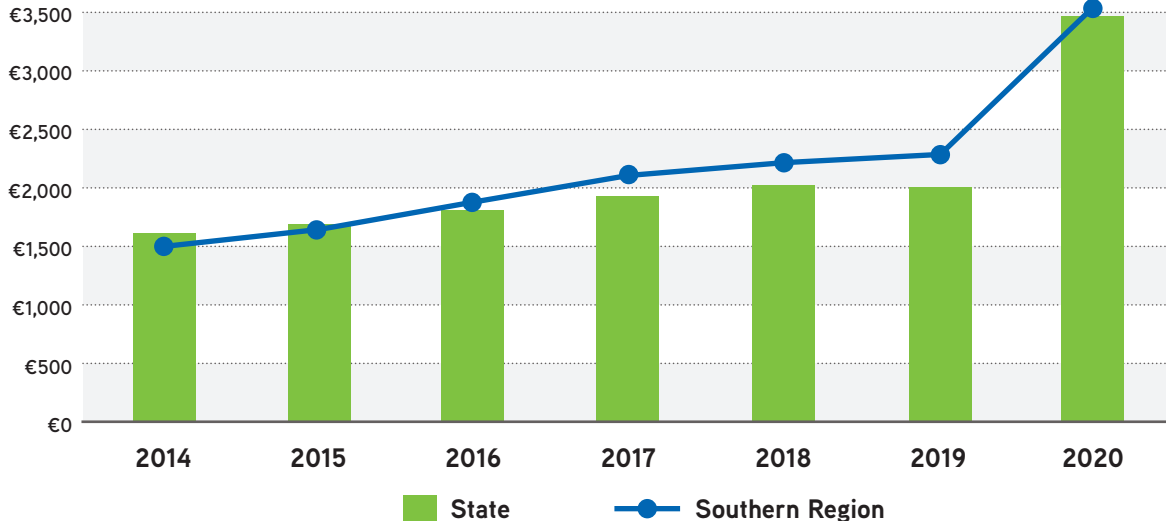
Figure 14: Total level of funding – for FET activities – provided to the ETBs in the Southern Region, versus FET Beneficiaries in the Southern Region, 2014-2020



Source: Department of Education

FET funding provided in the Region – per FET beneficiary – has risen every year since 2014, from €1,492 per beneficiary in 2014 to €3,532 in 2020. This is above the State average in 5 of the last 7 years.

Figure 15: Total level of FET funding provided to the ETBs based in the Southern Region, per FET beneficiary, 2014-2020

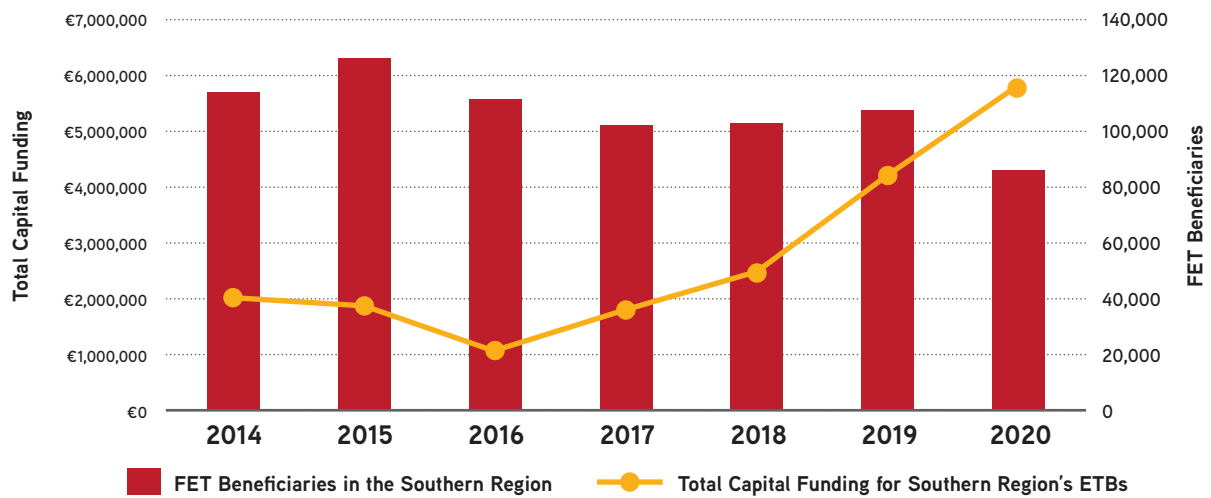


Source: Southern Regional Assembly calculations using Department of Education data

In 2020, government capital funding provided to the ETBs was €17.1 million; up €13.7 million from 2014; the first full year in which the ETBs were operational¹⁶. Of this, 34.1% or €5.8 million was provided to the ETBs in the Region, up €3.8 million compared to 2014. Funding provided to the ETBs in the Region has risen every year since 2016, with notable increases in capital investment since 2018.

¹⁶ Data for Limerick IT only includes core funding provided to the Tipperary Institute from 2011 onwards. Core funding data for the Tipperary Institute for 2010 was not available through the HEA.

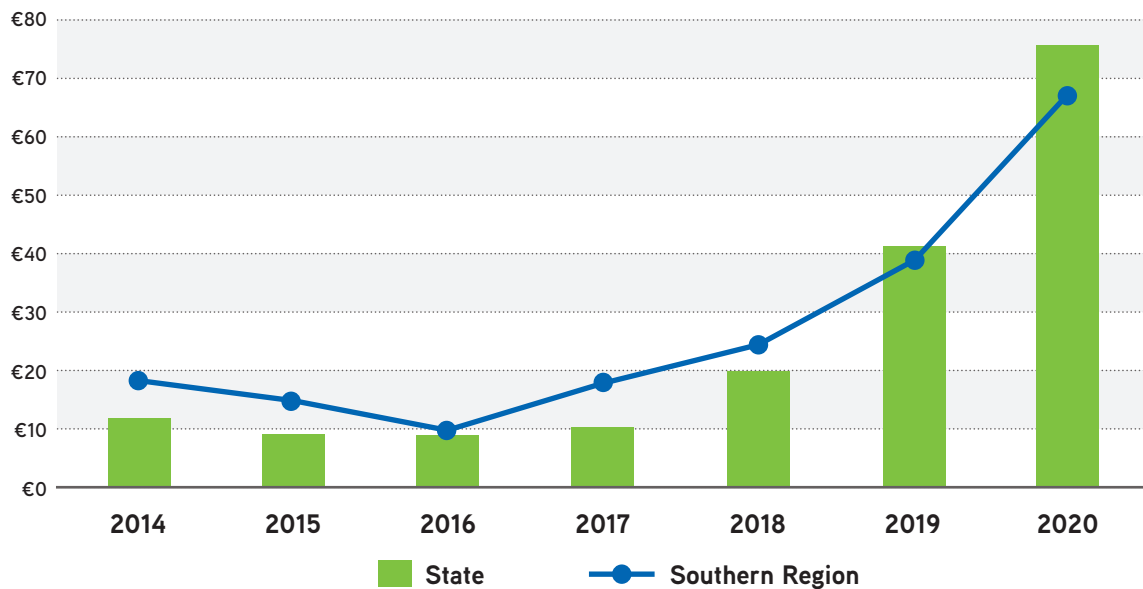
Figure 16: Total level of capital funding provided to the ETBs in the Southern Region, versus FET Beneficiaries in the Southern Region, 2014-2020



Source: Department of Education

Figure 17 shows that the Region's ETBs received capital funding – per FET beneficiary – below the State average in the last two years, with €68 per beneficiary in 2020. Although, the level of capital funding has been notably low in recent years, the level of capital funding has risen since 2016, rising from €10 per beneficiary in 2016 to €68 in 2020.

Figure 17: Total level of capital funding provided to the ETBs based in the Southern Region, per FET beneficiary, 2014-2020



Source: Southern Regional Assembly calculation using Department of Education data

4.2 Higher Education Investment

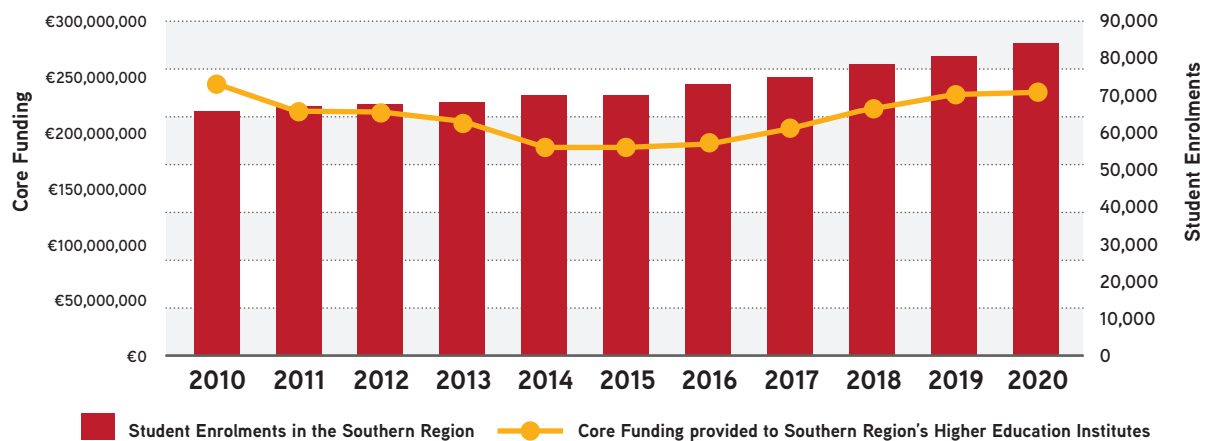
This sub-section will examine the level of government funding provided to each of the Higher Education Institutes based in the Southern Region.

4.2.1 HIGHER EDUCATION CORE FUNDING

Core funding provided by the HEA to each institute is a key metric and covers the cost of delivering Level 6 and above undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

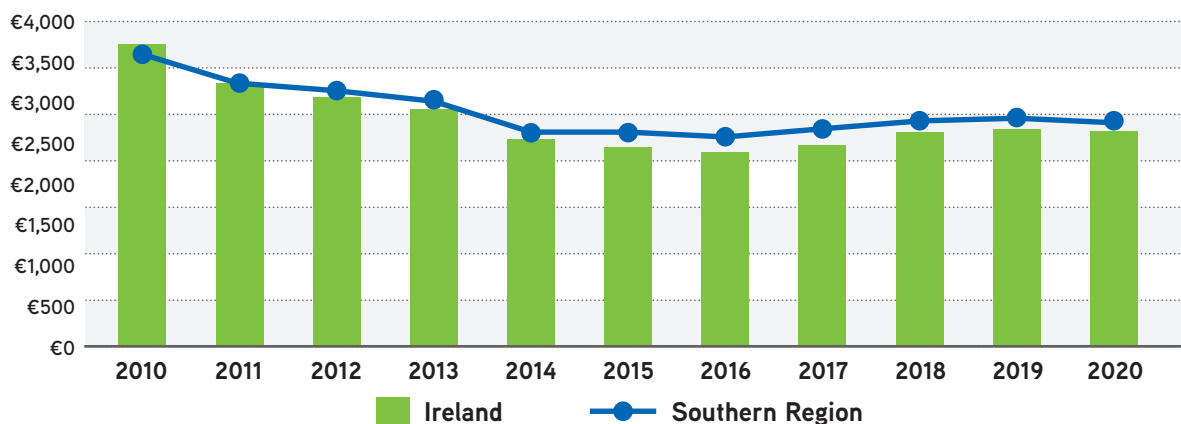
Figure 18 shows the absolute level of core funding provided between 2010 and 2020. In 2020 total funding was €236.8 million, which was down €6.2 million or 2.6% since 2015. Funding has gradually fallen from €3,688 per student in 2010 to €2,801 in 2020, which is in line with national trends.

Figure 18: Total level of core funding provided to Higher Education Institutes based in the Southern Region, (€), versus the Southern Region's total student enrolments, 2010-2020



Source: Higher Education Authority¹⁷

Figure 19: Total level of core funding provided to each of the Southern Region's Higher Education Institutes versus the State average, € per student enrolled, 2010-2020



Source: Southern Regional Assembly calculations using Higher Education Authority data

¹⁷ Data for Limerick IT only includes core funding provided to the Tipperary Institute from 2011 onwards. Core funding data for the Tipperary Institute for 2010 was not available through the HEA

4.2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION CAPITAL INVESTMENT

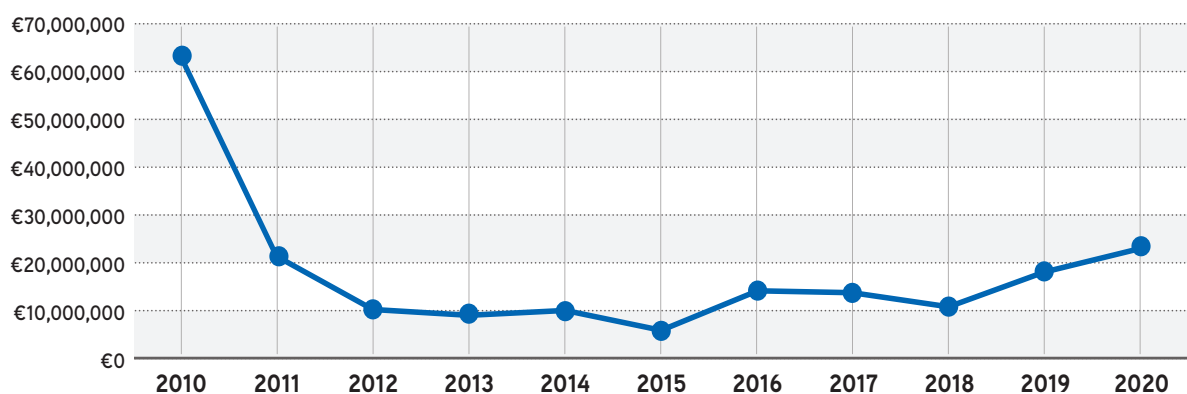
Since 2014, HEA capital funding to Higher Education Institutes has replaced funding provided by the Department of Education. Two types of capital funding are provided:

- General capital funding relating to undergraduate teaching and learning facilities.
- Research capital relating to postgraduate and research facilities¹⁸.

The figures examined refer only to general capital funding.

Between 2010 and 2020, €199.3 million in general capital funding was provided to the Regions Higher Education Institutes. Figure 20 shows the absolute level of general capital funding between 2010 and 2020, with funding falling to €23.4 million in 2020.

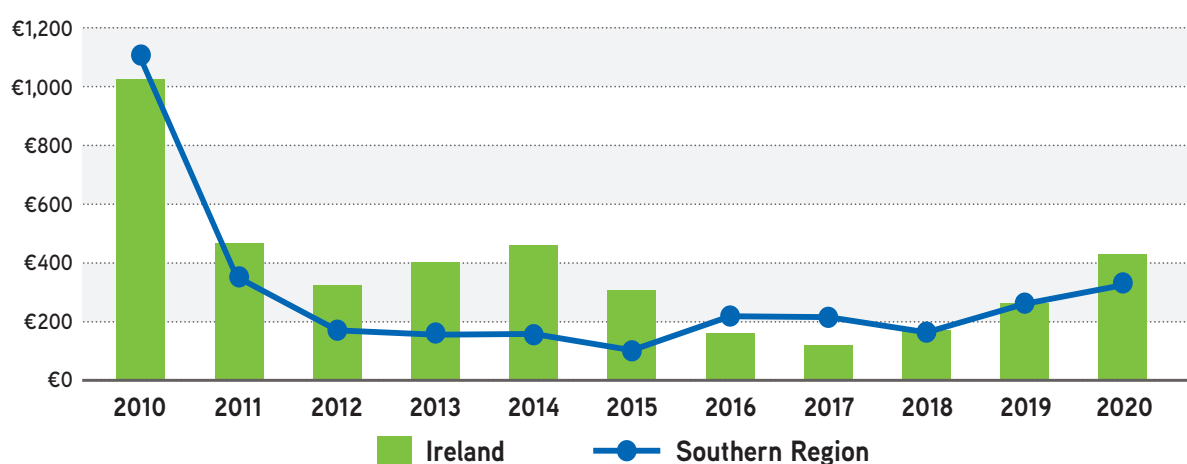
Figure 20: Value of “General Capital Funding” for Higher Education Institutes based in the Southern Region (€), versus total undergraduate enrolments, 2010-2020



Source: Higher Education Authority

General capital funding per undergraduate student¹⁹ – has fallen from €1,111 in 2010 to €332 in 2020, with below average levels in 7 of the last 11 years.

Figure 21: “General Capital Funding” provided to the Higher Education Institutes based in the Southern Region, € per undergraduate enrolled, 2010-2020



Source: Southern Regional Assembly's calculations using Higher Education Authority data

¹⁸ Consultations with the Higher Education Authority suggests that “Research Capital Funding” relates to investment provided for “postgraduate and research facilities”, with a large proportion of such funding relating to research activities. Considering the remit of the Learning Region Initiative, the Southern Regional Assembly felt it was more appropriate to solely examine “General Capital Funding” as such funding relates to the development of undergraduate teaching and learning facilities, a key input into the development of the Southern Region’s skills profile from a Higher Education perspective.

¹⁹ Undergraduate data provided by the HEA.

SECTION

Stakeholder Consultations

5

5 Stakeholder Consultation

To inform the actions of this paper, consultations were carried out with key stakeholders involved in the education and training sector in the Region.

During 2020 and 2021, twenty-one stakeholder bodies were consulted regarding the strengths of the Region's skills base, the challenges facing the Region from an education and training perspective, and how our knowledge-based economy can be enhanced.

This stakeholder consultation included representatives from the following bodies:

Higher Education Institutes²⁰

- › University College Cork
- › University of Limerick
- › Institute of Technology Carlow
- › Limerick Institute of Technology
- › Institute of Technology Tralee
- › Cork Institute of Technology
- › Waterford Institute of Technology
- › Mary Immaculate College Limerick

Education and Training Boards

- › Cork Education and Training Boards
- › Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
- › Kerry Education and Training Board
- › Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board
- › Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
- › Tipperary Education and Training Board

Regional Skills Forum

- › South-West Regional Skills Forum
- › South-East Regional Skills Forum
- › Mid-West Regional Skills Forum

Other Stakeholders

- › Representatives involved in Cork Learning City
- › Representatives involved in Learning Limerick.
- › Social Justice Ireland
- › Aontas
- › Skillnet Ireland

Key themes identified in the consultations related to:

- › **Further Education and Training**
- › **Higher Education**
- › **Community Education and Learning Region**

Under each of these three sub-sections, stakeholder's opinions are grouped as followed:

- › **Competitive advantages**
- › **Challenges**
- › **Policy suggestions**

²⁰ Interviews took place before Technological Universities were established.

5.1 Further Education and Training

The views of stakeholders are categorised under the following headings:

- **Competitive advantages**
- **Challenges**
- **Policy suggestions**

5.1.1 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

PRACTICAL AND VALUABLE COURSE OFFERING

- A clear strength of the ETBs in the Region is that courses are very practical, provide important skillsets to the Region's economy, offering a range of courses including construction, manufacturing, business services, retail, beauty services, childcare, social care, healthcare and hospitality. **Tipperary ETB** for example provide a range of training courses in areas such as manufacturing, construction, accommodation and food services, business services, retail, childcare and healthcare, with awards provided from levels 1 to 6.
- Many of these courses are delivered to post Leaving Cert learners, learners coming out of third level education or individuals who are unemployed, highlighting the socio-economic value of the work. The ETBs also undertake significant Community Education programs, working with community bodies across the Region.

STRONG LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Stakeholders noted that the ETBs provide a high-quality education and training service, reflected in the positive progression rates into employment and third level education. Two key reasons are identified for this success:
 - i. The ETBs have strong and practical links with key figures within industry.
 - ii. The ETB's courses are designed to meet the skill needs of industry.
- The ETB's progression rates to third level education are a notable strength with FET learners generally attending Higher Education Institutes near their respective ETBs.

CONTRIBUTION TO LIFELONG LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- The high quality of the ETB's service offering is one reason why lifelong learning participation rates have been improving in recent years. Other factors include:
 - i. The FET sector was restructured effectively in 2013.
 - ii. Greater funding has been provided since restructuring.
 - iii. There is more active engagement with companies.
 - iv. Communications about available courses has improved.
 - v. There is a greater emphasis on targeting disadvantaged groups.
 - vi. There is greater identification of local needs and skillsets.

SPECIALISED COURSE OFFERING

- A key strength is the provision of specialised courses that are important in addressing niche skill shortages in key sectors of the Region's economy. Examples include:
 - i. The **Limerick and Clare ETBs** specialised apprenticeships - based in Shannon - include aircraft maintenance and interior design. Around 70 aircraft mechanics go through the Shannon centre each year. They have several traineeships, working closely with the IASC group the aircraft holding company in Shannon. They also train on site in their aircraft hangers. They are also the only training providers for refrigeration and air conditioning in the State with a significant facility in Shannon for this purpose.

- ii. The **Kerry ETB** are the only training provider in the State in wind turbine maintenance and installation. They are currently developing – in consultation with industry – a wind turbine maintenance apprenticeship and provide unique courses in overhead line maintenance and fibre optic installation course. They also provide specialised courses in media, animation, software development, graphics, creative media, filming and broadcast production and digital media programs.
- iii. The **Waterford and Wexford ETBs** have unique courses in business sales, marketing services and healthcare. The **Cork ETB** provide a broad range of training courses and are providing a greater focus on ICT and digital skills including cloud computing, cyber computing, renewable energy and bio-pharma. The **Kilkenny and Carlow ETBs** provide courses in hospitality, healthcare, childcare, construction, manufacturing, retail, beauty and hair therapy, business and retail services and the creative industries.

STRATEGIC ASSETS OF THE ETBs

- The **Waterford and Wexford ETB** has 40 training centres. Their centre in Enniscorthy is a key strategic asset and is an example of how high-quality FET infrastructure can deliver confidence levels to learners often not associated with the FET sector. The centre focuses on “Nearly Zero Energy Buildings” and is one of the first in the world to provide training in this concept. The centre in New Ross is an important strategic asset with tailored courses in culinary and professional cookery. The FabLabs in Enniscorthy and New Ross, have IT facilities that offer 2D and 3D printing.
- The Cork Training Centre Biopharma facility is a prime example of how high-quality FET infrastructure can greatly enhance the skillsets of a strategic sectors of the Region’s economy, providing learners with confidence.
- Across Limerick City, County and Clare, there are 33 FET centres. Two are based in former FÁS training centres; one in Raheen in Limerick and the other in the Shannon industrial estate in Clare. These sites are key strategic assets of the **Limerick and Clare ETB**.



- The **Tipperary ETB** have several FET centres across the county, with its Thurles centre providing training services in several areas including a notable focus on apprentices for trades in the construction sector.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

- A key strength of the Regions ETBs is their excellent strategic partnerships with key stakeholders. For example, the **Cork ETB** works with UCC, MTU, and the Cork Local Authorities and is built on a partnership of equals. They regularly engage with community organisations via the “Cork Learning City” initiative (discussed in more detail in Sub-Section 5.3).
- Through strong collaboration with the **South East Regional Skills Manager**, the **Kilkenny and Carlow ETB** work closely with engineering clusters to deliver programmes to meet skills deficits. They have worked extensively with Cartoon Saloon and Lighthouse Studios to address niche skill requirements in drawing, animation and management. Furthermore, through the Institute of Further Education and Training in Carlow, the Kilkenny and Carlow ETB has long established links with the Institute of Technology Carlow.
- The **Limerick and Clare ETBs** have strong working relationship with Limerick’s skilled cluster groups, including the ICT network, the “Limerick for Engineering Network”, the “Limerick for Film Network” and the “Limerick for Food Network”. They work closely with the county’s skilled cluster groups, facilitating an open and direct conversation about the required skills of the county. Through strong collaboration with the Mid-West Regional Skills Manager, they work closely with manufacturing firms in the area such as the Explore Program.

5.1.2 CHALLENGES

PUBLIC CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- A challenge highlighted by several stakeholders is the lack of capital funding provided for FET activities. Stakeholders felt that although total funding has improved in recent years, the building stock of some ETB sites were outdated and investment will be needed to upgrade training equipment, building stock and to address capacity issues.
- The lack of investment in training equipment and infrastructure is restricting the ability of the ETBs to further develop training courses. ICT equipment in particular needs to be upgraded if services are to be delivered online.

OWNERSHIP OF FET TRAINING FACILITIES

- Some ETBs do not have ownership of their own FET facilities; a challenge restricting expanding their service offering, investing in their facilities and fully supporting the skills base, particularly for apprenticeships and traineeships. For example, the Kilkenny and Carlow ETB noted that following the transfer of training functions from FÁS to ETBs, several ETBs found themselves without training facilities. The absence of this infrastructure is a serious strategic structural deficit in their ETB.

IMAGE OF THE FET SECTOR

- Despite the significant contribution to the Region's economy, stakeholders noted that the sector in general has a poor image and many people have negative perceptions about participating in FET courses. There is too much emphasis on learners to go to Higher Education Institutes rather than other often more suitable options provided by the FET sector. Stakeholders felt that a lot more work needs to be done to improve the image of the FET sector.

LACK OF AWARENESS OF SERVICE OFFERING

- Stakeholders felt that many potential learners and SMEs – were unaware that most courses are free and that the ETBs provide flexible learning schedules or weekend courses, primarily due to a lack of marketing on the matter.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

- Many ETBs have experienced spikes in requests for training courses because of the economic impact of COVID-19, particularly from workers in the retail and hospitality sectors.
- Public health measures have had an impact on training for the hospitality sector where onsite training has been limited due to public health restrictions.
- The lack of high-quality broadband in rural areas can make it difficult to engage with potential learners, especially when public health measures limit learner's ability to travel to FET centres.
- Furthermore, strategic planning by ETBs had to be refocused due to COVID-19 with the focus on the hospitality and retail sectors changing accordingly.

LACK OF SUPPORT SERVICES TO FET LEARNERS

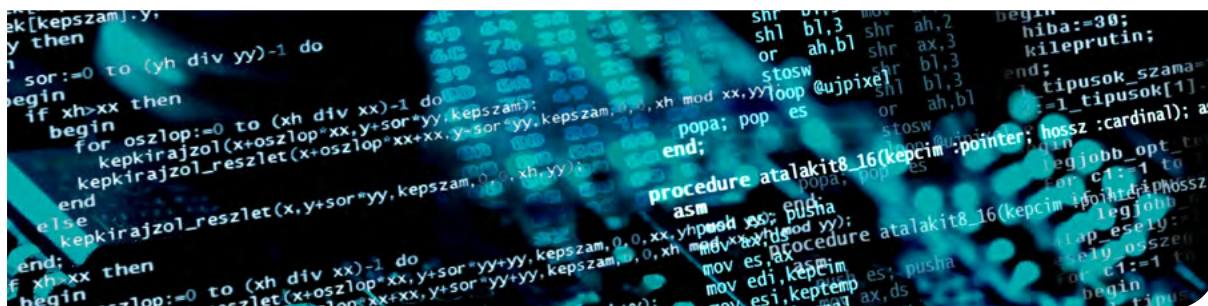
- Some stakeholders stated that anxiety levels in students have increased substantially. This issue was also raised by other education providers.
- A major issue for some was the lack of resources for mental health services support – specifically mental health counsellors.

STAFF RETENTION AND REQUIREMENTS

- Some stakeholders felt that the restrictive salary structure for the ETBs is restricting the ETB's ability to hire potential teachers from industry which is essential to ensuring learners are taught relevant skills that meet the needs of industry.
- Unless the ETBs can hire high quality staff with key industry links, they will struggle to get input from employers. This could negatively affect progression rates into employment.

SMEs AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Some SMEs are focused on short term financial issues and are generally not concerned with strategic matters such as developing the skillset of employees. Large companies by contrast have the time and resources to focus on staff skills.



5.1.3 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

GREATER CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN ETBs INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT

- All stakeholders felt that there should be more capital investment in addressing outdated building stock, capacity issues, equipment deficits and particularly ICT equipment issues. Ongoing capital investment is required in equipment and infrastructure to meet the needs of industry.
- Buildings and equipment need to match the good service being provided. Having good quality facilities is essential to instill confidence and to confirm that people know that they are valued.
- Sometimes people forget the huge value of Further Education and Training. Work needs to be done to get Further Education and Training on the political and Local Authority agenda.

ALIGN CAPITAL INVESTMENT TO SPECIALITIES OF REGIONS

- Stakeholders felt that capital investment in the FET sector should be aligned to specialities of different Regions. For example, the Kerry ETB see potential in the Marine economy of the south west, and they would like to set up a Marine centre of excellence to provide level 5 to 6 courses.

INCOME SUPPLEMENTS FOR FET LEARNERS

- Some stakeholders felt that unemployed people that undertake training in strategically important sectors experiencing skills shortages should be given a top-up on their unemployment benefits in the form of a training premium.
- This could act as incentive for people to undertake such courses, which could assist in tackling skills shortages in important sectors of the Region's economy.



MORE RESOURCES TO PROMOTE THE ACTIVITIES OF ETBs

- Stakeholders wanted to see greater promotion of the of the ETB's, including:
 - i. The availability and flexibility of free courses in relevant areas.
 - ii. The employment rates from ETB courses.
 - iii. The progression rates to Higher Education Institutes from ETB courses.
 - iv. The close links the ETBs have with key employers.

MORE RESOURCES FOR ETBs SUPPORT SERVICES

- Stakeholders felt that more funding was needed for supplementary resources such as mental health counselling.

TRAINING SUBSIDIES FOR SMEs

- Subsidies should be provided to employers – particularly SMEs – that facilitate employees undertaking skills development to ease short-term financial constraints of SMEs.

DELIVERY OF THE NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN

- The delivery of the National Broadband Plan will be instrumental to facilitating eLearning in rural based communities.

5.2 Higher Education

The views of stakeholders are categorised under the following headings:

- Competitive advantages
- Challenges
- Policy suggestions

5.2.1 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

PROVISION OF HIGH SKILLED GRADUATES

- The Higher Education Institutes offer an array of strategically important courses that provide high quality skillsets for key sectors of the Region's economy.
- These include Science, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), Business Services, Construction, Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Renewable Energy.



- Stakeholders in **Cork Institute of Technology** felt that the college was uniquely positioned with respect to Engineering courses, and the college offers the largest engineering school on the island of Ireland. WIT provides strategically important courses in Automotive & Automation Systems, Data Analytics, Life Sciences, "Zero Energy Building" (ZEB) Design²¹, Sustainable Energy Engineering and Agriculture.
- **Institute of Technology Tralee** nursing school provides a range of courses in healthcare, and the college also has a focus on environmental matters, including Agricultural Science, Renewable Energy Sustainability Practices and Wildlife Biology, all growing notably in recent years. UL offers a comprehensive set of high-quality courses; including Science, Technology, Engineering, Energy, Humanities and Business.

CONTRIBUTION TO ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY

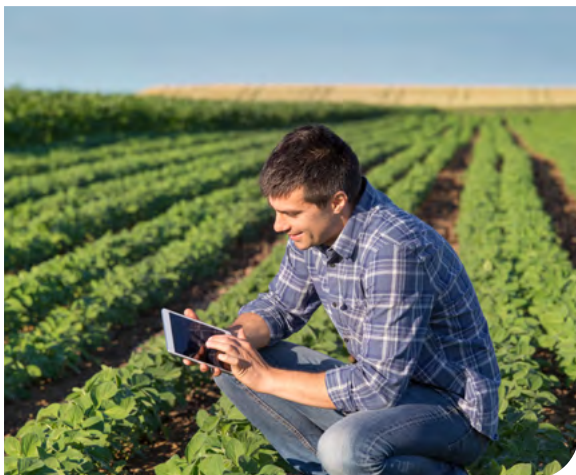
- The higher education sector has a key role in developing innovators and entrepreneurs. There is a link between student entrepreneurial activity and the development of the entrepreneurial mindset which ultimately carry through their professional lives.

INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED UNIVERSITIES

- Stakeholders noted that the Region's established universities – **UCC and UL** – are catalysts of regional transformation, are of national and international importance through their excellence in education and research. They have an array of established strengths across a wide range of subjects, evident by their high quality and internationally recognised educational and research programme offer. UL is a national leader in community engaged learning and research, one of only two European hubs of the UNESCO endorsed Knowledge for Change global network.



²¹ <https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/standards/nearly-zero-energy-building-standard/>



HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVE

- The Human Capital Initiative is key to supporting skills development, upskilling and lifelong learning. It aims to develop innovative higher education provision to meet emerging needs such as regional development and activities in support of Project Ireland 2040.
- Initiatives such as “Springboard” – which is funded through the Human Capital Initiative – have greatly contributed to improvement in lifelong learning participation rates in the Region.
- Many of the “Springboard” courses are related to strategically important sectors of the economy – including businesses services, science, law, ICT and humanities. These courses develop the skills profile of the Region. For example, in UCC, 12 programmes were recently provided in key areas such as environmental science, sustainability and climate, supply chain management, bio-pharma processing, digital arts and humanities.
Carlow Institute of Technology’s springboard courses focuses on programs related to pharmaceuticals, financial services and ICT services such as software development and data science.
- Stakeholders based in **Institute of Technology Tralee** noted that springboard funding had allowed the college to provide industry driven ICT courses, including cloud infrastructure.

ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- All the Higher Education Institutes consulted highlighted the benefits their strategic relationships with public bodies and the local business community provide in ensuring academic courses reflect the needs of the local economy.
- The Regional Skills Fora were recognised as a key stakeholder in identifying skills shortages across the economy and in utilising such knowledge in assisting colleges to develop courses to reflect the needs of the local economy.
- The importance of working relationships with the business community was highlighted.
Carlow Institute of Technology noted the important strategic relationships within their sub-region including State Street and Bank of Ireland in Kilkenny, Sun light and Glanbia in Waterford, Pfizer in Carlow and Equifax in Wexford. The **Institute of Technology Tralee** have successfully developed programmes with companies in proximity to the college – including a course jointly developed to enhance Kostal’s employee skills qualifications and Liebherr Container Cranes – where an apprenticeship course was jointly developed.

UPDATE ON TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE REGION

During the production of this paper and stakeholder consultations there were a number of key developments. These included the establishment of the Munster Technological University in January 2021, the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) began operations in October 2021 and the South East Technological University (SETU) was formally established in May 2022.

5.2.2 CHALLENGES

PUBLIC FUNDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- A number of stakeholders noted that public funding – per head of student – has fallen considerably.
- These public funding patterns are not sustainable and additional and consistent public investment in Higher Education Institutes is needed to ensure students are provided with high quality education services.
- It was stated that in instances where Higher Education Institutes collaborate with each other in the provision of courses, they do not get any extra funding for these efficiencies. It was stated that public funds should support collaboration that ensures efficiencies.



LACK OF CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN THIRD LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Stakeholders noted insufficient investment in teaching infrastructure and ICT equipment particularly lecture halls, teaching and lab facilities in recent years.
- This lack of capital investment impedes the delivery of third level courses to a higher standard.

UNDERINVESTMENT IN RESEARCH CAPABILITIES

- There has been persistent underinvestment in the research capabilities of Higher Education Institutes and it is perceived that this has had a negative effect on the development and retention of talent for high value / high growth industries.

RELIANCE ON INTERNAL AND COMPETITIVE FUNDING SOURCES

- Higher Education Institutes across Region have become reliant on internal funding sources in order to fund their activities and campus projects, particularly income relating to international students, commercial activities and Lifelong Learning initiatives.
- Bidding capacity, i.e., the ability to apply for and secure competitive funds is an issue. Responding to funding calls requires resources and this is problematic in that the biggest and best resourced are often in a better position to win these competitive bids.

LACK OF A BORROWING FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

- Legislation prohibits Institutes of Technology from borrowing and the absence of a borrowing framework for Institutes of Technologies is a major constraint on their ability to contribute to effective economic and skills development in the Region.
- The absence of this framework is constraining campus development plans that could generate future revenue and enhance student's skillsets, further restricting the ability of the Institutes of Technologies.

RECURRENT FUNDING ALLOCATION MODEL

- The "Recurrent Funding Allocation Model" the funding model used by the Department of Education and the Higher Education Authority in distributing funds to Higher Education Institutes – has limited the ability of colleges in growing their student numbers further.
- Under this revenue model, increases in government funding are not directly linked to increases in the number of students enrolled. This constrained the ability of Higher Education Institutes to grow their student base, as the provision of funding resources was not directly linked to the growth of student numbers.



LACK OF HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND FOR E-LEARNERS

- The lack of high-speed broadband in rural communities is a significant issue in impacting how students can effectively participate in remote learning.

DESIGNATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTH-EAST

- Stakeholders based in the South-East considered that achieving the designation of the South East “Technological University” (TUSE) was a major challenge. Issues to be overcome included:
 - i. State funding, which primarily relates to legacy issues that must be dealt with before designation can be completed.
 - ii. The development of a long-term funding model for the coming years.
 - iii. Relations between the Institutes of Technology of the South East.

ENGAGEMENT WITH STUDENTS DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

- A significant challenge has been the difficulty in engaging with students – particularly first year students – during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Learning is fundamentally a social experience, and the social and cultural side of learning is a significant issue for students during COVID-19 restrictions e.g., missed friends, lecture environment, quiet spaces to study, time to study with issues such as provision of child-minding. Problems with work placement were also raised.
- Investment in digital technology is required and COVID-19 has shown that some IT equipment is not fit for purpose and that there is a digital divide.
- The main challenge is social distancing particularly for first year students.



LACK OF STAFF FOR STRATEGIC COURSES

- Higher Education Institutes are often unable to provide enough courses for strategically important areas such as ICT, due to lack of teaching staff with relevant qualifications.
- Higher Education Institutes often cannot afford to pay qualified individuals what they earn in the private sector and are unable to provide enough courses in certain strategically important areas, which may impact on skill shortages in key sectors of the Region’s economy.

LACK OF DEMAND FOR STRATEGIC COURSES

- There is a lack of demand for strategically important courses, particularly Renewable Energy. There is a difficulty in selling renewable energy courses as it is associated with construction in which there is currently a skills shortage. People working in construction, often do not want to return to education. They may not have engaged in education previously and may feel apprehensive about doing so now, they may be too busy in their current job or firms did not want to give up staff time.

5.2.3 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

ENGAGE STUDENTS EARLY

- Some stakeholders felt that it was important that Higher Education Institutes and companies involved in key sectors of the economy engage with potential students during secondary school education.
- Involving Science, Technology, Engineering and Renewable Energy companies in visiting and engaging with secondary schools could encourage more students to get involved in these strategically important sectors.



- Access to education and support for educational ambition were identified as issues that can be attributed to a number of factors including family circumstances. Key Supports need to be expanded in order to assist students in Deis (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools to avail of all educational opportunities.

ENHANCE THE RESEARCH CAPACITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Stakeholders felt that greater investment is required in developing centres of research excellence that can sustain the Region as a knowledge region. There should be greater investment provided for research to increase educational opportunities at the higher end of the National Framework of Qualifications. Increasing available doctoral places across the Region is vital to improve innovation capacity.

ENHANCED FUNDING FOR SPRINGBOARD COURSES

- Some stakeholders noted that greater numbers of students could be taught on strategically important courses if additional funding were provided to Springboard courses. For example, stakeholders based in the **Munster Technological University (Institute of Technology Tralee)** felt that automation courses could be filled twice over, if additional funding were provided to deliver more course places.



- Additional funding will be required for Springboard courses due to the expected economic impact of COVID-19 on the Region's labour market. Additional resources will be needed to accommodate increased demand from individuals that have become unemployed.

INCREASE STAFF TO STUDENT RATIOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- The staff-to-student ratios need to be notably improved.

ENHANCE CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE

- Increased capital investment is required in particularly teaching infrastructure relating to STEM activities. Some stakeholders felt that additional capital investment would allow colleges to accommodate additional students' numbers while others felt this would allow for an improvement in ICT infrastructure, lecture halls, teaching and lab facilities.
- Stakeholders recognised the need to invest in staff to ensure an effective digital transformation is required to provide a great learning experience in the digital space.



CONTINUED PROVISION OF MICRO CREDENTIALS

- The continued provision of micro credentials will be important for employees of small sized companies to undertake skill development courses. These credentials accommodate the need of employees to enhance their skills profile while limiting their absence from the day-to-day operations in the workplace.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODEL

- Several stakeholders noted that until there is a sustainable funding model, the performance of Higher Education Institutes will be limited.
- Although stakeholders did not express a preference on the potential options that were outlined in the Cassells report on Higher Education Funding²², stakeholders did feel that the current funding model for third level education in Ireland was not sustainable and a decision was needed on which of the three funding options outlined in the Cassells report was most appropriate.

BROADER APPEAL OF CURRENT AND FUTURE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

- It is important that current and future Technological Universities in the Region diversify their programme offering across the full breadth of academic disciplines. This requires an increase in teaching and research staff numbers.

REVIEW OF THE RECURRENT FUNDING ALLOCATION MODEL

- There should be immediate review of the “Recurrent Funding Allocation Model” used by the Department of Education and the Higher Education Authority.



DESIGNATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTH-EAST AND THE MID-WEST

- Stakeholders in the South-East and the Mid-West felt that the delivery of the Technological Universities designations will enhance the education profile of their sub-regions and encourage more students to remain in the area.
- The delivery of the Technological Universities will open up an array of opportunities, attracting international students, research funding and private investment.
- Stakeholders based in the South-East felt that additional support will be required to ensure the designation of a Technological University in their sub-region. Achieving this designation will encourage these to remain within the sub-region for employment opportunities after graduation.

SUPPORT STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Greater support should be provided to support student entrepreneurship in Higher Education by:
 - Ensuring students develop their skills in innovation and entrepreneurship.
 - Ensuring that the strategic plans of all relevant bodies and agencies identify student innovation and entrepreneurship as a key area of focus which requires support.
 - Organising region-wide student innovation and entrepreneurship programmes and initiatives provide development opportunities for students and enhance the region's reputation for excellence in student innovation and entrepreneurship.

²² The SOLAS Strategy 'Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020-2024 notes that are a 'high proportion of learners citing mental health issues'

5.3 Community Education and Learning Region

The views of all stakeholders were sought on the existing “Learning Cities” initiatives in Cork and Limerick and whether such initiatives could be expanded further in the Region. The views are categorised under the following headings:

- Competitive advantages
- Challenges
- Policy suggestions

5.3.1 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

CULTURE OF LEARNING WITHIN CITIES

- The stakeholders involved in the “Cork Learning City” and “Learning Limerick” felt that such initiatives were extremely useful in creating a culture of learning within communities based in their respective cities, particularly in communities associated with high levels of deprivation and low education attainment.

LIFELONG LEARNING INITIATIVES AND DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

- Lifelong Learning initiatives – such as “Cork Learning City” and “Learning Limerick” – are hugely beneficial to education attainment in disadvantaged communities. It was noted that if parents engage in Lifelong Learning initiatives with their children, such engagement increases these children in participating in Higher Education in the future.
- The initiatives had opened the prospect of Higher Education to a cohort of young people that might not have considered this option as a possibility. In Cork the value of such programs is evident from the fact that young participants involved in the “Cork Learning City” initiative felt that attending a Higher Education Institute in the future was an attainable goal.

LIFELONG LEARNING INITIATIVES AND THE WORKPLACE

- The Cork “Learning at Work” forum and the “Cork Learning City Day” – have reminded employers of the benefits of investing in the skillsets of their staff while also showing how employers and employees could enhance their own skillset through skills and education programs that are highlighted on the “Cork Learning City Day”.





BRANDING OF CITIES

- The **“Learning Limerick”** and **“Cork Learning City”** concept adds value to the brands of both cities, reinforcing the value proposition of these cities being locations that nurture and grow knowledge, education and learning; components which are instrumental to growing knowledge-based industries.
- Many stakeholders involved in the **“Learning Limerick”** and **“Cork Learning City”** highlighted the benefits of hosting their own “Learning City” festivals, as such events allowed stakeholders to showcase the importance of learning and education in community settings while also reinforcing the image of their cities as being geographical areas that support education, skills and lifelong learning. Many stakeholders – that did not have an existing “Learning City” initiative based within their counties – were interested in hosting their own “Learning County” festival.

ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Stakeholders involved in both **“Learning Limerick”** and **“Cork Learning City”** highlighted that such initiatives have facilitated regular engagement with Higher Education Institutes, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Local Authorities and community groups on topics such as education and lifelong learning in a community setting.
- In the **“Cork Learning City”** initiative, there was a genuine and regular interaction between bodies including University College Cork, Munster Technological University, Cork ETB, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, the HSE, the National Association of Principals and Deputies and community groups. These interactions allow for constant and wide-reaching engagement on topics on lifelong learning and education in community settings, which assists in developing a culture of learning within Cork City, particularly within communities with high levels of deprivation and low levels of education attainment.

VALUE OF THE LEARNING CITIES

- Most stakeholders that did not have “Learning City” styled initiatives recognised the value of such programs in encouraging Lifelong Learning, educational and skills activities in community settings. To replicate such a concept would have to be done through existing education and training structures.

LEARNING CITIES CONCEPT APPLICABLE TO OTHER AREAS

- Most stakeholders felt that the “Learning Cities” concept could be applied to areas that do not have “Learning City” styled initiatives.
- Stakeholders were flexible to how such initiatives could be delivered, with some stakeholders noting a preference for “Learning County” initiative, while some stakeholders advocated for “Learning Regions” initiatives.
- Those involved in the **“Learning Limerick”** and the **“Cork Learning City”** felt that the positive outcomes could be replicated if similar type of initiatives were developed in other areas. For example, stakeholders in “Learning Limerick” felt that a similar initiative could be developed in Clare, Tipperary and outside of the Mid-West.

CONTRIBUTION OF INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROVIDERS

- Stakeholders outlined how the Community Education sector meets the learning needs of a wide and diverse range of adults, families and communities across the Region, including those outside of traditional formal education provision, in many instances for generations. Independent Community Education providers can be a key resource in development of the Learning Region and provide value for money in terms of the provision of educational services.

5.3.2 CHALLENGES

POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING CUTS TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Engagement with the “Learning Cities” could be affected if there is a reduction in the level of funding provided to community groups involved in the “Learning Cities” initiatives. Stakeholders felt that the impact would disproportionately affect education attainment in communities associated with high levels of deprivation.

COMPOSITION OF LEARNING CITIES EXPANSION

- For stakeholders not involved in the “**Learning Limerick**” and “**Cork Learning City**” initiatives, many felt that the concept would be applicable to their own geographical area.
- That said, stakeholders were unsure as to how such concepts could be applied within their own geographical area. Some stakeholders felt that a specific “Learning County” would be the most suitable mechanism to replicating the results of the learning initiatives in Cork and Limerick, some felt that the concept should be expanded to a sub-regional or regional level, while others felt that such an expansion should be held back until Waterford City has become a UNESCO Learning City.

ADDITIONAL COMMITMENT FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING BODIES

- Expanding the concept of the “Learning Cities” – whether on regional, sub-regional or county level – could place additional obligations on education and training bodies that already have an abundance of work commitments in developing the skills profile of the Region.



REQUIREMENT TO PROVIDE FUNDING COMMITMENTS

- For the “Learning Cities” concept to be successfully expanded to other geographical areas, all parties need to equally contribute to a shared budget and funding should aim to hire a designated officer – within existing structures – to drive the “Learning City” concept in the geographical area in question. Without a designated officer, stakeholders felt that the “Learning City” concept will not work.
- Some stakeholders noted that committing additional financial resources at this time could be problematic due to the impact of COVID-19 on the budgets of potential key stakeholders.

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT FROM INDUSTRY

- There could be more engagement on the “Learning Cities” initiative from an industrial perspective and it was noted that it is hard to engage industry on these issues unless there is an immediate benefit. Some stakeholders felt that both the “Learning Limerick” and “Cork Learning City” initiatives were too focused on community activities rather than industrial activities.

5.3.3 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

EXPAND “LEARNING CITIES” CONCEPT WITHIN EXISTING STRUCTURES.

- It was noted by some stakeholders that if the “Learning City” concept is to be applied on either a county, sub-regional or regional basis, then the following factors need to be addressed:
 - i. All interested parties need to equally contribute to a shared budget.
 - ii. Engagement needs to be high from all interested parties.
 - iii. A designated officer to drive the “Learning City” concept in the geographical area in question is required. Without a designated officer the “Learning City” concept will not work.
 - iv. Participating parties need to involve key individuals from disadvantaged communities.

DEVELOP WATERFORD CITY AS A UNESCO LEARNING CITY

- The “Learning City” concept should be expanded to Waterford City, with the view of the city becoming a UNESCO Learning City, in line with the status held by Limerick and Cork City. Some believed that Waterford City could first become a UNESCO Learning City, before expanding the “Learning Cities” concept.

DEVELOP A “LEARNING FESTIVAL” FOR COUNTIES BASED IN THE SOUTHERN REGION

- Many of the stakeholders that did not have “Learning City” were particularly interested in developing and hosting their own “Learning County” festival, with the view of highlighting the importance of learning and education while also showcasing some of the important work done by public bodies and community groups involved in education and training.

DEVELOP “LEARNING COUNTIES” IN THE SOUTHERN REGION

- Some felt that the “Learning City” concept should be applied on a county basis, allowing for the development of a “Learning County” for each of the counties in the Region.

DEVELOP “LEARNING SUB-REGIONS” IN THE SOUTHERN REGION

- Some felt that the “Learning City” concept should only be applied on a sub-regional level, allowing for the development of “Learning Sub-Regions”. For example, some stakeholders felt that it would be more efficient to develop these concepts on a sub-regional level, as focusing solely on counties would be too micro-focused.

DEVELOP IDENTIFIABLE PATHWAYS FROM COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- Stakeholders highlighted the important role of Community Education providers in developing and broadening the range of learning pathways from Community Education into the more formal elements of education and employment. Additional resources should support the development of identifiable pathways from Community Education to further and higher education and other skills development and employment opportunities, particularly for those most distant from the labour market, or those with low levels of educational attainment currently employed in roles at risk of automation.
- Developing learning pathways through Community Education will enable the Region to grow its Human Capital base and enhance the skills profile of the region but will also help realise the ambitions in the RSES and NPF with respect to equality, empowerment, inclusivity, and quality of life.

DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM FUNDING MODEL FOR COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

- Stakeholders advocated for a sustainable long-term funding model for independent Community Education providers because they play a pivotal role in the success of informal education and lifelong learning participation within local communities across the Region.

DEVELOP CAPACITY OF INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROVIDERS

- Stakeholders recognised the need to engage in capacity building activity at organisational and community level to ensure Community Education providers are equipped to participate in the Learning Region.

SECTION

Actions 6

INTERNET OF THINGS

6 Actions

This paper proposes a series of actions based on the findings of the previous three sections.

Each action is accompanied by a brief statement explaining the rationale behind each action.

6.1 Further Education & Training and Higher Education

Action #1: Increase awareness and uptake of the ETBs services in the Southern Region, including:

- a) The implementation of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 to 2025.
- b) Promote the positive outcomes experienced by ETB graduates including their progression to employment and Higher Education.
- c) Measures to improve the awareness of industry relevant courses, provided free of charge and with flexible learning schedule, including weekend and evening courses.

BASIS OF ACTION #1

- The Education Profile in Section 3.4 identifies the FET sector as being of significant importance to the Region's Lifelong Learning participation rates, skills profile, Human Capital and to the wider economy.
- Stakeholder consultations in Section 5.1 have shown that potential learners – and SMEs who could benefit from such training – are unaware that many courses provided by the ETBs are free of charge and that many course can be provided through flexible learning schedules or at weekends.
- FET learners recorded high progression rates into employment and Higher Education, but awareness of opportunities is low or not fully recognised.

Action #2: Ensure the Region's ETB's teaching infrastructure and digital equipment is to appropriate international standard with sufficient capacity to support the education and training needs of a Region targeted for substantial population growth.

BASIS OF ACTION #2

- ETB's capital funding in the Region has been below the State average in 2019 and 2020.
- A lack of capital funding provided for FET activities in the Region is evident in outdated building stock at some locations, all of which impacts the image of the sector. Capital investment is required to upgrade training equipment (including ICT equipment), enhance the building stock and to address capacity issues.
- The ability to expand the service offering and invest in facilities is severely constrained for some ETBs who do not have ownership of their own facilities.

Action #3: Ensure capital investment in the Southern Region's ETBs is aligned to strategically important skillsets and locally relevant skill specialities. The emerging Smart Specialisation policy should assist in informing this capital investment.

BASIS OF ACTION #3

- › Capital investment in the FET sector should support key skillsets in supporting the Southern Region's skills profile to support strategically important areas of the economy, including ICT, Renewable Energy, Science, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing.
- › Capital Investment should be aligned to the specialities of different geographical areas. The emerging Smart Specialisation policy should assist in informing this capital investment.

Action #4: Ensure greater participation on FET courses relating to sectors experiencing skills shortages and sectors most affected by economic shocks (e.g. outbreak of COVID-19) through provision of adequate resources. Consideration should be given to incentives such as a training premium provided for individuals participating in FET courses connected to such sectors.

BASIS OF ACTION #4

- › To address relatively low Lifelong Learning participation rates identified in the Southern Region Education Profile (Section 3.4) of 9.7% of adults, below the State average of 11%.
- › To ensure readiness to address future shocks as per Section 4.8 of the RSES and RPO 75: Anticipating Economic Structural Changes.
- › To assist tackling skills shortages in sectors of the Region's economy most affected by COVID-19 restrictions. The Regional Assemblies 'COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis' provides details of sectors and locations most affected.
- › To support ETB's in providing for increased demand in training and reskilling courses resulting from COVID-19.

Action #5: Improve participation in skills development courses by SMEs through the use of financial incentives to enterprises. This Action envisages a Pilot Scheme to be delivered through the ETBs and would specifically relate to training courses that cannot be provided free of charge.

BASIS OF ACTION #5

- › Incentives would address the short-term financial barriers for SMEs and increase the number of employees participating in relevant training and skills development courses, thereby allowing SMEs to take a strategic view of their employee's skillset and training profile. This improves SMEs competitiveness with opportunity to address their training needs in a similar way to larger firms.
- › This action has a potential for significant scale to enhance the overall skills profile of the Southern Region's economy, where according to data from the CSO, SMEs accounted for 99.7% of the Southern Region's enterprise base, with the number of people engaged in these SMEs totalling 325,181 in 2018.

Action #6: Ensure adequate mental health services are available to FET learners to address identified needs in each ETB area.

BASIS OF ACTION #6

- › ETBs have identified the lack of resources available to provide mental health services in the ETB structure (specifically mental health councillors) to support learners with anxiety and mental health issues. Among the challenges for the FET Sector, SOLAS note the high proportion of learners citing mental health issues in their *Future FET: Transforming Learning Strategy*.²³

²³ The SOLAS Strategy 'Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020-2024 notes that are a 'high proportion of learners citing mental health issues'



Action #7: Implement long term measures to embed programmes that enhance the Regions skill profile and address skill shortages, work readiness and Lifelong Learning issues. Adequate resources should be ringfenced for such skills initiatives.

BASIS OF ACTION #7

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS:

- Initiatives such as “Skills to Advance” and “Explore” and employer led training networks such as Skillnet have been identified in Stakeholder consultations (See Section 5.1.1 Further Education and Training) as being crucial to addressing skill shortages, skill gaps and lifelong learning issues and popular with participants. It is considered that adequate resources should be ringfenced for such skills initiatives.
- To mitigate exposure of low skilled manufacturing jobs to technological advances including Artificial Intelligence and Automation (an issue identified at Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.3 and 5.3.3).
- To reflect the importance of the Human Capital Initiative in supporting skills development, upskilling and lifelong learning as it aims to develop innovative higher education provision to meet emerging needs and focuses on areas such as regional development and activities in support of Project Ireland 2040.



Action #8: Deliver on the outstanding Technological University (TU's) applications in the Southern Region and ensure all the Regions TU's can offer a more broad-based educational offering.

BASIS OF ACTION #8

- To enhance the third level education offering of the Southern Region, it is essential that applications to become Technological Universities succeed and appropriate resources is provided.
- Delivering on Technological Universities will assist in graduate retention. For examples, Section 3 found that there is a low graduate retention rate in parts of the Region. (See Section 3.8). All three sub-regions of the Southern Region recorded third level attainment rates below the national average of 51% in 2020 and there continues to be a low proportion of students from disadvantaged area. (See Section 3.9).
- To improve their educational offering in the future, stakeholders felt that the Technological Universities in the Southern Region will need to become more broad-based providing a greater offering across a wider range of academic disciplines – including the humanities, entrepreneurship, STEM and other courses to address the needs of sectors that are affected by skills shortages and the outbreak of COVID-19.

Action #9: A borrowing framework should be agreed and developed for Technological Universities, while ensuring there is a timely review of the grant allocation model for all Higher Education Institutes.

BASIS OF ACTION #9

- Ensuring a borrowing framework is agreed and developed is particularly relevant for the Region. A sustainable borrowing framework for Technological Universities will allow borrowing from non-exchequer resources allowing these colleges to develop their own campus development plans and infrastructure assets.
- Core funding provided to the Higher Education Institutes based in the Southern Region have fallen over the past decade – dropping from €3,688 per student in 2010 to €2,801 in 2020. Stakeholders stated that under the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions' increases in government funding are not directly linked to increases in the number of students enrolled in a Higher Education Institute and that this funding model was constraining the ability of Higher Education Institutes from growing their student base.
- Stakeholders identified insufficient levels of capital investment in the Southern Region's third level infrastructure, specifically with respect to teaching infrastructure and ICT equipment. In terms of general capital funding provided to the Higher Education Institutes in the Region, this has progressively fallen over time, dropping from €1,111 per undergraduate student in 2010 to €332 in 2020, with below average levels of capital funding provided to the Region's Higher Education Institutes in seven of the last 11 years.

Action #10: Improve the research capacity of the Southern Region's Higher Education Institutes.

BASIS OF ACTION #10

- To address the need for more investment in Research and Development – identified as a significant development challenge in the European Commission's "2019 and 2020 Semester: Country Report – Ireland". Total business expenditure on Research and Development in the Southern Region of €489 per head of population in 2019 is below the State average of €662. Compared to the EU average in 2019, the Southern Region recorded relatively weak performances in other areas related to innovation including, lifelong learning, EPO patent applications, trademark applications and design applications.
- Provision of enhanced research infrastructure and doctoral and increased research positions in the Southern Region's Higher Education Institutes would improve the Region's innovation capacity as well as to provide opportunities for citizens and support developing centres of research excellence to sustain the Southern Region as a knowledge region.

Action #11: Provide greater support to improve the teaching infrastructure in High Level Institutions, particularly digital teaching and learning infrastructure

BASIS OF ACTION #11

- To address declining capital funding identified in Section 4.2.2 Higher Education Capital Investment.
- To provide for the teaching infrastructure required to support the projected population increases through the provision of teaching halls, lab facilities, digital equipment and other strategic infrastructure assets (Reference sections 5.2.2, 5.2.3).
- To address the low third level attainment rate of 46% (2020) of adults in the Southern Region with a third level qualification, 5% below the national average of 51%. This is the lowest third level attainment rate of the three NUTS 2 Regions of Ireland.

Action #12: Develop a common understanding and approaches to cluster-based economic development strategies to build on and support individual initiatives by the Regional Skills Fora and others. Clarity is needed on how training and upskilling (particularly in the context of Smart Specialisation) are embedded in cluster development and by whom these measures can be implemented best.

BASIS OF ACTION #12

- Industry Clustering²⁴ is recognised as a valuable economic tool for companies and industry sectors for regional development and for national competitiveness. Regions successful in facilitating industry clusters have been found to have higher levels of productivity, research and innovation, employment and prosperity.
- The Cluster Research Network (CRN) supports the development of this concept across the island of Ireland. As clustering comes into view across the island at both a policy and implementation level, great progress is being made in individual strategic and programming approaches. In recognising and paying tribute to these individual efforts, the CRN recognises that a key problem is the lack of a common understanding and approaches to cluster-based economic development strategies. This in turn makes it difficult to embed a culture of clustering consistently into the local, regional and national ecosystems.
- The main consideration is how to use cluster organisations in the context of Smart Specialisations and skills development²⁵. The skills requirements of emerging industries are evolving and adapting while the industries themselves are evolving. In this regard, skills development efforts for emerging industries present multiple facets and stages. Efforts to support and enable the development of the corresponding workforce at each stage of development must understand the nature and dynamics of the emerging industry of interest. Cluster organisations have potential to link the available talent pool to employment opportunities and to help shape training requirements.

Action #13: Increase the provision of Micro Credentials to potential workers and learners.

BASIS OF ACTION #13

- To support and recognise the important role of Micro Credentials in enhancing the employee skills profile while limiting their absence from the day-to-day operations in the workplace, particularly for SMEs (identified by HEIs at section 5.2.3).
- To address relatively low Lifelong Learning participation rates identified in the Southern Region Education Profile (Section 3.4) of 9.7% of adults, below the State average of 11%.

Action #14: Ensure more students and workers across all sectors participate in educational courses and skills development that support the transition to a Low Carbon and Circular Economy.

BASIS OF ACTION #14

- To address the lack of demand for strategically important courses identified by Stakeholders (Section 5.2.2), particularly with respect to retrofitting, renewable energy, circular economy, environmental engineering and other sustainable engineering practices.
- To encourage construction workers to participate in courses related to the Low Carbon Economy – particularly in retrofitting – will be key to improving the energy efficiency of the Southern Region's residential stock.

²⁴ The RSES defines Clusters as a geographic or virtual concentration of interrelated companies, suppliers and associated institutions. This approach aims to put in place a favourable and connected regional business ecosystem in which new players emerge and support the development of new industrial value chains and emerging industries. Clustering is one of the five economic principles of the RSES.

²⁵ This is according to the 'Clusters and Workforce Development – Discussion Paper' prepared by the European Cluster Observatory, November 2016.

6.2 Community Education and Learning Region

A key element of this paper is to build the structure behind the Learning Region. The formulation of a network to harnesses the energy and good work already carried out in local communities is the preferred approach.

It is recommended that the Learning Region is implemented through the establishment of a **Learning Region Network**. This network will be based on the promotion of learning and Community Education across the Southern Region and will build a network of communities engaged in Lifelong Learning Activities. This will be established on UNESCO Learning City Principles. The **Learning Region Network** will build on the foundations of Cork and Limerick UNESCO Learning Cities, with the addition of Waterford as a third pillar and through the support and development of established Community Education networks.

In developing a Learning Region and enhancing our Community Education sector, this paper will support the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 – namely Quality Education – and support RSES policy for inclusive and sustainable communities, improved well-being and quality of life and will be a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage and its associated public policy challenges related to poverty and social exclusion.

The following four linked actions are proposed:

1. Developing Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City
2. Developing new initiatives across communities in the Southern Region to expand the Learning City concept as a Learning Region network.
3. Additional current and capital funding to support the development of the Southern Region's Community Education sector.
4. Support greater collaboration across education and leaning sectors to develop identifiable pathways from Community Education into further and higher education and clear career pathways.

Action #15: Develop Waterford City as a UNESCO "Learning City".

BASIS OF ACTION #15

- To bring the successful "Learning City" Concept to Waterford City to assist in further developing a culture of learning, enhance the lifelong learning participation rate and develop the skills profile of the City and wider Metropolitan Area.
- To bring change to the City and disadvantaged communities throughout the Metropolitan Area through building learning and community initiatives around the UNESCO Learning City model to increase opportunities for lifelong learning, improve levels of participation in education, increase educational attainment levels and support wider community development. (Reference Section 3 - Educational Profile on low rates of educational attainment). According to the CSO²⁶, deprivation rates were notably high in the South-East, with 19.9% of all residents experiencing deprivation as of 2019.
- To implement RSES 186 Lifelong Learning and RSES RPO 190 Lifelong Learning & Healthy Living Initiatives.
- To implement Waterford MASP PO 23 Lifelong Learning and Skills.
- To provide a third base in the Regional Knowledge Triangle in Waterford before expanding the "Learning Cities" concept to the rest of the Southern Region.
- To support and develop Waterford's role as a driver of education attainment in the South-East, acting as a hub for education and training services. Replicating successful "Learning City" initiatives in Waterford City will assist the South-East in enhancing or improving its performance in these key educational indicators, further assisting the South-East in developing a culture

²⁶ <https://data.cso.ie/#>

of learning, while reaffirming the South-East's commitment to lifelong learning and education; key components to developing high valued knowledge intensive industries.

- To address low levels of lifelong learning participation identified in research conducted by SOLAS, which found that of the eight sub-regions of Ireland, the South-East had the second lowest participation rate in lifelong learning activities in Q4 2019.

Action #16: Ensure appropriate resources are provided to the existing "Learning City" initiatives in Cork and Limerick to enhance their current activities and to encourage more engagement with their business communities.

BASIS OF ACTION #16

- To build on the work of both UNESCO Learning City initiatives, which stakeholders have identified as contributing to improving education attainment in disadvantaged communities, encouraging skills development in the workspace, promoting learning in the community, while improving the branding of their cities through learning festivals and promotional initiatives.
- To broaden the work of the UNESCO Learning City initiatives in Cork and Limerick to encourage enterprises to actively participate in the Learning City initiatives and develop the economic side of the Learning City Initiative through enhanced activities involving SMES, business and enterprise in areas such as skills development and engagement with unemployed people.
- To implement RSES 186 Lifelong Learning and RSES RPO 190 Lifelong Learning & Healthy Living Initiatives.
- To implement Cork MASP PO 20 Lifelong Learning and Skills and Limerick-Shannon MASP PO 18 Education and Access to Talent.

Action #17: Expand the "Learning City" concept to the rest of the Southern Region by developing a "Learning Region Network" (Greater detail of the "Learning Region Network" has been outlined in Section 7).

BASIS OF ACTION #17

- By applying The "Learning City" concept to other geographical areas to develop a Learning Region, a network can be built to promote Lifelong Learning across the Region.
- Development of a Learning Region Network will support capacity building activity at organisational and community level and enable groups to participate in the Learning Region.
- To implement RSES 186 Lifelong Learning and RSES RPO 190 Lifelong Learning & Healthy Living Initiatives.

Action #18: Ensure adequate resources to support to the Southern Region's Community Education Sector and provide a sustainable long-term funding model for independent Community Education providers in the Region.

BASIS OF ACTION #18

- The Community Education sector meets the learning needs of a wide and diverse range of adults, families and communities across the Southern Region, including those who have been outside of traditional formal education provision, in many instances for generations.
- Courses offered by Community Education providers play A significant role in meeting diverse range of learner needs²⁷ including a range of accredited options across Levels 1-8 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

²⁷ Research carried out by Aontas (AONTAS CEN Census 2020).

Action #19: Support greater collaboration across education and learning sectors to develop identifiable pathways from Community Education.

BASIS OF ACTION #19

- To support the important role of Community Education providers in developing and broadening the available range of learning pathways from Community Education into the more formal elements of education and into training, skills development programs and career opportunities.
- To support development of the Learning Region Network and providing the identifiable pathways from Community Education to more formal elements of education for those most distant from the labour market including people with low levels of educational attainment.
- Support for developing learning pathways through Community Education will enable the Southern Region to grow its Human Capital base and enhance the skills profile of the region.
- To support capacity building activity at organisational and community level to ensure Community Education groups are equipped to participate in the Learning Region.
- To build collaboration across Community Education, further education and training and higher education sectors around shared goals for access to learning and skills.





SECTION
Developing the
Learning Region
Network 7

7 Developing the Learning Region Network

7.1 What is the Learning Region Network?

The Learning Region Network – is a regional, county and community network that will replicate the activities of the UNESCO “Learning Cities” initiatives within the Southern Region.

7.2 What are the objectives?

The objectives of the Learning Region Network are to:

1. Deliver on improved quality of life for all citizens and communities in the Southern Region by improving access to education and learning opportunities.
2. Enhance our skills and talent proposition by developing a culture of education, Lifelong Learning and skills development.

The **Learning Region** should grow organically and develop a network of communities engaging with the Learning Region Network where there will be regional and local components. This will provide a Learning Region Network structure which will be flexible to adapt and support the various approaches to learning activities across the Southern Region.

The strategic themes for the **Learning Region Network** – which are aligned to UNESCO’s work on Learning Cities – are as follows:

1. Inclusive learning in the education system
2. Revitalised learning in families and communities
3. Effective learning for and in the workplace
4. Extended use of modern learning technologies
5. Enhanced quality in learning
6. A vibrant culture of learning throughout life
7. Sustainable Development



7.3 What is required?

1. Appointment of a **Learning Region** Co-ordinator to implement the actions necessary to develop the **Learning Region Network** (sub-section 7.4).
2. The facilities and support base of the Lead Organisation, namely the Southern Regional Assembly.
3. The facilities and cooperation of Key **Learning Region** Partners and Stakeholders including staff time to assist with working groups and organising and facilitating **Learning Region** events and meetings plus other supports such as printing, photocopying, assistance with communications, etc.

Active support and input from Local Authorities across the Southern Region to develop a Learning Region is essential. This active support can take different forms. For example, in existing Learning Cities, staff resources

are hosted by Cork City Council while the Limerick City and County Council Social Intervention Fund, that is granted to the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, funds a position of a Learning City Co-ordinator that is hosted in the Paul Partnership. Active support will provide a commitment from Local Authorities to work with the Learning Region Co-ordinator.

The **Learning Region Co-ordinator** will work with any entity who wishes to develop Learning activities at their local level. Community organisations, local authorities, local development agencies, Chambers of Commerce are just some of the entities who may want to bring the Learning City to a local level. For example, establishing 'Learning Towns' across the Southern Region would be a positive step in bringing the Learning City concept closer to people.

7.4 What does this entail?

The Learning Region Network should not be another layer in the established educational and learning framework of the Southern Region.

It will instead be a supportive and organic network that links people and communities together to focus on a strategic area (or areas) in joint initiatives and actions; thereby complimenting existing structures and activities of relevant bodies. Developing learning and leaving no-one behind are the underlining principles and motivation of the Learning Region Network.

During consultations, stakeholders identified key areas where action would be required to build a Learning Region Network and such actions would be the strategic responsibilities of the appointed **Learning Region Co-ordinator**. These fall broadly within four action areas, namely:

1. Building Community Networks and enhancing the capacity of Community Education providers to enable engagement with the Learning Region.
2. Improving Access to Education / Learning & Outreach.
3. Using Technology to improve education and learning opportunities.
4. Promoting Learning.

Development of a collaborative approach will be key for the delivery of the Learning Region Network, where Government (National, Regional and Local plus state agencies), Industry (and their representative bodies), Higher Education and Civic Society (e.g., PPN, Community based organisations) can share their knowledge and work together. This is because developing access to learning and education opportunities requires all four pillars to be involved to successfully develop the Learning Region Network. This in turn, through a more educated and skilled population, will deliver social and economic benefits to Government, Industry, Higher Education & Community. The RSES describes this approach as Shared Knowledge Working Together (SKWT)/ Eolas Comhroinnte Obair le cheile (ECOLC)²⁸.

²⁸ Also known as Quadruple Helix

Through a collaborative SKWT/ECOLC approach to Learning, the Learning Region Network can provide effective support for Lifelong Learning Initiatives in the workplace, opportunities for commercial innovation, public service innovation, social enterprise innovation and knowledge creation in a framework of sustainability. This will develop a sustainable economic model in tandem with an inclusive approach which supports more cohesive communities.

The Learning Region Network can support sustainable regional development at scale and at the same time support learning activity at local level. As the Network is developed, the potential economic and social benefits will accumulate and become greater than the sum of its parts.

7.5 Why is this important?

Building a Learning Region offers a unique opportunity to develop the UNESCO approach to supporting Learning at scale. This will be done by using all the experience and creativity of communities and people involved in learning and education to build a network of community-based learning activity.

This will assist in:

1. Providing better access to education and pathways to further education, employment.
2. Creating a culture of learning.
3. Enhancing the use of technology for education and skills development.
4. Improving quality of life / life opportunities.

The proven benefits, as identified in our stakeholder interviews, include:

- Social benefit – personal development, life skills, new opportunities.
- Economic benefit – increases skills and learning capacity.
- Reputational benefit – improves the reputation of a City, Place or Region.

The development of a Learning Region in tandem with the economic and population growth envisaged by the RSES provides Local Authorities and other stakeholders with a proven method to tackle legacies of deprivation. It will help achieve progress in disadvantages areas and marginalised communities and will ensure they are not left behind. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of addressing these issues as it will ultimately give people more control over their lives. This focus will directly address UNESCO strategic themes and can make a real difference to a person, a family, a community and a settlement. The development of a Learning Region will represent the realisation of a key enabler of the RSES. This in turn means significant implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF)²⁹.

This paper represents value for money in identifying and supporting learning activity in communities and it is an opportunity for different parts of society to come together – to share our knowledge and to work together.

²⁹ Direct impact on National Policy Objectives (NSO) 5 (Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills) and 10 (Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services).



SECTION

Conclusion 8

8 Conclusion

It is national policy to deliver effective regional development in Ireland. Key to delivering this policy position will be the ability of our Region to grow its Human Capital base, namely our skills, talent and knowledge. This will be a fundamental driver of regional economic development and social progress.

This paper has identified that the Southern Region is a considerable distance behind high performers in Lifelong Learning. Intervention is required to address this gap. It also requires an innovative approach. In this regard, the establishment of a Learning Region is a key enabler for NPF and RSES implementation as it is a step change in developing Human Capital.

Like the RSES, this paper is a co-production thus its implementation is dependent on multi-agency co-operation and co-ordination. The Southern Regional Assembly will work with others to help develop the Learning Region Network. The Assembly is committed to commencing the development of a Learning Region as it offers a unique opportunity to develop the UNESCO approach to supporting Learning at scale. It is accepted that its implementation will be an iterative process and that further updates of this paper will be required sometime in the future.

The development of a Learning Region in tandem with the economic and population growth envisaged by the RSES provides Local Authorities and other stakeholders with a proven method to tackle legacies of deprivation. It will help achieve progress in disadvantages areas and marginalised communities and will ensure they are not left behind. The Learning Region represents value for money in identifying and supporting learning activity in communities and it is an opportunity for different parts of society to come together – to share our knowledge and to work together.





Appendices

Appendix A

Relevant RPOs – that have been outlined in the Southern Regional Assembly’s RSES – are as follows:

RPO 39

It is an objective to further strengthen our higher education and further education and training sector, research, development and innovation capacity, the initiatives of the Regional Skills Forums and Lifelong Learning to match the diverse skills of our people with a choice of employment opportunities for all and to attract and retain a skilled labour force within our Region.

RPO 63 (A)

It is an objective to address the skills shortages challenges though improvements in lifelong learning rates across the Region.

RPO 68

It is an objective to develop and coordinate the regional investment plan, to enable enterprise infrastructure and initiatives of economic, education and skills development to improve our ranking under the EU Regional Competitiveness Index.

RPO 184

It is an objective to support the further enhancement of higher education provision in the Region through the establishment of two new high-quality universities of international standing, the Technological University for the South-East (TUSE), including development of the Wexford Campus, and the Munster Technological University (MTU) and other future collaborations between third level institutions.

RPO 186

The RSES recognises the value and necessity for lifelong learning. It is an objective to support the further development of the Region as a Learning Region support the expansion of the Learning City initiative to other urban and rural centres of population and support the initiatives of the Irish Network of Learning Cities and preparation and implementation of a Learning Region Strategy

RPO 187

It is an objective to promote co-ordinated investment in infrastructure comprised of regional education and training providers, local government agencies and industry to facilitate a collaborative approach to regional skills development, aligned to the needs and opportunities of regional economies and to promoting lifelong learning to all citizens. Local authorities should ensure that the development of education and training facilities is informed by an appropriate level of environmental assessment.

RPO 188

It is an objective to retain and enhance the Regional Skills Fora as a permanent part of the education and training infrastructure.

RPO 189

It is an objective to increase the investment in addressing our Region’s educational and skills needs through investment in the higher education and further education and training sector, recognising that:

- a. The further education sector is a lead contact point for citizens to re-engage with learning and skills development;
- b. The strong partnerships already evident between the training and education institutions and agencies such as the Regional Skills Fora in addressing development and innovation capacity;
- c. The important role of the Education and Training Boards in the further education sector, creating a diversity of skills, education, lifelong learning and enabling access to job opportunities for citizens; d.

The critical role of higher education in the continued evolution of the Regional effort to identify and address skills gaps, retraining needs, continuing professional development needs, and the future needs for a sustainable, knowledge driven economy.

RPO 190 (A)

It is an objective to foster an interagency approach to integrating Lifelong Learning and Healthy City initiatives across the Region as essential components as exemplified in Cork and Limerick's attainment of UNESCO Learning City status and extend the UNESCO Learning City status to Waterford city, to create a regional knowledge triangle is an explicit aim of the RSES.

RPO 190 (B)

It is an objective to support the Irish Network of Learning Cities and preparation and implementation of a Learning Region strategy

Cork MASP Policy Objective 20 (A)

Support Cork as a Learning City and seek investment in initiatives which supports the Cork Learning City initiative, support Cork's role in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and support the spread of such initiatives throughout the metropolitan area and wider region.

Cork MASP Policy Objective 20 (B)

Support initiatives under the Learning City Key Strategic Actions 2017-2021

Limerick and Shannon MASP Policy Objective 18 (A)

It is an objective to support the existing educational facilities in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area which includes UL, Mary Immaculate, LIT and the Shannon College of Hotel Management as critical drivers of economic development and the fostering of an innovative, knowledge-based economy for the Metropolitan Area.

Limerick and Shannon MASP Policy Objective 18 (C)

It is an objective to support investment in Higher Education Institutes, Education and Training Board, apprenticeships and skills development in the Metropolitan Area as an enabler for jobs growth. This includes, inter alia, investment in LIT, UL, associated research institutes and facilities, the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board and initiatives applied to the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area under the Mid-West Regional Skills Forum and Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan (REP)

Limerick and Shannon MASP Policy Objective 18 (D)

It is an objective to support Limerick as a Learning City, and Limerick's role in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. It is also an objective to seek investment in initiatives under the Learning City initiative and to support the spread of such initiatives in the Metropolitan Area and wider region.

Waterford MASP Policy Objective 18 (D)

It is an objective to support the existing educational facilities in the Waterford Metropolitan Area as critical drivers of economic development and the fostering of an innovative, knowledge-based economy for the Metropolitan Area.

Waterford MASP Policy Objective 23

It is an objective to support measures to develop Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City, including Community Education initiatives and support for lifelong learning and skills training, recognising the requirements for accessible Irish Language Learning for children and adults and linguistic diversity in a multi-cultural society through the development of the necessary infrastructure and facilities, subject to the outcome of environmental assessments and the planning process.

Appendix B

A sample of questions that were provided to stakeholders have been included in Appendix B. Sample include questions that were asked of specific ETBs, Regional Skills Managers and Higher Education Institutes.

TIPPERARY EDUCATION & TRAINING BOARD (TETB) QUESTIONS

- The ETBs work with policymakers and employers to align education and training provision with the skills needs of the Irish economy. What sectors are the TETB focused on, in terms of its provision of education and training services? Of these sectors, which are most affected by the issue of skills shortages?
- For participants that complete a TETB program, what sectors do they generally gain employment in after completing the program? *i.e., Hospitality, Construction, Manufacturing etc.?*
- For participants that complete a TETB program, what proportion of participants move onto 3rd level education? *i.e., Generally, speaking, about a third of participants move onto 3rd level education etc.?*
- Considering advanced economies are becoming increasingly technology and knowledge driven, to what extent is the TETB focusing on the skills needed to capture future employment opportunities in these areas? *i.e., Skills for ICT and data, business services, renewable energy etc.?*
- The rate of individuals undertaking lifelong learning activities in Ireland has improved considerably in recent years and is now above the EU average¹. Is there any particular reason for this improvement? *i.e., more investment in ETB infrastructure and Education in general, employees undertaking training courses outside of work hours, greater awareness of courses etc.?*
- The TETB clearly contributes to economic development through its provision of education and training services. In general, what additional resources would the TETB like to see provided, in order to enhance this contribution? *i.e. More funding for and advertisement of TETB courses, more skill development options for low skilled workers, greater collaboration from Higher Education bodies to allow smoother transition from ETBs to 3rd level education, greater capital investment in TETB facilities and training equipment etc.?*
- As a result of COVID-19, a lot of people may need to be reskilled or upskilled. In your opinion, what additional resources will the TETB need in order to tackle this issue?
- Limerick and Cork form part of the Irish Learning City Network and would have “Learning City” initiatives in place. In your opinion, how can the “Learning City” initiative be expanded to other urban centres in Tipperary? *i.e., Greater funding to develop similar initiatives for urban centres such as Clonmel or Thurles, development of a wider “Learning Region” stakeholder committee that allows for further collaboration and peer learning for government bodies, strategic plan needs to be developed for urban centre in question, greater collaboration with government bodies, Tipperary Learning Festival, etc.?*
- In your opinion what are the economic benefits of expanding the “Learning City” initiative to other urban centres in Tipperary? *i.e., uptake in lifelong learning activities, uptake in skills development courses, improving skills profile of Tipperary etc.?*
- Can you foresee any particular challenges in expanding the “Learning City” initiative to other urban centres in Tipperary?

LIMERICK & CLARE EDUCATION & TRAINING BOARD (LCETB) QUESTIONS

- The ETBs work with policymakers and employers to align education and training provision with the skills needs of the Irish economy. What sectors are the LCETB focused on, in terms of its provision of education and training services? Of these sectors, which are most affected by the issue of skills shortages?
- For participants that complete a LCETB program, what sectors do they generally gain employment in after completing the program? *i.e., Hospitality, Construction, Manufacturing etc.?*
- For participants that complete a LCETB program, what proportion of participants move onto 3rd level education? *i.e., generally, speaking, a third of participants move onto 3rd level education etc.?*
- Considering advanced economies are becoming increasingly technology and knowledge driven, to what extent is the LCETB focusing on the skills needed to capture future employment opportunities in these areas? *i.e., Skills for ICT and data, business services, renewable energy etc.?*
- It has been noted that some employers can be reluctant to let staff undertake skills development courses. In your opinion, why is this the case and what is needed in order to overcome this issue? *i.e., Issue due to potential disruption to employees work schedules, mitigated with flexible course times of LCETB etc.?*
- The rate of individuals undertaking lifelong learning activities in the Mid-West is below the latest Irish average of 13 per cent and the EU's 2020 target of 15 per cent¹. Is there any particular reason for this? *i.e., Lack of investment in ETB infrastructure and Education in general, resistance from employees in undertaking training courses outside of work hours etc.?*
- The LCETB clearly contributes to economic development in the Mid-West through its provision of education and training services. In general, what additional resources would the LCETB like to see provided, in order to enhance this contribution? *i.e. More funding for and advertisement of LCETB courses in the Mid-West, more skill development options for low skilled workers, greater collaboration from Higher Education bodies to allow smoother transition from ETBs to 3rd level education, greater capital investment in LCETB's facilities and training equipment etc.?*
- How has the "Learning Limerick" initiative enhanced the skills proposition of Limerick City and Limerick County? *i.e., Launch of LearningLimerick.ie and Limerick's Lifelong learning festival have raised awareness of importance of lifelong learning and skills development etc.?*
- What additional resources would the LCETB like to see provided in order to enhance the contribution of the "Learning Limerick" initiative? Outside of additional funding, what else can be done in order to enhance this contribution? *i.e., Additional funding to allow greater access of LCETB's services and remote learning, additional capital investment for training facilities and learning centres, more funding to launch additional skill development initiatives etc.?*
- How can the "Learning City" initiative be expanded to other urban centres in the Mid-West region? *i.e., Greater funding to develop similar initiatives for urban centres such as Ennis etc.?*
- Outside of additional funding, what else can be done in order to expand the "Learning City" initiative to other urban centres in the Mid-West region? *Development of a wider "Learning Region" stakeholder committee that allows for further collaboration and peer learning etc.?*
- To what extent has the LCETB's involvement with the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Enterprise Plans contributed to the work / services of your ETB?
- To what extent has the LCETB's involvement with the Higher Education Institutes and Local Authorities of the Mid-West region contributed to the work / services of your ETB?

WATERFORD IT QUESTIONS

- Can you outline the key strengths of the educational offering of Waterford IT, in terms of skills development and lifelong learning? *i.e., provision of courses with respect to ICT, Engineering, Science, Medicine, Business, Arts, Health, full time, part time, remote learning offering, good linkages with industry etc.?*
- Considering advanced economies are becoming increasingly technology and knowledge driven, how has Waterford IT adapted its educational offering to reflect such changes? *i.e., are their new courses in ICT, Renewable energy technologies, Advance technologies, Science, Engineering etc.?*
- To what extent has Waterford IT's involvement with the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Enterprise Plans contributed or changed your educational offering?
- The rate of individuals undertaking lifelong learning activities in Ireland has improved considerably in recent years and is now above the EU average. In your opinion, is there any particular reason for this improvement? *More employees undertaking training courses outside of work hours, provision of springboard courses, greater employer and employee awareness of courses, greater awareness of benefits of lifelong learning etc.?*
- What are the main challenges facing Waterford IT in the short / long term, in terms of providing learners with appropriate skills and training? *i.e., Impact of COVID-19, need to social distance in higher education facilities, transition to more e-learning activities, third level education infrastructure needs to be upgraded etc?*
- Waterford IT clearly contributes to the Southern Region's skills, talent and education proposition. In general, what additional resources would you like to see provided, in order to enhance this contribution and to tackle challenges facing the college, particularly in light of the outbreak of COVID-19? *Greater capital investment in third level education infrastructure, investment needed to accommodate social distancing measures, enhancement of digital infrastructure, delivery of National Broadband Plan to facilitate remote learning, more linkages with industry, more funding for springboard courses etc?*
- Waterford IT is aiming to become a "Technological University". How will this improve the region's offering as a destination for 3rd level education, skills development and lifelong learning? In this regard, what are your views on the wider economic impact for Waterford and the South-East?
- Limerick and Cork form part of the Irish Learning City Network and have "Learning City" initiatives in place. The Southern Regional Assembly are now seeking to extend the UNESCO Learning City status to Waterford. How would you see this complimenting the development of TUSE and what would be your view be on the themes and focus of the Learning City in Waterford?

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK QUESTIONS

- Can you outline the key strengths of the educational offering of University College Cork, in terms of skills development and lifelong learning? *i.e., provision of courses with respect to ICT, Engineering, Science, Medicine, Business, Arts, Health, full time, part time, remote learning offering, good linkages with industry etc.?*
- Considering advanced economies are becoming increasingly technology and knowledge driven, how has University College Cork adapted its educational offering to reflect such changes? *i.e., are their new courses in ICT, Renewable energy technologies, Advance technologies, Science, Engineering etc.?*
- To what extent has University College Cork's involvement with the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Enterprise Plans contributed or changed your educational offering?
- The rate of individuals undertaking lifelong learning activities in Ireland has improved considerably in recent years and is now above the EU average. In your opinion, is there any particular reason for this improvement? *More employees undertaking training courses outside of work hours, provision of springboard courses, greater employer and employee awareness of courses, greater awareness of benefits of lifelong learning etc.?*
- What are the main challenges facing University College Cork in the short / long term, in terms of providing learners with appropriate skills and training? *i.e., Impact of COVID-19, need to social distance in higher education facilities, transition to more e-learning activities, third level education infrastructure needs to be upgraded etc?*
- The University College Cork clearly contributes to the Southern Region's skills, talent and education proposition. In general, what additional resources would you like to see provided, in order to enhance this contribution and to tackle challenges facing the college, particularly in light of the outbreak of COVID-19? *Greater capital investment in third level education infrastructure, investment needed to accommodate social distancing measures, enhancement of digital infrastructure, delivery of National Broadband Plan to facilitate remote learning, more linkages with industry, more funding for springboard courses etc?*
- Limerick and Cork form part of the Irish Learning City Network and have "Learning City" initiatives in place. In your opinion, should the "Learning City" initiative be expanded to other urban centres in the South West or the wider Southern Region? If so, how could this be achieved? *i.e., Greater funding to develop similar initiatives for urban centres in South West, development of a wider "Learning Region" stakeholder committee that allows for further collaboration and peer learning for relevant government bodies, strategic plan needs to be developed for area in question, greater collaboration with government bodies, designated officer to assist in this regard, South West Learning Festival, etc.?*
- In your opinion what are the economic benefits of expanding the "Learning City" initiative to other urban centres in the South West or the wider Southern Region? *i.e., uptake in lifelong learning activities, uptake in skills development courses, improving skills profile of the region, greater awareness of benefits of lifelong learning etc.?*

REGIONAL SKILLS MANAGER QUESTIONS (SOUTH-EAST SAMPLE)

- Are there any particular sectors / skillsets that the South-East Regional Skills Forum intend to focus on in order to enhance the skills of workers in the region?
- Considering advanced economies are becoming increasingly technology and knowledge driven, to what extent is the South-East Regional Skills Forums focusing on the skills needed to capture future employment opportunities in these sectors? ***i.e., is there a big focus on ICT, science, renewable energy skills etc.?***
- Can you provide any specific examples of skills programs that have led to greater skill development or enterprise development in the region? If so, how could such programs be enhanced in order to improve the region's performance in these areas?
- The rate of individuals undertaking lifelong learning activities in Ireland has improved considerably in recent years and is now above the EU average¹. Is there any particular reason for this improvement? ***i.e., more investment in ETB infrastructure and Education in general, employees undertaking training courses outside of work hours, greater awareness of courses etc.?***
- The South-East Regional Skills Forum clearly contributes to economic development in the South-East. In general, what additional resources would you like to see provided, in order to enhance this contribution? ***i.e. More funding for and advertisement of ETB courses in the South-East, more skill development courses for low skilled workers, greater collaboration from Higher Education bodies to allow smoother transition from ETBs to 3rd level education, greater capital investment in education and training facilities and equipment etc.?***
- As a result of COVID-19, a lot of people may need to be reskilled or upskilled. In your opinion, what additional resources will education and training providers need in order to tackle this issue?
- Limerick and Cork form part of the Irish Learning City Network and would have "Learning City" initiatives in place. In your opinion, how can the "Learning City" initiative be expanded to Waterford City? What would you like to see the Learning City initiative achieve for Waterford? ***i.e., Greater funding to develop similar initiatives for urban centres such as Waterford, development of a wider "Learning Region" stakeholder committee that allows for further collaboration and peer learning for relevant government bodies, strategic plan needs to be developed for urban centre in question, greater collaboration with government bodies, South-East Learning Festival, etc.?***
- In your opinion what are the economic benefits of expanding the "Learning City" initiative to Waterford City and potentially to other urban centres in the South-East? ***i.e., uptake in lifelong learning activities, uptake in skills development courses, improving skills profile of South-East etc.?***
- Can you foresee any particular challenges in expanding the "Learning City" initiative to Waterford City and to other urban centres in the South-East?
- Can you foresee any particular challenges in expanding the "Learning City" initiative?
- In your opinion, should the "Learning City" initiative be expanded to other urban centres in the South East or the wider Southern Region? If so, how could this be achieved? ***i.e., Greater funding to develop similar initiatives for urban centres in South East, development of a wider "Learning Region" stakeholder committee that allows for further collaboration and peer learning for relevant government bodies, strategic plan needs to be developed for area in question, greater collaboration with government bodies, designated officer to assist in this regard, South East Learning Festival, etc.?***
- In your opinion what are the economic benefits of expanding the "Learning City" initiative to other urban centres in the South East or the wider Southern Region? ***i.e., uptake in lifelong learning activities, uptake in skills development courses, improving skills profile of the region, greater awareness of benefits of lifelong learning etc.?***
- Can you foresee any particular challenges in expanding the "Learning City" initiative?





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