

National Planning Framework Submission

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INTRODUCTION

The South East consists of Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, and Wexford. It accounts for almost 11 percent of the population of the state and generates 8 percent of national GDP.¹ Manufacturing, agriculture and services, tourism, fishing and aquaculture are the mainstays of the region's economy.

The Agrifood sector accounts for a sizeable proportion of production and employment. In recent years, however, there has been more of a shift towards services. Foreign direct investment in the region is mainly in electronics and precision engineering, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, as well as internationally traded services.

JOB CREATION

Of the net jobs added nationally through IDA-support ventures, less than one percent were in the South East.

The region also has an unemployment rate of 9.3 percent, with that of Waterford city at 18.8 percent, the highest in the state. It is the only region that is falling short of the Action Plan for Jobs target.

The National Planning Framework needs more specific job creation targets. There is a structural imbalance in terms of job creation in the state and this has to be recognised by the National Planning Framework with a positive bias incorporated into its objectives.

Under any new National Planning Framework, job creation targets must meet population growth demographics.

It is vital that capital spend and the policies of each government department are closely aligned to targets in the National Planning Framework.

Regional targets set out in any framework must be met in all the main population centres of the region, not simply in Cork and Limerick for example, and not Waterford or Wexford.

CITY INFRASTRUCTURE:

The development of the north quays in Waterford city is necessary to increase city centre office space, hotel bed capacity and the region's retail offering.

¹ See WIT, *South East Economic Monitor July 2017* for a breakdown of these and other figures relating to the South East.

The city also needs to enhance the connectivity between the North and South Quays through the development of a pedestrian bridge.

EDUCATION:

The region has 20,000 students in full-time higher education yet receives less than two percent of capital investment in higher education. The Southeast is the only region in the state without a University. The regions needs a university which is focused on the social and economic needs of the region and its people.

It is crucial that a Technological University of the Southeast has the ability to borrow, receives baseline funding for R&D, is independent and is fully autonomous. There needs to be a level playing field for Institutes of Technology with existing Universities.

It is vital that a sustainable funding model is put in place. Waterford Institute of Technology had its core funding cut from €40m in 2008 to €26m in 2016. At present 85% of core funding is for payroll costs. This is unsustainable.

A Technological University also needs a capital investment plan. There is an obvious need to progress plans to build an engineering block on the grounds of WIT and an extension of laboratory space to increase life sciences based subjects.

A Technological University will need a Governance centre or Hub. Each campus will need a head of campus accountable to the main Governance centre. It is recommended that the main centre be based in Waterford.

Priorities for education in the south-east include:

- Designation of Waterford and Carlow Institutes as a Technological University of the Southeast.
- Ensure a Technological University is embedded in the social, cultural and economic needs of the Southeast.
- Incorporate Higher Education Institutions into a regional strategy to ensure a matching of education provision with industry needs, allowing policy to guide and support regional development and to ensure actions taken at national, regional and HEI level support each other.
- A Technological University must deliver new engagement models bringing together education at all levels, technology, research, business and entrepreneurship producing industry-ready graduates and new innovation models that drive the economic development of the region.
- A holistic and integrated regional strategy to improve educational attainment through increased focus in lifelong learning, up-skilling and greater flexibility in course delivery.

- The development of a specific Labour Market Activation Programme for those with literacy and numeracy needs.
- The integration of literacy and numeracy into all publically funded education and training programmes.
- Create greater connections and collaboration across all training and education programmes and providers.
- Create greater awareness of skills development and learning opportunities in the region through local information campaigns, open days and exhibitions.
- Create greater opportunities for engagement with employers in the important areas of training, re-skilling and up-skilling.

The south East as a region has low attainment rates, and to combat this the region needs the following:

- An educational attainment strategy to include a technological university and targeted investment in the primary and secondary level as well as ETBs in the region
- A skills strategy to ensure that the skills are in the region to attract inward investment
- Increase lab space at WIT to ensure we have sufficient graduates to attract more life sciences companies

TRANSPORT

In terms of transport for the region, there needs to be a development of a regional Transport Hub that aligns road, rail and port infrastructure, maximises use of both ports (Rosslare and Waterford), ensures completion of the Enniscorthy and New Ross Bypass and improvements to the N24 to greatly improve the Limerick to Waterford road corridor.

- Waterford to be a regional transport hub
- Completion of the New Ross bypass
- The relocation of Waterford train station to the redeveloped north quays
- Improvements to the Wexford to Limerick road
- Improvements in the region's rail corridor
- Development of Waterford airport to increase connectivity with Britain and Europe

In terms of Waterford and Rosslare Ports:

- A strategic review of rail access to Rosslare Europort to allow the port reach its full potential.

- Deepen a berth at Rosslare Europort from 7 metres to 9 metres, where feasible, in accordance with the Habitats Directive, to allow the port realise its potential as a strategic asset supporting regional exports and tourism.
- To explore the feasibility of the deepening of the Port of Waterford and exploit its commercial potential as a load-on load-off Port.
- The development of key strategic sites such as Belview in South Kilkenny and Knockhouse in Waterford.
- The creation of an Independent Port Authority for Rosslare Europort with a mandate to develop the range and business activity at the Port.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The south east region needs increased capacity at University Hospital Waterford. Since 2009, we have seen a serious lack of spend and investment at University Hospital Waterford. While demand is on the increase, capacity has been in sharp decline.

The number of hospital cancellations has doubled, the number of patients on trollies has increased by 65%, spend on agency staff has trebled and the number of patients outsourced has increased by 100%. All of this points to a hospital in decline, struggling to meet patient need.

In 2015, the number of outpatient hospital cancellations was 8,568 compared to 4,490 in 2013. The number of those lying on hospital trollies up until early September for this year was 2,122, compared to 1,187 for the previous year. The number of patients outsourced has soared from 3,085 in 2013 to 6,203 in 2015.

Meanwhile, operational and capital funding is less than it was in 2008 and agency spend has rocketed. This indicates a serious lack of capacity and an increase in patient wait times.

All of these figures point to systemic deficiencies and an overall lack of capacity. The hospital has a number of pressure points where waiting times are at an all-time high including orthopaedics, radiology and urology. It is obvious that the hospital needs serious capital and operational investment. It is imperative that significant increases in funding are provided as demand is on the increase.

An increased population needs to be cared for. This means:

- More community nursing units
- More supports for children and adults with disabilities
- 24/7 emergency cardiac cover
- More capacity in the acute hospital
- More social services and home care

The National Planning Framework also needs to undertake a poverty mapping exercise. Communities within areas that face higher levels of poverty need greater supports

There is a need for a plan for rural towns and villages in County Waterford within the national planning framework that recognises the unique circumstances and unique offering of each town, the development of clusters where towns and villages combine to offer joint offerings in tourism, heritage, and festivals

The Framework also needs to recognise the importance of services to rural communities, such as post offices.

CONCLUSION

The new National Planning Framework must ensure that job creation targets are clearly aligned with population targets. The ability of regions to increase their population will depend on job creation.

The setting of job creation targets must also have as an objective creating a level playing field to address regional disparities in job creation

The Framework must be closely aligned to the National Capital Plan to ensure that population and job creation targets are met.

A mapping exercise must be done in all areas where unemployment is higher than the national average to ascertain as to why it is difficult to create jobs, what challenges these areas face and what solutions will be put in place to enable these areas and regions meet the targets set