

Impact Report Local Enterprise Office Carlow

*Acknowledging
10 years of supporting
Local Enterprise in
County Carlow
2014-2024*



10
YEARS | Local
Enterprise
Office



Plan

Start

Grow

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CONTACT US:

Email: enterprise@carlowcoco.ie

Phone: 059-9129783

Director of Services: *Michael Rainey*

Head of Economic Development & Enterprise: *Kieran Comerford*

Assistant Head of Economic Development & Enterprise: *Séamus Doran*

Welcome from Coilín O'Reilly

I welcome you to this report celebrating the achievements of Carlow's Local Enterprise Office (LEO) over the last decade.

The LEO in Carlow is a key part of the economic ecosystem of the County and is the keystone resource hub for entrepreneurs in Carlow.

Since its inception in 2014, the partnership between Enterprise Ireland and Carlow County Council, which supports the LEO programme, has remained dedicated to its core mission of furnishing both budding and established small businesses with bespoke advice, specialized training, and vital financial backing to foster their growth and success.

This retrospective analysis reflects upon the LEO's pivotal role within the local enterprise landscape from 2014 to 2023, as we recognise a decade of the Local Enterprise Offices' contributions to the economy of Carlow.

At the heart of Carlow County Council's operational philosophy lies the synapse between the national enterprise strategy to drive employment growth in Ireland and the intimate connection it maintains with the local business ecosystem. Carlow County Council actively engages with a diverse spectrum of businesses daily, delivering invaluable support tailored to their unique needs, while remaining agile to adapt to the dynamic demands of its clientele.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of our approach, as it works synergistically with neighbouring LEOs in the region and local stakeholders.

In addition to the programme supported by Enterprise Ireland, our Economic Development Unit also operates locally funded programs in areas such as Tourism, Festivals & Events, and Enterprise Centres but also manages a diverse portfolio of EU projects.

Looking ahead, we are poised to continue our unwavering commitment to Carlow's business community through a spectrum of pivotal projects and support mechanisms while leveraging partnerships with stakeholders at local, national and international levels.

With the steadfast support of elected members, we remain resolute in our dedication to empowering ambitious entrepreneurs across County Carlow to envision, establish, and expand their enterprises in 2024 and beyond.

Coilín O'Reilly,
Chief Executive Officer, Carlow County Council



LEO In Numbers 2014 - 2023

Local Enterprise Office Supports in Numbers

Number of Grants Approved
673

66
Priming Grants
€1.6M

102
Business Expansion Grants
€2.3M

1
Agile Innovation Fund
48K

4
Grad Start Grants
120K

49
Feasibility Study Grants
€454K

5
Energy Efficiency Grants
€18.6k

45
TAME Grants
€70K

SYOB Programmes
78

401
Trading Online Voucher
€864K

Training & Networking Programme Budget
€5.7M

Total Value of Grants
€5.6M

Training & Networking Participants
15608

Training Programmes & Events
742

Mentoring Sessions
2280

Digital for Business Supports
13

SYOB Participants
880

Lean for Business Supports
130

Green for Business Supports
66

Student Enterprise Programme Participants
6000



Grant Aid – Investment in SMEs

The Local Enterprise Office plays a crucial role in fostering business growth by offering grant aid to budding entrepreneurs and established businesses alike. Since 2014 the Local Enterprise Office has provided over €5.6 million in 673 offers of grant aid to businesses throughout Carlow. These allocations are from the LEOs core grant offerings such as the Feasibility Grant, Priming Grant and Business Expansion Grant. Over the past 10 years the Local Enterprise Office has also supported Carlow businesses to access other grants such as Grad Start, the Agile Innovation Fund and the LEO Innovation Investment Fund.

These grants serve as invaluable financial support, enabling businesses to invest in various areas such as research and development, expansion, marketing, and innovation. By providing this financial assistance, the Local Enterprise Office empowers businesses to accelerate their growth trajectory and contribute to the economic development of County Carlow. Through our strategic allocation of grant aid, the Local Enterprise Office has encouraged entrepreneurship, stimulated job creation and fostered a vibrant and dynamic Carlow business ecosystem.

Local Enterprise Office Supports in Numbers

TYPE OF GRANT	NUMBER OF GRANTS APPROVED	APPROVED AMOUNT €
Business Expansion	102	€2,395,042.91
Priming	66	€1,668,928.18
Feasibility	49	€454,945.62
TAME	45	€70,804.16
Trading Online Voucher	401	€864,432.81
Grad Start	4	€120,000.00
Agile Innovation Fund	1	€48,000.00
Energy Efficiency	5	€18,633.00
TOTAL	673	€5,640,786.68

Measure 1 – Case Study – Eskimo Software

Eskimo Software is a business which has availed of a broad range of Local Enterprise Office supports to start up, grow and develop exciting export markets.

Eskimo Software is a software provider which has developed a lead management platform for the motor industry. The business was founded after identifying a gap in the marketplace for an integrated lead management platform which would integrate leads generated both online and on the shop floor.

Conor Moran, founder of Eskimo Software, developed his business idea through participation in the New Frontiers programme. New Frontiers is a partnership between the Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and the third level education sector which provides financial support, professional training and support services for entrepreneurs who have innovative business concepts which show potential for significant growth.

Eskimo Software’s growth over the following years was facilitated by access to Local Enterprise Office Priming and Business Expansion Grants. Like many software development companies one of Eskimo Software’s biggest costs is staff and the Local Enterprise Office grants provided financial support to hire new members of staff.

After testing its business model and establishing itself as the leading provider of its type in the Irish motor industry, Eskimo Software became ambitious to grow overseas. With the support of a Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME) grant from the Local Enterprise Office they were able to undertake market development activities in the Middle East. This work has allowed

them to develop partnerships which have led to new Middle Eastern customers in the UAE, Oman and Kuwait. Eskimo Software has also secured new customers in Britain, Spain and Australia from their base in Carlow.

According to Conor Moran, founder of Eskimo Software, the Irish software industry is one which offers huge potential to develop export sales – “The Irish software industry is uniquely positioned to excel in developing export sales due to its highly skilled workforce, culture of innovation, and strategic location. Eskimo Software has been able to develop an international customer base while being headquartered in Carlow.”

He added “Engagement with the Local Enterprise Office has been critical to our growth and we will continue to work with the Local Enterprise Office in the years to come. The LEO provided us with grant aid to hire staff at critical growth periods and their export grant helped us to explore overseas markets which are now the central part of our growth strategy.”

As a sign of the impressive growth of Eskimo Software, the business has been chosen to represent Carlow in the National Enterprise Awards 2024.





Measure 1 – Case Study Vision Green Consultancy

Carlow Company **Vision Green Consultancy** supports businesses in developing comprehensive sustainability reporting strategies through their software solution. By helping businesses measure, monitor, and communicate their environmental and social impacts, Vision Green is enabling companies to become more transparent and accountable in their sustainability efforts.

Vision Green contacted the Local Enterprise Office for support when they were looking to develop new overseas markets.

Local Enterprise Office Carlow helped Vision Green with this through supports such as a Business Expansion Grant. The Business Expansion Grant is designed to assist the business in its growth phase after the initial 18-month start-up period. This support enabled Vision Green to hire two new staff members, a typical use of such grants.

The Local Enterprise Office worked in a development capacity with Vision Green to identify their current and future needs to prepare them to scale up effectively. The support provided to Vision Green was not just financial but extended to guidance in sales and marketing activities for Export Markets.

Having received the Business Expansion Grant, Vision Green took the first step into the world of exporting through a Local Enterprise Office Carlow Trade Mission to Scotland. This involved an intensive training on approach to sales, trade expectations, negotiation and delivery which was followed up by pre-arranged meetings with clients. For Vision Green, it was not just about selling across borders; it was about breaking down barriers, creating alliances and navigating the

complexities of exporting for the first time.

This export programme played a vital role in boosting Vision Green’s capabilities and made a significant contribution to their success. Expanding into global markets has significantly future-proofed and de-risked Vision Green.

Vision Green recognises the value of continuous support from the Local Enterprise Office : “The Local Enterprise Office have been a huge asset to our business and supported us all the time, it’s a testament to the importance of a supportive ecosystem for businesses looking to expand and enter global markets.”

Overall, this success story highlights the symbiotic relationship between clients of the Local Enterprise Office and growing enterprises, showcasing how strategic collaborations and well targeted grants can contribute to the success and sustainability of businesses.



Measure 1 – Case Study - Ardattin Embroidery

Ciara Stanley, a young female entrepreneur, has developed not one but three businesses in County Carlow. Ciara started her entrepreneurship journey with Ardattin Embroidery in 2015. Ardattin Embroidery specialise in custom embroidered clothing, whether it's just one garment or an entire range of items, corporate wear, or gifts. Ciara expanded this business in 2022 by introducing a new embroidery machine with the support of a Local Enterprise Office grant.

Ciara also opened Coppengh House Farm shop, situated on the outskirts of Tullow, with her husband Robert in August 2022, where they produce their own beef and sell it directly to the customer. Both Ciara and Robert have a passion for high quality food and locally produced produce, which they aim to encourage in their shop. They also use the shop and farm to help consumers learn and understand where their food comes from and the importance of supporting local food producers.

In November 2022, Ciara had an opportunity to purchase another business, Ballybar Ireland. Ballybar Ireland is an established Irish brand which produces a range of stylish and practical shirts. Ballybar Ireland's range of shirts are both beautiful and practical for a community that lives in and loves the outdoor lifestyle. Ballybar Ireland create clothing that is not just stylish but comfortable, hard wearing, and offers a standard of high quality.



In 2023, Ciara was the worthy winner of two categories of the Powerhouse Women in Business Network Awards - Best Newcomer/Startup of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year.

Ciara has also won the Google 'You're the Business Competition' with the support of the Local Enterprise Office 'You're The Business' is a platform to help Irish SMEs to grow their digital footprint and expand internationally.



Business Training, Networking and Capacity Building

The business mentoring, training and networking services offered by the Local Enterprise Office are the most common LEO supports availed of by businesses in Carlow. From 2014 to 2023 Local Enterprise Office Carlow organised 742 separate events which were attended by almost 16,000 people engaged in business in Carlow. In the same time the LEO offered mentoring support to almost 2,300 people.

The Local Enterprise Office designs a range of training programmes to support business people at all stages of the business life cycle and cover a huge variety of business topics. One of the most popular training programmes is the 'Start Your Own Business' programme which runs several times every year and supports people who are interested in exploring self-employment for the first time. At the other end of the scale our Management Development Programmes help established business owners who want to transition their businesses into the next phase of its development. The LEOs mentoring services provides confidential one-to-one advice and support to business owners to help them deal with strategy and issues within their businesses. Many business owners availed of mentoring to help them plan approaches to overcome many of the challenges which appeared over the past decade including Brexit and Covid.

The LEO's networking events have always proven to be hugely popular with the local business community and their reputation means business owners now travel from all over Ireland to attend events in Carlow. Some highlights from the past 10 years include "The Business Picnic" which ran from 2014-2019, the Powerhouse Picnic for Carlow's female entrepreneurs and Carlow Business Day.

Training & Networking Participants	15608
Training Programmes & Events	742
SYOB Programmes	78
SYOB Participants	880
Mentoring Sessions	2280
Digital for Business Supports	13
Lean for Business Supports	130
Green for Business Supports	66
Student Enterprise Programme Participants	6000





Measure 2 – Student Enterprise Programme

Secondary schools in Carlow have always embraced the opportunity to allow their students experience entrepreneurship through the Student Enterprise Programme. Each year up to 11 Carlow schools enter the competition with up to 160 mini companies being formed to compete within their school and against the rest of the County.

The Student Enterprise Programme (SEP) is an initiative to foster entrepreneurship among students in Carlow by providing young people with hands-on experience and skills in business and entrepreneurship. Encouraging students to develop their own business ideas not only helps them learn valuable skills but also instils a sense of creativity, innovation, and initiative.

Investing in education and skills training is crucial, as well as providing mentorship and networking opportunities for young entrepreneurs. Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all young people, regardless of background or circumstances, is essential for fostering a thriving enterprise culture in Ireland.

Competing for awards in different categories can further motivate students to put their best effort into their projects and showcase their talents and ideas. The Student Enterprise Programme is a great platform for students to explore their entrepreneurial aspirations and gain practical experience that can benefit them in their future careers. The Student Enterprise Programme recognises outstanding achievements that focus on real-life issues. Awards like the Smart Business Award and Sustainability Award can provide students with a platform to showcase their innovative solutions to problems and demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills in action.

Recognizing and rewarding students for their achievements not only boosts their confidence and motivation but also encourages them to continue exploring their entrepreneurial potential. By focusing on real-life problems, the SEP helps students develop practical and relevant solutions that address current societal or economic needs.

These awards not only acknowledge the hard work and creativity of students but also serve as a testament

to their ability to think critically, problem-solve, and make a positive impact in the world around them. The SEP's emphasis on real-life challenges ensures that students are equipped with the skills and mindset needed to succeed in the business world.

Carlow's impressive track record at the **National Finals of the Student Enterprise Awards** showcases the entrepreneurial spirit thriving in the region.

Some of the notable achievements over the past number of years;

HUDEBA from Borris Vocational School & Rapid from Presentation College Askea: These student enterprises from Carlow secured victories, demonstrating their innovation and business acumen.

"School of Sound": An event management company from **Tullow Community School** received the **Social Media Award**. Their effective use of social platforms set them apart.

Clodagh Brophy's Enterprise: Clodagh, representing **St. Leo's College**, won the **Most Effective Social Media Campaign Award** in the senior category with her creation, the **"Junior Cert Science Dictionary"**. Her impactful campaign resonated with the judges.

Monarch Gymwear: In the Senior Category, teenage entrepreneurs—**Jamie Noctor, Paul Barrett, Oisín Nolan, and Andi Dascalescu**—represented Carlow. Their business, **Monarch Gymwear**, aims to create an inclusive community through premium-quality gym clothing. Their commitment to excellence earned them recognition, especially for their outstanding **Social Media Campaign**.

AJ Dooley's Entrepreneurial Journey: In the Intermediate Category, Carlow was also represented by **AJ Dooley of ENT-GAME** from **Presentation De la Salle, Bagenalstown**. His journey reflects the resilience and creativity of young entrepreneurs.

Carlow's vibrant entrepreneurial spirit continues to inspire and nurture the next generation of business leaders.

www.studententerprise.ie



Measure 2 - Case Study – Start Your Own Business – Flag Lane Marketing

Lynda Bolger, founder of Flag Lane Marketing developed her business with the support, training and advice through the Local Enterprise Office.

Flag Lane Marketing specialises in helping businesses promote their products or services to target audiences. The primary objective is to create and implement effective marketing strategies to increase brand awareness, generate leads, and drive sales.

Lynda began her journey with the Local Enterprise Office in 2019 by completing the Start Your Own Business Programme. After completing the programme, Lynda entered entrepreneurship and self-employment with a greater understanding of running a business and transformed her vision into reality.



Flag Lane Marketing began to grow over the years with the support of many Local Enterprise Office services including a Priming Grant to help towards salary costs, equipment, consultancy and innovation costs.

Currently, Flag Lane Marketing are providing their services in Ireland, Northern Ireland, UK and Italy and are seeing continuous growth in both domestic and overseas markets. 60% of Flag Lane Marketing clients are in the agricultural sector, 25% are in the professional services and 15% are in the energy sector. The aim of the company is to grow their customer base in the agricultural sector by another 75% in the energy sector by 50% in the next 3 years.

As part of a process of business development and product diversification, Flag Lane Marketing has developed a new product offering - a selfie studio which targets a demographic of 16-40 year old females and taps into the lucrative domestic tourism sector. Recognising the shifting spending patterns in domestic tourism, especially in the entertainment and experiential sectors, Flag Lane Marketing strategically positions its selfie studio as a response to the increasing demand for personalised customer experiences. The studio differentiates itself by integrating cutting-edge technology and AI-driven interactions, offering more than a visual experience. By integrating with local culture and attractions, the studio ensures a personalised exploration, creating a space where customers capture moments while engaging with unique local culture. This approach positions the selfie studio as a ground-breaking venture, providing a unique blend of technology, personalised experiences, and visual creativity in the Irish market.

This growth in Flag Lane Marketing and its diversification into new service offerings has come about through the entrepreneurial spirit of business founder Lynda Bolger and her engagement with the broad range of supports offered by the Local Enterprise Office at each stage of her business journey.



Measure 2 – Case Study – Management Development – Carlow Toolmaking Services

For decades Carlow has had a reputation as the centre of a thriving industry in light and precision engineering. Innovative businesses at the forefront of product development have sprung up all over Carlow. Few companies represent this vibrant industry better than Carlow Toolmaking Services.

Carlow Toolmaking Services was established in 1994 with Pat Amond assuming full ownership of the company in 2016. Carlow Toolmaking Services produces precision components for a range of domestic and multi-national customers throughout Ireland. Customers come from a wide range of industries such as medical, pharmaceutical, oral care and the automotive industry. The business offers a full service to customers from design to manufacturing to delivery of the finished product. Their production service is electronically controlled, enabling the company to increase efficiency, traceability and guarantee the quality of all products.

Managing Director Pat Amond has actively engaged in the variety of Management Development supports offered by the Local Enterprise Office and has used these supports to plan the strategic development of his business as it seeks to grow in a sustainable manner.

Pat was a participant in the Local Enterprise Office's flagship Owner Manager Development Programme delivered by Blaise Brosnan and he credits this with helping him to plan the future of his business: "Taking part in that programme gave me the chance to step away from day to day operational issues and look at where I wanted to bring my business over several years and what role I had to play in that. Every business owner should be taking the opportunity to engage in these programmes and plan the future of their business."

Pat's belief in the benefits of management development is shown by his commitment to facilitate the key managers in his business to also attend some of the LEO's programmes – "These programmes and events are a great opportunity for the key people in my team to build their own knowledge and experience."



The impact management development has had on Carlow Toolmaking Services was recognised in 2019 when the business was selected to represent Carlow at the National Enterprise Awards. Pat says that this experience helped to build the Carlow Toolmaking Services brand.



Pat Amond, Carlow Toolmaking Services

"Taking part in the awards brought us to the attention of businesses that hadn't known of us before. It told new customers that we are an award-winning and reputable company and opened doors for us throughout the country."



Measure 2 – Case Study – Supporting Female Enterprise – Norah Ryan

Barrow Training & Consultancy is a specialist and accredited training provider, based in Carlow but operating throughout the country. It was founded in 2008 and has been owned by Norah Ryan since 2021.

It has grown from strength to strength and offers a wide variety of classroom based and online training programmes for a range of clients, from first-time learners to professionals wanting to progress in their career.

Barrow Training & Consultancy are the first training provider in Ireland to hold the prestigious ISO 9001 [2015] standard and are accredited by QQI [Quality Qualifications Ireland] and SOLAS.

Since becoming owner of Barrow Training & Consultancy, Norah Ryan has availed of a variety of Local Enterprise Office supports to help develop her business. She is an active participant in LEO mentoring services and training courses. Norah is also an active participant in the Local Enterprise Office’s Powerhouse Women in Business Network. The Powerhouse Women in Business Network is a community of women entrepreneurs and professionals who are committed to supporting and empowering each other in their personal and professional lives. The network provides a platform for women to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge and resources.



In 2022, Norah Ryan was Entrepreneur of the Year in the first Powerhouse Women in Business Network Awards in recognition of the huge progress Barrow Training & Consultancy made under her leadership and the inspiration she has provided to other potential female entrepreneurs in Carlow.

Barrow Training & Consultancy is thriving under Norah’s ownership and has ambitions to expand into the UK market. This potential entry into the UK market is not just a narrative of business expansion but a testament to the boundless levels of ambition, innovation, and enterprise that Norah displays. The Local Enterprise Office will continue to support Norah and the growth of Barrow Training & Consultancy over the coming years.



Measure 2 – Case Study – Green for Business – Mount Brandon Cottages

The Green for Business Voucher is designed to help small businesses take the first step towards becoming more sustainable, giving them access to a green consultant who will show them the small changes that can have a big impact on their company and the world around them. The Energy Efficiency Grant supports the investment in technologies and equipment of enterprises following on from a Green for Business Report with 50% of Eligible costs to a maximum of €5,000. The aim of the scheme is to reduce the impact of enterprises on the environment thereby increasing the ability and resilience of these businesses.

Mount Brandon Cottages are an ambassador for both the Green for Business Voucher and the Energy Efficiency Grant through the Local Enterprise Office in Carlow.

The promoters, Andrea Wenner and her sister Carmen, originally hailing from Germany, had a good knowledge of sustainability and had implemented some green projects before contacting the Local Enterprise Office.

The key concerns for the business owners was to understand the carbon footprint of their business, how to measure it and on how to continue to offer a sustainable service. With the advice of a Green for Business Consultant, the company could look at becoming more efficient, reduce their environmental impact, reduce costs to the business and build sustainability credentials for the business thus winning new business.

According to Andrea *“We received a carbon footprint assessment, which allowed us to identify any areas that we could improve upon.”*

Long term efficiencies can outweigh upfront costs: Mount Brandon Cottages with the help of an Energy Efficiency Grant switched from old storage heaters to Wi-Fi enabled heaters that could heat the cottages quickly and efficiently when required. The company also replaced upgraded LED Bulbs and replaced a refrigerator.

Sustainable actions can increase your customer base: Mount Brandon Cottages saw an increase in demand for their services from eco-conscious consumers. Mount Brandon with the help of the Green for Business Supports has extended the lifecycle of their business and more importantly has made an impact on the wider environment.



Andrea Wenner, Mount Brandon Cottages

“Customers today want to understand a brands purpose, a reason to exist beyond the making of money, given the data on climate change, it’s no longer wise to ignore sustainability in business. Customers will pay you for it.”





Measure 2 – Case Study – Digital for Business – MMPS Carpentry

We now live in a digital age and businesses are adopting digital techniques to survive and to grow. Digital tools now give small businesses the power to increase their efficiencies, making them more productive and more responsive to customer needs.

By embracing digital technologies to streamline operations, small businesses can optimise resources, improve customer experiences and position themselves for long-term success in the digital age.

One business who undertook this journey with the support of the Local Enterprise Office is **MMPS Carpentry** in Royal Oak. MMPS Carpentry is a custom manufacturing and shop fitting service. MMPS wanted to explore ways to make their processes more efficient, to remove the possibility of errors from administration and to make their business more responsive to their customer needs. They undertook the “Digital for Business” programme with the Local Enterprise Office and were given expert external advice on integrating digitalisation into their operations. Through “Digital for Business” MMPS were able to develop an online platform which integrated all administrative, manufacturing and fitting activities into a single workflow, accessible to all staff members.

According to Lucy Mullins from MMPS this development made their business more efficient and has transformed all aspects of their operations: “Our new app gives us real time information about what work has being undertaken so we are far more efficient in invoicing and managing cashflow. All sections of the business from the office to the factory floor and the onsite fitters are working from the same information so we know our information is accurate. We are also much more efficient in responding to our customers’ needs as there is no time lag in responding to a customer request now.”



Trading Online Voucher Scheme

As well as internal processes, the digital world also offers businesses new ways to interact with customers, to build their brand awareness and to sell. For small businesses, establishing a robust online presence is not just advantageous but essential for survival and growth. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards digital commerce, making it imperative for small businesses to adapt swiftly to changing consumer behaviours. With e-commerce platforms, social media channels, and digital marketing tools at their disposal, small businesses can level the playing field against larger competitors. The Local Enterprise Office’s Trading Online Voucher supports Carlow businesses to embrace these e-commerce platforms. Since the Trading Online Voucher was launched in 2014, over 400 have been awarded to Carlow businesses, at a value of almost €900,000, giving them access to a global marketplace.

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is a government initiative designed to assist small businesses in enhancing their online presence. Eligible businesses can apply for a voucher that can be used to cover costs associated with developing or improving their online capabilities, such as website development, e-commerce solutions, digital marketing, and training. Once approved, businesses receive the voucher and implement the proposed improvements, with support and guidance provided throughout the process. The scheme aims to help businesses adapt to the digital marketplace, increase sales, expand their market reach, and improve competitiveness.

Measure 2 – Case Study – Lean for Business – Enchanted Castle Melts

The supports offered to businesses by the Local Enterprise Office in Carlow change and adapt as businesses progress through their life cycles. Many entrepreneurs start their journey with us before even starting their business. Their first steps often involve meeting the Business Advisory team in the LEO to discuss a business idea and then taking part in our impactful 'Start Your Own Business' programme.

From there the businesses will often engage with the LEO for supports at every stage of their journey. Developmental supports often include receiving a grant, taking part in our training and mentoring activities or applying for a Trading Online Voucher. One of the most effective support many of these clients avail of is our 'Lean for Business' programme. Lean For Business is designed to encourage clients to adopt Lean business principles in their organisations to increase performance and competitiveness. Lean is about doing things quicker, better and saving costs. Lean strives to remove waste and to continually improve a company.

One Carlow business which is a great example of engaging with LEO supports throughout the business journey is **Enchanted Castle Melts** based in Bagenalstown. Enchanted Castle Melts manufactures luxury home fragrance products. The business was founded by Joanne Doyle who was looking for a change in direction after a career in retail.

Joanne first came into contact with the LEO through her involvement in the 'Powerhouse Women in Business' network and from Powerhouse she has availed of a wide range of LEO supports, including successfully applying for a business start-up Priming Grant. Enchanted Castle Melts also exhibited at the Local Enterprise Office area of Showcase 2024, one of Ireland's largest international trade shows. Joanne made a number of exciting contacts in Showcase and is currently developing proposals for them for custom made products for the Christmas 2024 season. The experience of Showcase also inspired Joanne to join the Local Enterprise Office in attending an international retail trade mission

in London which she says "really helped me to get a better understanding of the international approach to retail."

However one of the most resonant supports Enchanted Castle Melts received from the Local Enterprise Office was the Lean for Business programme. Under Lean for Business, Joanne was provided with expert advice in lean processes which she used to examine her manufacturing methods. As Joanne describes it "My lean advisor looked at every step of my manufacturing process for every product and came up with great solutions to save time – taking hours off my production time." According to Joanne the impact on her business was immediate "I never appreciated before I did lean how valuable my time in the business was and the more time I could save the more money the business saved." Joanne also identified another benefit to her business which arose through Lean for Business – "Lean helped me to properly factor the time taken to produce items into my pricing and for the first time my pricing now accurately reflects the real cost of manufacturing my products."

Joanne is now an enthusiastic believer in Lean for Business and advocates all businesses to take advantage of it.



Joanne Doyle, Enchanted Castle Melts

"Lean for Business has made my business more efficient and more profitable. Very simple solutions have had a huge impact on my bottom line. I would encourage every business in Carlow to contact the LEO to start their own Lean for Business programme."



Measure 2 – Case Study - The Export Journey – Cheetah Electronics

Exporting presents numerous opportunities for small businesses to expand their reach, increase revenue, and diversify their customer base. Diversification into international markets helps mitigate risks associated with relying solely on local economies and can provide stability during economic downturns. Expanding internationally can enhance the reputation and credibility of a small business, positioning it as a player in overseas markets. Exporting can significantly help companies to increase turnover and enhance business performance.

Carlow County Council's Local Enterprise Office has been at the forefront of supporting small Carlow businesses to explore exporting opportunities and to sell Carlow products to international markets. We realise that for many businesses the first steps abroad can be a daunting prospect with uncertainties about what an overseas market wants, how to sell in that market, how to price effectively and how to transport your product. Over the past 10 years the Local Enterprise Office has developed and delivered a series of innovative programmes to help Carlow businesses overcome these uncertainties and to successfully sell overseas.

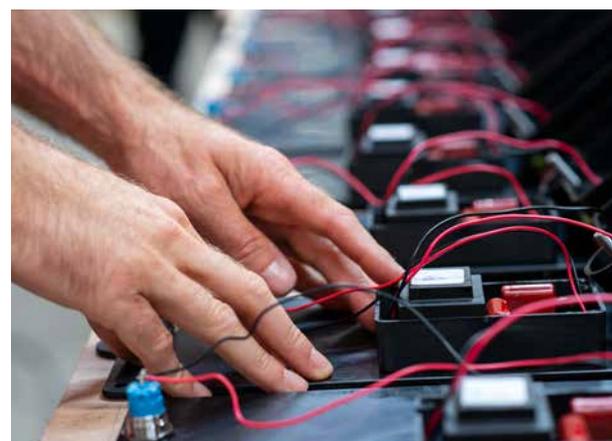
The Local Enterprise Office's most high-profile export initiative has been our annual overseas trade mission. Every year we partner with County Carlow Chamber and South East Technological University to support a number of clients to start their export journey. The programme facilitates Carlow businesses to receive specialist expert training in export development and one to one mentoring focusing on their individual businesses. This capacity building is delivered over a period of 5 months. The programme culminates in a three-day trade development trip when the clients are brought as a group to a specific overseas market and take part in a series of pre-arranged meetings with prospective overseas customers. The first LEO Carlow programme of this nature was centred on Rotterdam in the Netherlands in 2019. Once the Covid pandemic ended further programmes were delivered in Liverpool in 2022 and Scotland in 2023. The Local Enterprise Office will deliver a similar programme in Belgium in 2024.

Cheetah Electronics in Ballon is one business who has participated in these programmes and is an example of the overseas potential that exists for Carlow businesses. Cheetah is a family-owned business, operating since 1973, and is Ireland's leading manufacturer of electronic fencing for the agricultural community. In recent years the business saw an opportunity to diversify their product offering and to open the business to new customers. Owner Padraic George's interest in running in his rural community made him recognise the need for running equipment that was practical, comfortable to wear and offered safety protection to users running and walking in locations that were poorly lit. Padraic received an Innovation Voucher which

allowed him to work with the product design experts in the Design+ centre in SETU. As a result of this collaborative work, he developed a new range of road safety clothing which is now sold by Cheetah under the 'Bodylite' brand.

After testing the product on the Irish marketplace, Padraic decided to explore the potential of export sales for his brand. He participated in the 2023 export development programme and after months of the training and mentoring processes he travelled with the Local Enterprise Office to Scotland where he took part in a series of meetings with prospective Scottish buyers over 3 days. These meetings went so well that product was being shipped from Cheetah's base in Ballon to a retailer in Glasgow before Padraic had even left Scotland. As a result of his success on this programme, and the market credibility of his new Scottish customers, Padraic secured nationwide distribution for Bodylite with a major British sports retailer.

Speaking of his export experiences, Padraic said "The LEO's export programme was very challenging. We had to work hard to make sure we sold ourselves in the most professional way possible to the buyers we were meeting. But it worked. We saw the huge opportunity that is there for our business in Scotland and we secured new customers who are among the leading players in the Scottish market. This really shows there are opportunities for any Carlow business who has the ambition to grow overseas."





Measure 2 – Case Study – Powerhouse Women in Business Network

The **Powerhouse Women in Business Network** is a community of women entrepreneurs and professionals who are committed to supporting and empowering each other in their personal and professional lives. The network provides a platform for women to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge and resources. The Powerhouse Women in Business Network offers various opportunities for its members, including regular networking events, workshops, and mentorship programs. These events and programs aim to help women build their skills, grow their businesses, and advance their careers.

The network also provides a supportive community for women to share their experiences, challenges, and successes. By connecting with like-minded women, members can gain valuable insights and support as they navigate their personal and professional lives.

Overall, the Powerhouse Women in Business Network is a valuable resource for female entrepreneurs and professionals looking to grow their businesses and careers while connecting with a supportive community of peers.



Annually the Network runs a series of networking events including the Powerhouse Awards and the Powerhouse Picnic. The Powerhouse Picnic is an excellent opportunity to build new connections and expand your professional network while enjoying a fun and relaxed atmosphere. By attending this event, you may meet potential customers, clients, or business partners that could help your business grow, all while enjoying a delicious picnic spread. Additionally, the event is in association with Network Ireland, which means you can also meet and connect with members of this professional organisation. This can help you build relationships and access a wider network of professionals in your industry. Powerhouse has over 200 members and in 2024 will develop a new youth programme.





EU Projects & Economic Development





Economic Development Programmes

The Local Enterprise Office works on a cross functional basis to develop competitive funding and economic development projects which are delivered in-house by the economic development team of the Local Enterprise Office and across the wider corporate body of Carlow County Council.

The following investment has been provided since 2014 for the Economic Development Programme.

Tourism & Promotion	€ 1,052,031.00
Economic Development & Promotion	€ 218,000.00
FDI Marketing	€ 150,000.00
Retail Sector Development	€ 90,000.00
Retail Incentive Schemes	€ 15,000.00
Business Incubation & Development	€ 50,000.00
Project Development	€ 125,000.00
Ireland South East Project	€ 436,600.00
Christmas Programme & Lights	€ 580,500.00
Festivals & Events	€ 1,401,000.00
Streetscape & Shop Front Schemes	€ 160,550.00
Total	€ 4,278,681.00

In tandem with the above programme a series of EU projects are delivered in a variety of cross functional areas.



Strategic Partnerships: Carlow Tourism

Carlow Tourism is the marketing and tourism development company for County Carlow whose remit is to increase the number of domestic and overseas holidaymakers to the county and maximise economic benefits vis-à-vis job creation and revenue for the entire county of Carlow. The company aims to provide a cohesive approach to tourism marketing and development planning in co-operation and collaboration with all relevant agencies with a remit for tourism development within County Carlow.

Carlow Tourism was established in 2001 as a partnership between Carlow County Council, agencies and the tourism industry within the county. It was established on the basis that funding for operational costs would be provided by the County Council in the Annual Estimates and paid by way of a grant-in-aid at the commencement of each year, to assist with cash flow and project management. Revenue is also generated by the Company from a variety of sources including an annual membership fee, grants from other statutory bodies and agencies and other sources including fundraising, to fulfil the objectives for which the company was established.



carlow
tourism

Overall Objectives of Carlow Tourism CLG:

- To carry on the expeditious promotion, development and administration of the tourism product in the whole of the county (Urban and Rural) of Carlow in collaboration with all relevant agencies and bodies with a remit for tourism development in County Carlow;
- To facilitate the creation of additional employment derived and supported by the continued and additional revenue generated from the marketing of Carlow as a tourism destination;
- To harmonise the workings of all tourism interests, groups, individuals and activities who promote Carlow as a quality tourism destination;
- To develop a marketing strategy which aims to generate an awareness of County Carlow as a tourist destination, both in the marketplace and among the people of Carlow;
- To focus on market segments which offer the most potential while also maximising the length of stay and expenditure by tourists and visitors in the Carlow area;
- To identify, develop and promote products which will increase tourist traffic in co-operation with all relevant bodies.

The economic development unit work in collaboration with Carlow Tourism to support Tourism in County Carlow including the provision of annual funding, training partnerships and a variety of projects.



Strategic Partnerships – Carlow Community Enterprise Centres CLG

Carlow Community Enterprise Centres CLG was established in 2003 in partnership with Carlow County Council. Enterprise House, its first property, opened its doors in 2005 at a development cost of €1.2m. This was financed by Carlow County Enterprise Board Ltd, the Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment, IDA and €50,000 of private enterprise funding.

In 2008 the Board of CCEC worked with Carlow County Council and raised €500,000 of funding from Enterprise Ireland with further match funding being provided by AIB to allow a three-storey extension to the building, adding another 11,000 SQFT.

Enterprise House is unique in Carlow in that it provides a one-stop calling point for people starting and developing their enterprises. Currently it has an annual footfall exceeding

50,000 people. The goal of Carlow Community Enterprise Centres (CCEC), as a social enterprise initiative, is to work with early stage businesses through the suite of services which on offer and together with partners to foster entrepreneurship and develop economic activity in County Carlow. The Board of Carlow Community Enterprise Centres CLG works closely with the support of the Economic Development Unit in Carlow County Council.

The Board is currently in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland developing a suite of new enterprise space solutions which will be progressed in 2024. In late 2024, the company's second property "Station House" in Hackestown will open its doors.





EU Projects

The Economic Development Unit as part of Carlow County Council develops direct EU funding opportunities in relevant areas of development for the County. This work enhances and compliments the resources available locally and nationally via the development of international partnerships which are designed to enhance the County Carlow Eco-System.

Since its inception the office has secured EU funding for the following projects:

- Catalyst – Interreg Ireland Wales – Food Drink & Life Sciences
- RU:RBAN – Urbact
- Athena – Erasmus +
- Craft Hub – Creative Europe
- InnoCom – Interreg Europe

The Catalyst initiative served as a pioneering cross-border endeavor, emblematic of the innovative spirit driving sustainability within the realms of Welsh and Irish business communities, particularly focusing on the food and drink and life science sectors – two strategic focal points within the Ireland Wales program. Spearheaded by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, in collaboration with Carlow County Council, WRAP Cymru, Tipperary County Council, and the Institute of Technology Carlow, Catalyst harnessed the transformative potential of sustainability to inspire and propel innovation across borders.

Supported in part by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Ireland-Wales Programme, Catalyst epitomized the essence of transnational collaboration, fostering strategic partnerships and business synergies between coastal counties in East and South-East Ireland and West Wales. By leveraging the resources and expertise of diverse stakeholders, Catalyst catalyzed a paradigm shift, unlocking new avenues for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Carlow County Council further solidified its commitment to EU partnerships through its pivotal role as an esteemed partner in **RU:RBAN**, a groundbreaking Good Practice Transfer Network funded under Urbact. Rooted in the ethos of knowledge exchange and capacity building, RU:RBAN sought to transfer the management model of urban gardens in Rome to newcomer cities across Europe. By facilitating the sharing of experiences and best practices,

RU:RBAN aimed to enhance the capacities of local governance, fostering sustainable urban development across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Meanwhile, the **Athena** project, funded under Erasmus +, epitomized a concerted effort to empower and support women entrepreneurship in the digital age. Leveraging innovative methodologies and tools, Athena aimed to equip women entrepreneurs with the requisite skills and knowledge to thrive amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic. By harnessing the power of digital technologies, Athena envisioned a future where women entrepreneurs could leverage digital tools for capacity development and business growth.

Craft Hub a flagship European project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme, underscored the enduring relevance of craft in contemporary practice and cultural heritage. Through a multifaceted approach encompassing research, documentation, outreach, and experiential learning, Craft Hub sought to illuminate the rich tapestry of craft traditions across Europe. By fostering collaboration between diverse partners spanning multiple countries, Craft Hub envisioned a future where craft practitioners could harness their collective creativity to forge new pathways for artistic expression and cultural exchange.

The innovative approach taken by Craft Hub was recognised internationally when the European Commission declared it a runner-up award winner at the European Enterprise Promotion Awards in Bilbao, Spain in 2023.

In essence, these strategic initiatives epitomize the transformative power of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability in driving economic growth and fostering resilience across diverse communities. As we chart a course towards a more prosperous and sustainable future, let us continue to leverage the collective wisdom and ingenuity of our global community to build a brighter tomorrow for generations to come.





InnoCom – Interreg Europe

InnoCom partners are working to remove obstacles that keep SMEs from accessing support offered by regional and municipal governments, and to make communications between institutions and SMEs less bureaucratic and more user-friendly.

Administrative barriers can keep SMEs from gaining full benefits of EU funding opportunities intended to help elevate their competitiveness, so city and regional authorities must improve their governance and regulatory framework to reduce barriers, improve messaging and increase the visibility of support and EU funding opportunities. These actions will benefit SMEs and the reputation of institutions delivering the services and support programmes.

Recent global events [COVID-19, War in Ukraine, etc.] have made it even more crucial to support SMEs’ development and competitiveness. European cities and regions can respond by making funding more accessible, so businesses can expand or innovate, export within and beyond the single market, undertake energy-saving upgrades, hire from traditionally disadvantaged groups, increase digitalisation, etc. Communication of these opportunities must be better targeted, digitally accessible, interactive, equally distributed and clearly presented, reducing bureaucratic jargon as much as possible.



Building on existing practices and informed by interregional learning, InnoCom is improving local policy instruments to introduce innovative models, digital tools, and services, reduce obstacles, and make other changes for better and more user-friendly interaction with businesses. In follow-up, it will monitor the expected outcome: SMEs empowered to raise their game through access to public services, finance, and other support.

Partners from Carlow and a balanced mix of regions and cities in Italy, Romania, France, Latvia and Slovenia work together with the University of Latvia [Advisory partner] to identify weaknesses, seek solutions and exchange good practices and ideas through the interregional learning process. Stakeholders have an active role providing feedback, co-designing, and participating in interregional learning.

The expected results are 6 improved regional policies, reduced barriers, and increased visibility of EU funding.

Interreg
Europe



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Closing Remarks

On behalf of Carlow County Council, I firstly wish to express my gratitude for the invaluable support and guidance provided by the LEO Unit in Enterprise Ireland during the transition from the County Enterprise Board to the Local Enterprise Office. Together, we have strategically positioned the Local Enterprise Office as an integral part of a national network of offices and a local hub of expertise and enterprise support within Carlow County Council.

The landscape for small business owners in Carlow has undergone significant transformation since the inception of the Local Enterprise Office in 2014. From navigating economic recovery, to addressing challenges posed by Brexit, global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the War in Ukraine, and other pertinent issues, our local businesses have displayed remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.

As we reflect on the achievements of the past decade, we are poised to embark on the next phase of growth and development. Over the next five years, our Economic Development Team will remain steadfast in its commitment to providing unparalleled support to our local enterprise ecosystem. Our vision is clear: to foster sustainable growth, revitalize our communities, and create abundant economic opportunities that empower both individuals and businesses to flourish.

Central to the realization of this vision are three key pillars designed to drive economic development across the entirety of our county. With a particular emphasis on Enterprise Spaces and new services, we are working closely with our partners to bring forward transformative initiatives that will propel Carlow's businesses into a prosperous future.



Michael Rainey

*Director of Services:
Corporate / HR, Planning,
Health & Safety, Economic
Development / LEO*

I extend my deep appreciation to the dedicated staff of LEO Carlow, whose tireless efforts have been instrumental in advancing our collective mission. To our broader community of partners, stakeholders, and the esteemed Approvals & Evaluation committee, your collaboration and support have been invaluable.

Looking ahead, I am confident in our collective ability to navigate the challenges, to adapt and innovate alongside our valued clients, and to foster a thriving economic landscape that benefits every corner of County Carlow.

Michael Rainey
Director of Services



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