

# IMPACT REPORT 2020

Measuring  
the impact of  
Local Enterprise  
Office supports  
in 2020

#MakingItHappen

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A Local Enterprise Office (LEO) is Ireland's 'first stop shop' for anyone thinking about starting or growing a business, anywhere in Ireland.

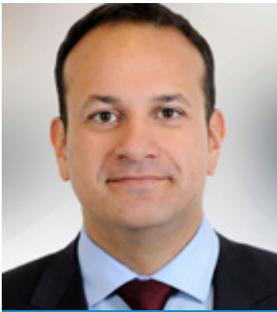
31 Local Enterprise Offices across Ireland are all focused on a single mission: to provide new and existing businesses with the expert advice, tailored training and financial supports they need to help them thrive.

Since they were set up in 2014 LEOs have operated in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

**Acknowledgements:** This LEO Impact Report is published on behalf of Local Enterprise Offices in local authorities by Enterprise Ireland. It has been produced with the assistance of the LEO Communications Committee and the Enterprise Ireland Centre of Excellence in Shannon, Co. Clare. Our thanks go to all the current and former LEO clients that feature in it.

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# Welcome



**Leo Varadkar, T.D.,**  
Minister for Enterprise,  
Trade and Employment

*Local Enterprise Offices exist to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses. They provide high quality supports for business ideas, and in doing so help to drive job creation.*

2020, which marked the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, was a challenging year for many businesses. Local Enterprise Offices were to the fore in helping them to respond to that challenge.

From the Micro-Enterprise Assistance Fund to the Client Stimulus Fund, from Business Continuity Vouchers to Trading Online Vouchers, from advice to mentoring, they consistently provided the right supports at the right time.

In so doing they helped Ireland's micro and small businesses to navigate an unprecedentedly difficult trading environment. Unfortunately, while 5,585 new jobs were created by LEO-backed client companies, there was however a loss of 7,079 jobs, resulting in a net loss of 1,494 jobs. Without the tireless work of staff at the Local Enterprise Offices there is no doubt but we would have lost many more.

This report is an opportunity to express my personal appreciation for the excellent work of staff at our Local Enterprise Offices.



**Damien English, T.D.,**  
Minister of State for Business,  
Employment and Retail

*The esteem with which our network of Local Enterprise Offices is held is a testament to their central role in helping to foster enterprise. Year after year they provide an invaluable resource to anyone thinking of starting or growing a business.*

Each of the 31 Local Enterprise Offices operates at the heart of communities right across the country. They are the first port of call for anyone looking to develop an idea into a business, or develop an existing business into a better one.

Throughout 2020 they provided a range of targeted supports designed to help businesses cope with a radically changed landscape.

From signposting Government COVID-19 supports to providing mentoring from seasoned practitioners, the LEOs excelled in providing clients with the right support at the right time.

The introduction of Business Continuity Vouchers helped many to get professional help to develop the short- and long-term strategies they needed to deal with the crisis. It's just one example of the way LEOs play such a central role in our business community, helping to ensure Ireland's entrepreneurs both raise their aim and realise their ambition.



**Robert Troy, T.D.,**  
Minister of State for Trade Promotion,  
Digital & Company Regulation

*The speed at which very many small businesses were able to respond to the challenges of the pandemic owes a lot to the supports provided by the country's network of Local Enterprise Offices.*

In particular their work promoting the Trading Online Voucher Scheme helped very many small and microenterprises to get online and keep trading. In 2020, over 13,000 applications were approved by Local Enterprise Offices under the Trading Online Voucher scheme. To put that in context, the previous year, 2019, saw 1,218 approvals.

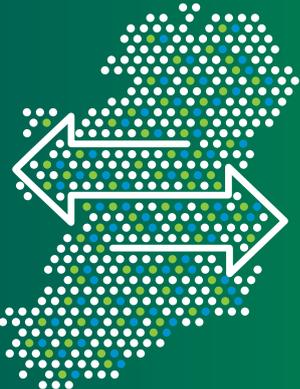
The great strength of Ireland's network of Local Enterprise Offices is the depth of knowledge and expertise it holds.

Honed over many years of practical, on the ground experience of cultivating, working with and partnering small and micro businesses, Ireland's LEOs provide an unrivalled resource that is, I believe, without peer.

It's why we will continue to fully support the work of the LEOs as they help the entrepreneurs of today - and tomorrow - to reach their full potential.

# Highlights from 2020: A Snapshot

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**133**  
LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE  
CLIENT BUSINESSES  
TRANSITIONED TO  
ENTERPRISE IRELAND

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**IN 2020**

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**16,231**  
PEOPLE RECEIVED  
MENTORING  
ASSIGNMENTS  
FROM THEIR LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE

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**IN 2020**

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**A RECORD  
€22,000,000  
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE  
APPROVED**  
FOR LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE  
CLIENT COMPANIES

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**IN 2020**

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**35,236**  
PEOPLE NOW  
EMPLOYED IN 7,529  
LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE  
CLIENT COMPANIES

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**IN 2020**

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**12,946**  
BUSINESSES APPROVED FOR  
TRADING ONLINE  
VOUCHERS

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**IN 2020**

 Local Enterprise Office #MakingItHappen



**77,466**  
PEOPLE  
TRAINED  
BY THE LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICES

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**IN 2020**

# Making an impact at every stage

*Every business is different but each can benefit from the right support at the right time, whether it's starting out or looking to grow.*

LEOs provide just that, on a daily basis, to new and existing small businesses all over Ireland, including:

- financial assistance and access to microfinance loans
- training and development
- mentoring and advice
- signposting to relevant bodies and agencies
- networking opportunities

## At the heart of Ireland's entrepreneurial ecosystem

LEOs help their clients to navigate organisations that can help their business grow, including:

- Local Authorities
- Education and Training Boards
- Microfinance Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland
- Enterprise Europe Network
- Leader
- The Revenue Commissioners
- InterTradeIreland
- Bord Bia
- Enterprise Ireland
- Skillnet Ireland
- Credit Review Office
- National Association of Community Enterprise Centres
- Udarás na Gaeltachta
- Dept of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
- Dept of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

## Celebrating and supporting enterprise

LEOs drive Ireland's entrepreneurial culture through high profile initiatives such as:

- Local Enterprise Week
- National Women's Enterprise Day
- Local Enterprise Village [Ploughing]
- Food Academy and Food Starter
- Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur [IBYE]
- National Enterprise Awards
- Local Enterprise Showcase at Showcase
- Student Enterprise Programme

## Find out more at:

-  [LocalEnterprise.ie](http://LocalEnterprise.ie)
-  [@Loc\\_Enterprise](https://twitter.com/Loc_Enterprise)
-  [@LocalEnterpriseOffices](https://www.facebook.com/LocalEnterpriseOffices)

# Helping to Grow Employment

## Helping to grow employment

**5,585** new jobs were created by LEO-backed client companies, according to the LEO 2020 Annual Employment Survey. However there was a loss of **7,079** jobs, resulting in a net loss of **1,494** jobs, a **4.1%** decrease on 2019.

**35,236** people were employed by **7,529** small businesses and start-ups that had received financial assistance from the Local Enterprise Offices by the end of 2020.

### More than money!

The job numbers above refer only to jobs recorded by those businesses that received LEO financial assistance.

Thousands more jobs are created by businesses which have received non-financial LEO supports, such as expert advice, one-to-one mentoring or targeted training.

\*FT stands for full-time and PT stands for part-time. The Annual Employment Survey was compiled by the Centre of Excellence in Enterprise Ireland.

Local Enterprise Office	2020 No. of LEO Clients	2020 All Jobs (FT + OT)	2020 Gross Total Job Gains	2020 Net Job Gains/Losses
Carlow	216	1,219	155	56
Cavan	193	1,203	111	-98
Clare	236	1,283	179	-55
Cork City	194	823	131	-137
Cork North & West	269	1,285	163	-90
Cork South	204	919	221	-10
Donegal	242	1,283	226	-33
Dublin City	462	1,743	272	-84
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	329	1,242	229	-94
Dublin Fingal	258	984	127	-60
Dublin South	298	1,427	235	-105
Galway County/City	279	1,048	138	-39
Kerry	287	1,135	213	-126
Kildare	221	1,149	252	-11
Kilkenny	188	1,058	200	-37
Laois	131	672	83	-25
Leitrim	147	416	68	-44
Limerick	310	1,754	128	-55
Longford	256	1,200	158	-12
Louth	247	884	145	-88
Mayo	240	1,274	115	-62
Meath	282	1,356	228	30
Monaghan	162	1,118	175	-19
Offaly	228	1,049	179	-34
Roscommon	178	888	109	-18
Sligo	232	930	132	-56
Tipperary	278	1,365	274	16
Waterford	330	1,252	207	-186
Westmeath	241	1,162	265	-1
Wexford	241	1,474	331	23
Wicklow	150	641	136	-40
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7,529</b>	<b>35,236</b>	<b>5,585</b>	<b>-1494</b>

# Making an impact with the right support at the right time

Local Enterprise Offices provide a range of grant assistance to eligible businesses. Known as Measure 1 Supports, these are designed to help fund start-up costs, expansion plans, entry into new markets and jobs growth.

**€22,001,368** was approved in grant aid by Local Enterprise Offices for 1,112 applications (see breakdown of grant types in the table below)

## Training and Development

Local Enterprise Offices provide a wide range of high-quality training and development supports designed to meet specific business requirements.

**77,466** people were trained by LEOS across different programmes in 2020.

## Start Your Own Business

LEO Start Your Own Business programmes help prospective entrepreneurs to assess their business idea and its viability, to help them decide whether or not to proceed.

**5,150** aspiring entrepreneurs took part in **342** LEO-run Start Your Own Business programmes in 2020.

## Mentoring

LEO Mentoring matches small business owners with the knowledge, skills, insights, and entrepreneurial capability of seasoned business practitioners – the mentor – to provide practical and strategic one-to-one guidance for their business.

**16,231** mentoring assignments were managed by LEOs in 2020.

## Lean for Micro

Lean for Micro helps LEO clients to adopt 'lean' business principles within their businesses to increase performance and competitiveness.

Companies also avail of consultancy services from a qualified practitioner, who works with the company to introduce lean principles, undertake a specific cost reduction project, and assist the company in benchmarking performance

**397** companies were supported through the Lean for Micro programme in 2020.

## Pathway to Enterprise Ireland

LEOs work with small companies looking to export, helping them to grow to a point where they can avail of Enterprise Ireland supports.

**133** LEO clients were supported to transfer into the Enterprise Ireland portfolio to avail of further services.



*“Funding is the limiting factor for most start-up businesses”.*

*David Walsh*

*Read the full story about how Local Enterprise Offices helped David Walsh of HaloCare on page 16.*

## Measure 1 Supports - Grant Aid Approved in 2020

Measure 1 Supports	Grant Aid Approved in 2020
Priming Grants <i>[255 approved applications in 2020]</i>	€7,029,103
Business Expansion Grants <i>[398 approved applications in 2020]</i>	€10,689,770
Feasibility Study Grants <i>[241 approved applications in 2020]</i>	€2,437,798
Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grant <i>[191 approved applications in 2020]</i>	€357,552
Research, Development & Innovation <i>[16 applications approved in 2020]</i>	€1,200,394
Grad Start <i>[11 applications approved in 2020]</i>	€286,750
<b>Total number of applications in 2020: 1,112</b>	<b>Total amount of grant-aid approved in 2020: €22,001,367</b>

# Promoting Entrepreneurship

*Local Enterprise Offices promote entrepreneurship across all stages, sectors and regions. One way they do this is by working together in national committees to co-ordinate a series of flagship programmes and events.*

## Local Enterprise Week

**300+** enterprise initiatives were collectively organised by LEOs to market Local Enterprise Week in March 2020. This high profile annual event showcases the full range of enterprise supports LEOs can offer existing and aspiring entrepreneurs, as well as providing networking and training opportunities to small businesses locally.

## National Women's Enterprise Day

National Women's Enterprise Day is designed to promote female-led businesses. It took place on 14th October 2020 with a virtual event themed "Stronger Together".

**2,103** online attendees took part, with an average of 1,641 attendees throughout the day to hear advice and insights from some of Ireland's most successful female entrepreneurs.

## Local Enterprise Showcase

**89** small craft and design businesses took part in the LEO 'Local Enterprise Showcase' in January 2020, as part of Showcase - Ireland's international creative expo.

An initiative of the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, Showcase takes place annually in the RDS and is promoted internationally by Enterprise Ireland.

It's an invaluable opportunity for LEO client companies to connect with national and international trade buyers.



# Building for the future

*Local Enterprise Offices support youth entrepreneurship through the Student Enterprise Programme which support and nurture the next generation of business owners and leaders.*

## Student Enterprise Programme

**29,014** students from **493** secondary schools took part in the 2019/2020 Student Enterprise Programme, which began in September 2019. The programme encourages students to research, set-up and run their own businesses with the help of student enterprise co-ordinators from the Local Enterprise Offices.



# Making an impact through collaboration

*Collaboration is key to enterprise success and Local Enterprise Offices worked closely with many stakeholders to roll out supports in 2020*

## Microfinance Ireland

Microfinance Ireland (MFI) is a not-for-profit lender established to deliver the Government's Microenterprise Loan Fund. It provides loans of between **€2,000** and **€25,000** to commercially viable businesses that employ fewer than 10 people, with an annual turnover of less than **€2** million.

Enterprise Offices assist client companies with their MFI loan applications, which attract a discount on standard loan rates.

In 2020, LEOs assisted client companies, with **751** applications for loans. Of these, **508** applications were successful in securing loan approval, supporting the creation of **1,369** jobs.

[www.microfinanceireland.ie](http://www.microfinanceireland.ie)

## Brexit Seminars

Local Enterprise Offices organised information events in 2020 for both existing and potential clients. These sessions enabled small businesses, start-ups and micro-enterprises to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities posed by Brexit, and to engage in a process of strategic planning to ensure their companies had a robust strategy in place. Local Enterprise Offices also encouraged clients to take part in the Brexit SME Scorecard online and to participate in the Enterprise Ireland Brexit Roadshow, which included a series of regional events.

**3,215** participants attended Brexit information events in 2020.

## Customs Training

As businesses readied themselves for Brexit, getting to grips with its implications on customs procedures, tariffs and taxation as well as the possibility of regulatory divergence became increasingly pressing for small businesses in 2019. The Local Enterprise Offices created the 'Prepare Your Business for Customs' training workshops, which were open to every business across every sector.

**1782** participants attended customs training in 2020.

# Promoting Entrepreneurship



*“My website has much more functionality now”*

says *Grainne Mullins* of *Grá Chocolates* in Galway

Read the full story about how Local Enterprise Offices helped Grainne on page 18.

## Trading Online Voucher Scheme

Designed to assist small businesses trade more online under the National Digital Strategy, the Trading Online Voucher Scheme offers training and advice, along with financial assistance of up to **€2,500**.

The scheme, which was funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices, is based on matched-funding, where the maximum amount payable is **€2,500** or **50%** of the eligible cost, whichever is the lesser.

**12,946** applications were approved by Local Enterprise Offices under the Trading Online Voucher scheme in 2020.

[www.dccae.gov.ie/tradingonlinevoucher](http://www.dccae.gov.ie/tradingonlinevoucher)

## Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Exporters

Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Exporters (TAME) provided an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. These grants, with a maximum value of **€2,500**, are used to part-fund expenditure to investigate and research export markets.

For example: costs incurred exhibiting at Trade Fairs, preparing marketing materials, and developing websites specifically targeting export markets.

The purpose of these grants was to increase the number of LEO clients developing new export opportunities, with a focus on supporting those clients with high levels of exposure to Brexit risks.

**185** LEO clients were approved for TAME grant assistance in 2020.

## Covid Support Measures



*“Lean is thinking about each thing you are doing, asking yourself why you are doing it, and then looking to see if there’s a better way,”*

*says Aine Gleeson of WowWee in Clare*

Read the full story about how Local Enterprise Offices helped Aine on page 17.

*The LEOs as the first stop shop for enterprise were on the frontline supporting businesses during the Covid crisis. Together with Trading Online Voucher (TOV) and MicroFinance Ireland loans the following supports were also offered by LEOs:*

### Business Continuity Vouchers:

Businesses employing up to 50 employees were eligible to apply for a Business Continuity Voucher up to the value of **€2,500** towards 3rd party consultancy costs to assist with developing short and long term strategies to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak.

The purpose of the voucher was to provide contingency planning advice to assist businesses to continue trading through this crisis.

The primary aim of the scheme was to support businesses to make informed decisions on the immediate measures needed to continue trading while securing the safety of all employees and future business viability through identification of remedial actions.

**12,077** Business Continuity Vouchers approved to the value of **€25,850,156**.

### Client Stimulus Scheme

Under the July stimulus, a **€10m.** fund was ringfenced for Local Enterprise Office clients to enable businesses to move into a recovery phase.

The purpose of the Local Enterprise Office Client Stimulus scheme was to sustain eligible businesses through the provision of a cash stimulus to support operational costs and enhanced engagement with their Local Enterprise Office. The funding was through an immediate cash contribution to support liquidity and could be used to cover ongoing operational costs.

**1,376** Clients paid to the value of **€7,120,189**

### Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund

The Micro-Enterprise Assistance Fund was provided for businesses that were not eligible for the COVID-19 Restart/ Restart Plus Grant or similar COVID-19 business restart grants from other government departments.

The fund provided a minimum of **€500** to a maximum **€1,000** in respect of vouched expenditure contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers.

**196** Applications approved to the value of **€185,079**

# Making an impact on start-ups

*The country's 31 Local Enterprise Offices are the first port of call for Ireland's aspiring entrepreneurs. The LEO's flagship Start Your Own Business course has helped individuals all over the country to take their first step on the road to business success.*

Honed over many years, this highly accessible training course provides participants with the skills and knowledge they need to assess the viability of their business idea.

It includes modules on business planning, sales and marketing, employment legislation, business finance and taxation. Undertaking it equips participants with the tools they need to assess and understand their target market, their own capabilities and their chances of success. SYOB courses are many people's first introduction to their Local Enterprise Office.

As they progress with their venture, LEOS offer an invaluable sign-posting service both to other LEO supports, and to those of other state agencies which can help them.

For many participants the SYOB programme is the first step on a proven path from start up to growth and even internationalisation.

## LEO Start Your Own Business programmes are aimed at those:

- with a business idea they want to develop, or
- who are looking at self-employment as a realistic career option, or
- who have recently started a business

**5,150** people took part in **342** LEO-run Start Your Own Business programmes in 2020.



*“LEO has been very supportive of us right along the way”*

*says Wim de Jongh of Hope Beer in Fingal*

Read the full story about how Local Enterprise Offices helped Wim on page 19.



## Helping Businesses in 2020...



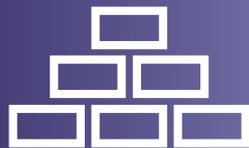
from *idea...*

**€2,437,798**  
approved for  
Feasibility  
Study Grants

**€7,029,103**  
approved  
for Priming  
Grants



to *start-up...*



to *growth...*

**€10,689,770**  
approved  
for Business  
Expansion  
Grants

**€22m+** approved in  
grant aid in 2020



**Padraic McElwee,**  
Chair of Network of Local  
Enterprise Offices

## 2020 saw an increase in supports provided and a record investment of funding in small businesses.

2020 was the one of the most challenging years on record for small businesses across the country and that challenge is continuing. During the year the Local Enterprise Offices were on the frontline in helping small businesses to keep their doors open. Our teams across the country worked closely with our partners Enterprise Ireland, the Local Authorities and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to ensure small businesses had a suite of supports to help them adapt to the new and uncertain trading conditions.

Supports such as the Trading Online Voucher became invaluable to companies who could open virtual doors as physical

doors had to shut. We were able to help companies take new paths with supports like the Business Continuity Voucher, giving companies the expertise to plan for a new path and pivot in to new areas where relevant.

As many people closed their doors, the Local Enterprise Offices kept their virtual doors open across the country in what was a record year in the amount of supports that were approved for clients. The challenge continues into 2021 and beyond as we deal with a new trading environment affected by a range of economic and societal factors but the LEO doors will continue to be open for small businesses across the country who want to start and grow.

## Client success stories

Again in 2020, the Local Enterprise Offices went above and beyond for their clients and you can read a selection of these client stories in this section.

- 16 Halocare:** how a Priming Grant helped this security business get ahead
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- 19 Hope Beer:** How a Covid support provided Hope at a difficult time

*“The fact that a LEO backs you gives you credibility when you go to talk with other financial institutions.”*

*David Walsh  
HaloCare, Carlow*



**PRIMING GRANT SUPPORT**

***How a Priming Grant from Local Enterprise Office Carlow helped HaloCare get ahead***

David Walsh and Niall Kelly set up their remote security business Netwatch in Carlow in 2002. It grew into an enormous international success. Today Netwatch has in excess of 250,000 business customers and more than 500 staff in Ireland, the US and UK.

“We didn’t start out wanting to make big revenues or profits. Our vision was to build a global business from Carlow,” says Walsh.

They sold the business in 2018, retaining a shareholding and seat on the board. Their experience starting and growing a successful business meant that when they came up with a new idea for a business, in 2020, they knew exactly where to turn.

“LEO was hugely important on our first journey, so we wanted them to be involved in our second journey too,” explains Walsh.

The result is HaloCare, a technology company that empowers older people to enjoy a better, more connected quality of life in their own home, for longer. It’s a complementary service to care in the home which can provide much needed peace-of-mind and respite for carers when they cannot be there.

The solution uses smart devices that are installed around the home. These monitors, which have no cameras, use sensor technology to learn about a person’s natural gait, posture and daily behaviours. They then monitor the person for outlier events, such as a fall or a period of sustained immobility, alerting a clinically trained central Care Hub team. The pair started to look at the technology in March 2020 and set up the company in August. One of their first steps was to contact their Local Enterprise Office.

“The LEOs have huge experience because they are dealing with start-ups day in, day out. Even before we started we got in touch with LEO in Carlow to talk about what supports were available. Their support has been fantastic, just as it was with Netwatch.” he says.

HaloCare received a LEO Priming Grant, which it used to fund employment and other costs involved in setting up the business.

“Funding is the limiting factor for most start-up businesses, as well as for those looking to grow. The fact that a LEO backs you gives you credibility when you go to talk with other financial institutions. For them to know that a LEO has done its due diligence on you, and backed you, gives them solace,” he explains.

The priming grant was hugely important to its development. “We invested in building the software which will be hugely important to us as we grow the business. LEO’s investment was hugely important in helping us to build out the platform we need to go international.”

The soft supports, such as management training, have helped enormously too, he says. “When you get a grant, it’s like giving a hungry man a fish. When get supports such as building management capacity, or market intelligence, that’s the rod.”

## LEAN FOR MICRO BUSINESS TRAINING SUPPORT

### *Why lean business training helped put the wow into **WowWee.ie***

When Aine Gleeson couldn't find personalised Christmas stockings for her children, she decided to make her own. They were so lovely all her friends wanted one too, so she started a small home based craft business she could work around her children.

As they grew older her ambitions grew bigger. She set up WowWee.ie in 2004 to sell via one of the country's first ecommerce stores. Today she operates from a 5000 sq ft commercial premises, employs nine people and ships to 68 countries.

"LEO Clare has worked with us all the way through the development of this business. They have always reached out to me, which is terrific," says Aine.

"They saw the potential for exports into the future and helped me with Business Expansion Grants. But the biggest benefit for our business has been LEO training. There is just so much to learn in the fast-evolving digital space that I would have been stranded without them."

Gleeson took part in the LEO Lean for Micro programme in 2019 and the learnings have enabled WowWee.ie to do business better. Aine has seen the lean problem-solving approach evolve first-hand at all levels in the business.

"Lean is thinking about each thing you are doing, asking yourself why you are doing it, and then looking to see if there's a better way," she explains.

"Our team has taken the lean journey to heart and will only present a problem when it is backed up with possible solutions"

Because of lean training, the business, which had evolved on an ad hoc basis, put clear systems and processes in place.

"The clear flow of the organisation is key to efficiency, growth and profit making as well as an improved customer experience" she says.

The worst waste is that which you are not aware of, she points out. "Its the waste you don't measure, such as double handling, poor layout of workstations, manual operations that people do in different ways, which makes things take longer," she explains.

Simply asking suppliers not to provide packaging saves staff time, and reduces the company's waste bill.

Her lean consultant helped her to change the layout of her facility too, to boost efficiencies. Staff now can swivel from one workbench to another, while ensuring ribbon dispensers are set at a metre saves money, makes ordering easier and reduces waste.

"Lean has made us work smarter," says Aine. "It has also helped with team happiness. We are now all fully trained to do everything and if someone doesn't know how to do something, there's a procedure and a video to help. The result is that everyone's job has more variety and the process is clearly defined with consistent results."

Savings go straight to the bottom line but some benefits are immeasurable. "I now have time for myself. We have systems in place that mean the business can run without me," she says.

Aine credits LEO Clare for its ongoing, proactive support: "When the LEO reaches out to ask what are they not doing for you, you know you are working with a great team."



*"LEO Clare has worked with us all the way through the development of this business. They have always reached out to me, which is terrific"*

*Aine Gleeson  
WowWee, Clare*

*"I embraced every single bit of support they offered. They'll point you in the right direction."*

**Gráinne Mullins**  
Gra Chocolates, Galway



### TRADING ONLINE VOUCHER SUPPORT

#### **How online trading made life so much sweeter for *Grá Chocolates***

When award winning young chef Gráinne Mullins was starting a business in 2020 a seasoned entrepreneur gave her some advice – call LEO. "I said who is Leo, why do I have to talk to him? I had no idea what LEO was?" she laughs.

It was the first lockdown and her chef's work had dried up. She kept busy by making hand painted chocolates for friends and family but these had gone down such a treat she decided to try and sell some online.

"I emailed LEO Galway and they emailed me back," she explains. With the help of staff there, she signed up for a LEO Start Your Own Business Course online, a LEO Food Start-up programme, and the Digital School of Food, an online initiative she could undertake at her own pace. LEO mentors helped her hone her business strategy, get to grips with distribution and figure out finance.

"I went on LEO Lunch and Learn Facebook sessions every Tuesday too. Because I didn't have a business background I did loads of training. I did them all, I still do. I've just signed up for one about TikTok," says Gráinne.

A Priming Grant enabled her to build a micro chocolate factory at her home. "It was amazing," she says.

She also received the LEO Trading Online Voucher, designed to assist small businesses to trade more online, boost sales and reach new markets. "I got approved for that in 2021 and have used it to develop a new website, because my previous one was quite basic and I wanted to improve the customer experience to make the website as great as possible," she says.

"My website has much more functionality now, it has Apple and Google pay, and it remembers customers. The flow is better. It's easier to add things to your cart, and to purchase, as well as to pre order, and select the shipping date, which is perfect for gifting," she says.

She now employs a team of five people and will soon move into a bigger premises just outside Galway city. That enables her to manufacture and store more products, to ship to more destinations.

"Our website is integrated with our couriers now, they have all our labelling and we ship directly across Europe. I want to build a worldwide luxury chocolate brand," says Gráinne. The team at LEO Galway has supported her right along the way. "The guys in there are amazing. I embraced every single bit of support they offered. They'll point you in the right direction. Even if you are already in business, you can always upskill, and they have training and grants too, and they are just so supportive," she says.

"The first thing I tell others now is to call LEO."

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY VOUCHER SUPPORT

### *How a Covid support provided Hope at a difficult time*

Wim de Jongh, his wife Jeanne Mahony and their friend Des McSwiggan set up **Hope Beer** in 2015 at Howth Junction, in Kilbarrack, Dublin 5.

They were all in their fifties at the time. “Obviously we were never going to be the cool rock star brewers but on the other hand we had advantages, like our pensions, which meant we could build a state of the art brewery without having to rely on borrowings,” says Wim, who is Dutch.

One of their first ports of call was their LEO Fingal. “LEO has been very supportive of us right along the way.” Even before they had settled on the idea of a brewery, Wim and Jeanne had undertaken a LEO Start Your Own Business course. “There are very few LEO supports that we haven’t availed of. We started out with a Feasibility Study Grant. Then we got Priming Grants for employment and equipment. Now we have eight employees, and every single one of those has been assisted by a grant,” he says.

The business has grown steadily since inception, but the pandemic put a temporary halt to that. “Two days before St Patrick’s Day in 2020 our warehouse was filled to the roof with kegs of beer ready to supply to bars, export and festivals,” he recalls.

“We were left with all that stock as bars closed, export was halted and restaurant sales stopped and festival sales stopped overnight. For the first week or too retail sales stopped too.”

Over time, retail sales doubled, but because that involved cans rather than kegs and bottles, and with the hiring of contract packers, gross margin fell significantly.

“We did a three-day week for a while. Then I looked for any support I could get and we got back to work. While our sales were down in 2020 overall, and our gross margin was seriously affected, things weren’t as bad as they might have been,” says Wim.

To cope with the changes in the market they needed to invest in a canning line in order to protect gross margin. A LEO Business Continuity Voucher helped. “It was worth Euro 2,500 and we used that to get professional advice, working with our accountant to put together three-year cash flow projections, including both worst- and best-case scenarios. This was required to get a bank loan, which we needed in order to help finance the canning line,” he explains.

That work helped them to secure a Government-guaranteed bank loan and a capital grant from LEO Fingal. Together with their own resources they could make the investment.

The Euro 2,500 LEO Business Continuity Voucher was the key that enabled the trio to complete a Euro 150,000 investment in a canning line and necessary infrastructure.

Today the business is back on a growth path both at home and abroad, with export sales across Europe. “To get the money for the canning line we needed to get those cash flow projections,” says Wim. “It was extremely valuable support for us.”

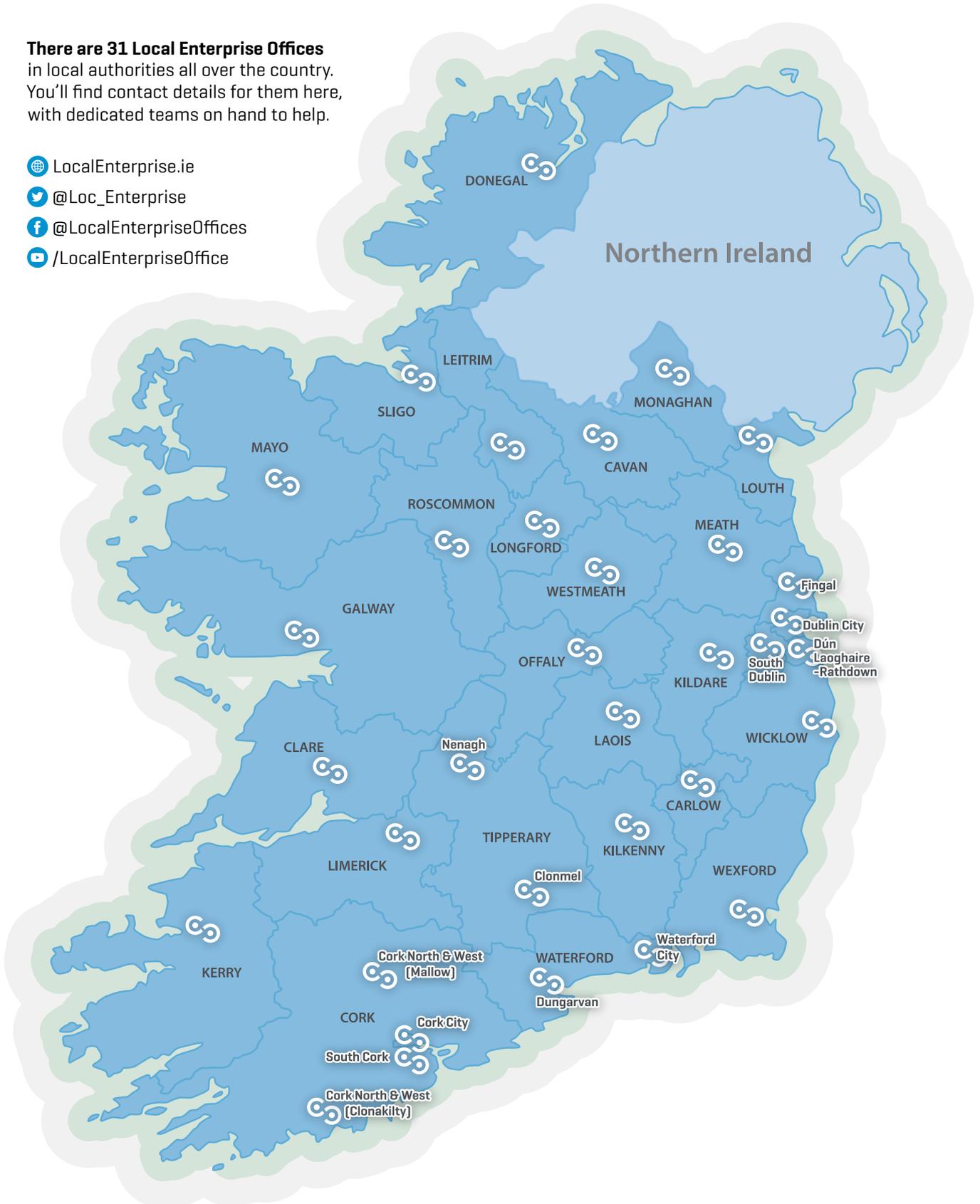


*“Business Continuity Voucher was extremely valuable support for us”*

*Wim de Jongh  
Hope Beer, Fingal*

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## CARLOW

**Local Enterprise Office Carlow,**  
Enterprise House,  
O'Brien Road,  
Co. Carlow.  
T: 059 912 9783/5  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/carlow](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/carlow)  
Twitter: @carlowLEO  
Facebook: Search LEOCarlow

## CAVAN

**Local Enterprise Office Cavan,**  
Cavan Innovation & Technology Centre,  
Dublin Road,  
Co. Cavan.  
T: 049 437 7200  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/cavan](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/cavan)  
Twitter: @LEOCavan  
Facebook: Search LocalEnterpriseCavan

## CLARE

**Local Enterprise Office Clare,**  
Aras an Chontae,  
New Road,  
Ennis,  
Co. Clare.  
T: 065 682 1616  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/clare](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/clare)  
Twitter: @LEOCountyClare  
Facebook: Search LEOCountyClare

## CORK CITY

**Local Enterprise Office Cork City,**  
Room 101,  
City Hall Building,  
Anglesea Street,  
Cork.  
T: 021 496 1828  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/corkcity](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/corkcity)  
Twitter: @LEOCorkCity  
Facebook: Search LEOCorkCity

## SOUTH CORK

**Local Enterprise Office South Cork,**  
Business Growth Hub,  
Cork County Council,  
County Hall,  
Cork.  
T: 021 428 5200  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/southcork](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/southcork)  
Twitter: @LEOSouthCork  
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## CORK NORTH & WEST

**Local Enterprise Office Cork North and West Cork West:** 8 Kent Street,  
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T: 023 883 4700 [Clonakilty office]  
**Cork North:** Ground Floor, Blackwater House,  
Mallow Business Park, Mallow, Co. Cork.  
T: 022 432 35 [Mallow office].  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/corknorthandwest](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/corknorthandwest)  
Twitter: @LEOCorkNW  
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localenterpriseCorkNorthandWest

## DONEGAL

**Local Enterprise Office Donegal,**  
The Enterprise Fund Business Centre,  
Ballyraine, Letterkenny,  
Co. Donegal.  
T: 074 916 0735  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/donegal](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/donegal)  
Twitter: @DonegalLEO  
Facebook: Search DonegalEnterprise

## DUBLIN CITY

**Local Enterprise Office Dublin City,**  
Civic Offices, Block 4, Floor 1,  
Wood Quay, Dublin 8.  
T: 01 222 5611/2  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/dublincity](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/dublincity)  
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LocalEnterpriseOfficeDublinCity

## SOUTH DUBLIN

**Local Enterprise Office South Dublin,**  
County Hall, Tallaght, Dublin 24.  
T: 01 414 9000  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/southdublin](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/southdublin)  
Twitter: @LEOSouthDublin  
Facebook: Search LEO South Dublin

## DUBLIN DLR

**Local Enterprise Office  
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown,**  
County Hall, Marine Road  
Dún Laoghaire,  
Co. Dublin.  
T: 01 204 7083  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/dlr](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/dlr)  
Twitter: @LEO\_dlr  
Facebook: Search  
LEODunLaoghaireRathdown

## FINGAL

**Local Enterprise Office Fingal,**  
First Floor, County Hall,  
Swords,  
Co Dublin.  
T: 01 890 0800  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/fingal](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/fingal)  
Twitter: @LEOFingal  
Facebook: Search LEOFingal

## GALWAY

**Local Enterprise Office Galway,**  
First Floor,  
County Buildings,  
Prospect Hill, Galway City.  
T: 091 509 090  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/galway](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/galway)  
Twitter: @GalEnterprise  
Facebook: Search LEOGalway

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**Local Enterprise Office Kerry,**  
County Buildings, Rathass,  
Tralee, Co. Kerry.  
T: 066 718 3522  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/kerry](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/kerry)  
Twitter: @LEOCountyKerry  
Facebook: Search LEOCountyKerry

## KILDARE

**Local Enterprise Office Kildare,**  
Aras Cill Dara, Devoy Park,  
Naas, Co. Kildare.  
T: 045 980 838  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/kildare](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/kildare)  
Twitter: @LEO\_kildare  
Facebook: Search LEOKildare

## KILKENNY

**Kilkenny County Council,**  
County Hall, John Street,  
Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny.  
T: 056 775 2662  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/kilkenny](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/kilkenny)  
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## LAOIS

**Local Enterprise Office Laois, Business**  
Support Unit, County Hall,  
Portlaoise, Co. Laois.  
T: (057) 866 1800  
W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/laois](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/laois)  
Twitter: @LEOLaois  
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## LEITRIM

### Local Enterprise Office Leitrim,

Aras an Chontae, Carrick on Shannon,  
Co. Leitrim.

T: 071 965 0420

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/leitrim](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/leitrim)

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## LIMERICK

### Local Enterprise Office,

The Engine, Upper Cecil St,  
Limerick.

T: 061 557 499

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/limerick](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/limerick)

Twitter: @LEO\_limerick

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### Local Enterprise Office Longford,

Áras an Chontae,  
Great Water Street, Co. Longford.

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### Local Enterprise Office Louth,

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Dundalk, Co. Louth.

T: 1890 202 303

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## MAYO

### Local Enterprise Office Mayo,

Cedar House - 2nd Floor,  
Moneen, Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

T: 094 906 4299

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Twitter: @LEOmhaigheo

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## MEATH

### Local Enterprise Office Meath,

Buvinda House,  
Dublin Road, Navan,  
Co. Meath.

T: 046 909 7000

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/meath](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/meath)

Twitter: @MeathLEO

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## MONAGHAN

### Local Enterprise Office Monaghan,

Unit 9, MTEK Building,  
Knockaconny,  
Co. Monaghan.

T: 047 718 18

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### Local Enterprise Office Offaly,

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Aras an Chontae,

Charleville Road,

Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

T: 057 935 7480

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/offaly](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/offaly)

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## Roscommon

### Local Enterprise Office Roscommon

Roscommon County Council

Áras an Chontae

Co. Roscommon

T: 090 662 6263

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/Roscommon](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/Roscommon)

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## SLIGO

### Local Enterprise Office Sligo

City Hall, Quay Street

Co. Sligo.

T: 071 911 4417 / 4408

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/sligo](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/sligo)

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## TIPPERARY

### Local Enterprise Office Tipperary

**Nenagh:** Civic Offices, Limerick Road,

Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

T: 0761 065 000

**Clonmel:** Ballingarrane House,  
Cahir Road, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

T: 0761 065 000

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/tipperary](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/tipperary)

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## WATERFORD

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#### Waterford City Office:

32 The Mall,

Waterford,

Co. Waterford.

T: 0761 102 905

#### Dungarvan Office:

Civic Offices,

Dungarvan,

Co. Waterford.

T: 0761 102 905

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/waterford](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/waterford)

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## WESTMEATH

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Westmeath County Council,

Áras an Chontae,

Mount Street,

Mullingar,

Co. Westmeath.

T: 044 933 8945

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/Westmeath](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/Westmeath)

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## WEXFORD

### Local Enterprise Office Wexford

Wexford County Council,

Carricklawn,

Wexford.

T: 053 919 6020

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## WICKLOW

### Local Enterprise Office Wicklow

Wicklow Local Campus,

Clermont House,

Rathnew,

Co. Wicklow.

T: 040 430 800

W: [LocalEnterprise.ie/wicklow](http://LocalEnterprise.ie/wicklow)

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