Midlands Regional Authority

REGIONAL REPORT ON IS

December 2010

Report on IS (Final version)

1. Overview

1.1 – Introduction

The Midland Region comprises the four Counties of Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. The region covers an area of around 6,524 square kilometers and accounts for 9.5% of the total area of the Irish Republic. The landscape of the Midland Region is diverse, dominated by the River Shannon and its callows along the western boundary, interpspersed with lakes, wetlands, peatlands, agricultural lands and eskers throughout the central area, the upland area of Slieve Bloom Mountains to the south and the rolling landscape of the Barrow and Nore valley to the South East. In 2006 the region's population was recorded at 251,664 which represents 6% of the total population of Ireland. 60% (149,945) of the region's population were found to reside in rural areas.

1.2 – Socio-economic data

Results for the 1st quarter of this year show 108,200*[3] people were employed in the region. The largest employer in the region is the Public Sector, with the med-tech, food sector and agriculture/peat industry also employing significant numbers. 2007 saw nearly 8000[4] students from the region attending 3rd level education.

The Midlands has a strong industrial base, with the medical devices, healthcare, pharmaceutical and chemicals, and engineering categories accounting for the largest segment of this sector. There are also numerous food and drink producers in the Midlands bringing to the market quality brands such as Glenisk, Carroll Cuisine, and Lockes Whiskey**.** The software sector is represented but has yet to forge a strong presence. The peat industry plays a most important role in the industrial development of the Midlands.

Successful multi-national firms that have located in the region include GeneMedix (Tullamore), Tyco-Healthcare, Boston Scientific and Isotron Ireland.

The region hosts telecommunications-based service companies such as ICT Eurotel and One Direct (Athlone) and also hosts financial services and software companies such as GMACCM (Mullingar), ICM UniComp (Portlaoise) and Ericsson Systems Expertise and 2PM Technologies (Athlone)

[3] Source, Central Statistics Office, http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Dialog/Saveshow.asp.
[4] Source, Central Statistics Office

1.3 – Regional SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Athlone Institute of Technology is a 3rd level education provider situated at the heart of the region. The Colleges continued development is as a key driver in the region of ICT skills, education and innovation.
- The region posses a skilled labour force with a high number attending third level education.
- The rollout of access technologies in the region continues with WiFi and the National Broadband Scheme bringing high speed internet access to more citizens on a continued basis

Weaknesses

- The regions ICT infrastructure is not as yet fully in place with some rural areas without broadband access.
- National ICT strategies although very beneficial are not completely focused on the region alone.
- Research suggests that the region possesses a digital age divide with fewer older citizens using PCs.
- There may on occasion be a need to draw experienced people away from the larger population areas such as Dublin and the east coast. Other regions may also have a more recognised IS tradition.

Opportunities

- The roll out of affordable and high quality broadband services across the region through schemes such as the National Broadband Scheme will empower citizens and business
- Support and training is available to assist and support ICT enterprise
- New business parks with technology infrastructures in place, ICT education (through the local 3rd level institute and other universities), and an improving ICT infrastructure nationally are a strong combination to attract more ICT companies into the region.
- Organisations such as Enterprise Ireland are available to assist enterprise in the region.

Threats

- The current economic crisis and credit crunch may impede the pace of ICT development and enterprise in the region.
- It is anticipated that local government and public bodies will experience further budget cuts in the foreseeable future; this will require these bodies to prioritize their efforts and may require a decrease in the rollout of ICT enabled services to the citizen.

  With reducing household incomes in the region the affordability of ICT (hardware and access to high speed communication technology) may impede the regions development.

2. The Information Society in *Region*: information and data

2.1 - Diffusion of the main instruments => Focus is on IS base instruments

2.1.1 Use of the PC

Indicators	Unit
How many families have a PC (figure represents households*[5]	63 (Midlands 2010 Figure)%
How many people use the PC: *[9]	
- **every day**	37% (BMW 08)
- **more time in a week**	18% (BMW 08)
- **few times in a month**	4% (BMW 08)
- **never**	40% (BMW 08)
How many enterprises have a PC*[6]	97% (National 2009 Stats)

[5] Midlands Figure from Mr Tom Butler broadband presentation to MRA 24th June 2010.
[6] CSO Information Society Stats 2009
[6]+ CSO Information Society Stats 2009, Having a Website or Homepage
[9] CSO Information Society BMW specific Stats 2008

2.1.2 Internet

Indicators	Unit
How many families have an Internet connection at home*[9]	54% (BMW 08)
Which are the main declared reasons to not have Internet at home: example	% of reasons
- **Unable to use it*[9]**	19% (BMW 08)
- **Cost *[9]**	15% (BMW 08 – Equipment Cost) Access Cost = 4%
- **Accesses to Internet From another place (work,..) *[9]**	11% (BMW 08)
- **It.s not so interesting**	N/A
How many enterprises use Internet for own activity*[6]+ **How enterprises accesses to Internet:**	66% (National 09) % of ways (National)
- **Modem*[6]**	13% (National 09)
- **ISDN*[6]**	21% (National 09)
- **Broadband*[6]**	84% (National 09)
- **Wireless**	(Not Reported by CSO)
How many enterprises (10 employees at least) has a LAN (Local Area Network) *[6]	64% (National)

2.1.3 Broadband

It is difficult to provide a figure for regional broadband coverage as this figure is not available from comreg (the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector (telecommunications, radio-communications and broadcasting transmission) and the postal sector). However research shows that 69% of (eircom) telephone exchanges in the region have been broadband enabled. The National Broadband Scheme, the objective of which is to deliver broadband to target areas in Ireland in which broadband services were deemed to be insufficient has been completed in the region. The rural broadband scheme which will be rolled out later this year will provide secure access to broadband for certain target premises in rural areas to which affordable broadband is not currently available and is unlikely to be available in the near future.

2.2 IS: services and customs

2.2.1 Internet and the citizens

Indicators	Unit
How many people use Internet for:	% among people using Internet
- **Email***[10]	77% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Searching info on products and goods***[10]	64% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Searching info on travel and holidays***[10]	54% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Searching health info**	22% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Other search activities**	%
- **Learning***[10]	30% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Downloading ***[10] (software)	18% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Home banking ***[10]	35% (BMW Q1 2008)
Focusing on people which purchasing by Internet, how many buy	
- **Books, papers***[11] [7]	24% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Travel, holidays***[11]	50% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Clothes ***[11]	20% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Films, music***[11]	22% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Software***[11]	11% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Tickets***[11]	24% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Hardware***[11]	5% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Electronic devices***[11]	13% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Foodstuff***[11]	4% (BMW Q1 2008)
- **Financial services***[11]	2% (BMW Q1 2008)
	%
Other regional additional/distinctive indicator	

[10] CSO Information Society BMW specific Stats for first 3 months of 2008
[11] CSO Information Society BMW specific Stats for first 3 months of 2008
[12] CSO Information Society BMW specific Stats 2008

2.2.2 Internet and the enterprises

Indicators		Unit
How many enterprises use Internet for:		% among enterprises using Internet
-	**Commerce (buying/purchasing)**	45% (National 09)
-	**Banking or financial services*[6]**	85% (National 09)
-	**PA services**	%
-	**Achieving market information (e.g. prices) *[6]**	24% (National 09)
-	**E.learning**	39% (National 09)
How many enterprises have a web site		66% (National 09)
Which services/information they offer by the web site:		
-	**Catalogues and prices*[6]**	37%(National)
-	**On line purchasing / booking**	45% (National 09, excludes EDI)
-	**Customer management*[6]**	25%(National)

2.3 Digital divide

2.3.1 Gap features

Use of PC according to age/gender		
Age*[12]	**Male**	**Female**
	BMW Q1 08 Stats	BMW Q1 08 Stats
16-19 years	100%	95%
20-35 years (young people)	80%	90%
35-45 years (middle age people)	79%	81%
45-55 years (middle age people)	65%	72%
More than 55 years (aged people)	39%	42% %
Total	66%	73%

3. The Information Society in ***Region***: governance and policies at local and regional level

This part of the document has to give a whole picture on IS policies, programmes, goals and governance instruments

3.1 – The governance of the Information society in ***Region***

The governance of the information society within the region rests at National level.

The Taoiseach (prime minister) announced on 7th May 2008 that responsibility for eGovernment was to be consolidated in the Department of Finance. Responsibility for the delivery of individual eGovernment projects will remain the responsibility of individual Departments and Offices. This new arrangement will ensure that there is strong, coordinated leadership from the Centre, with regular communication between the Department of Finance and the various Departments, Offices and Agencies with responsibility for various projects

A national "Knowledge Society Strategy" is currently being prepared with publication expected shortly: http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/26C23436-E6B3-4842-95B3-20BD2AF104D6/0/FinalVersionTechnologyActionsReportFinal210709.doc#_Toc234315301.

The strategy will cover the following areas.

The Knowledge Society Strategy will cover:

- Broadband access;
- eInclusion;
- eGovernment;
- the role of ICT in all stages of education;
- eLearning;
- eHealth;
- Citizenship;
- Technology innovation;
- Actions from Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy, 2009.

The Department of Finance has issued direction for arrangements for eGovernment in March 2009. This direction requires all Departments, Offices, Agencies, and all non-commercial public bodies and authorities to develop eGovernment plans which set out all ongoing, planned and potential eGovernment projects. Such plans will be set in the context of the wider modernisation programme underlying the need to, inter alia:

- Improve the quality of customer service
- Drive administrative and process simplification
- Improve value for money in a tightening fiscal environment
- Improve Ireland's standing in international benchmarking and public perception
- Improve the public's perception of ICT usage in the public service

This work will also determine which services are not amenable to electronic interactions and why that is the case.

The role of the **Regional Authority** is to promote the co-ordination of the provision of public services at regional level. The Authority also reviews the development needs of the region, contributing to the preparation of the National Development Plan and other strategies at national and regional level.

The Regional Authority is not a direct provider of infrastructural or other mainstream services. Responsibility for such matters lies with the existing local and public authorities. Rather, it has an umbrella role in relation to public services, i.e. the promotion of co-ordination. This requires a wide range of consultations with local authorities, public bodies, agencies, government departments, partnership companies and the social partners.