How Ireland has benefited from the EU

- Almost €76 billion received since joining the EU in 1973.
- Over €57 billion has been paid in support for agricultural programmes.
- The next largest area of funding came from Structural and Cohesion Funding (over €10.7 billion).
- The European Social Fund contributed almost €6.6 billion towards education and training, social inclusion and supports for vulnerable sectors of our society. Recently, a large emphasis has been placed on up-skilling our workforce.
- By the end of 2017, Ireland had secured funding of €424 million in Horizon 2020 funding.

For the 2014-2020 Budget, the majority of Irish funding will come through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and will be spent on areas such as direct income and market support to the agricultural sector.

Ireland will continue to receive significant funding under the Structural Fund. As in recent years, this funding will focus on research, technology and innovation, contributing to energy efficiency, education and training, and job creation measures.

Additional funding opportunities arise under the Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, Connecting Europe and COSME EU level programmes, which cover research, education, infrastructure networks, SME competitiveness and a number of other smaller initiatives.

This information leaflet provides an insight into some of the ways that the EU has recently supported this county.
Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever, with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020). It promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the laboratory to the market.

In recent years, Laois companies have availed of funding but currently none are participating in EU programmes. However, Laois residents can avail of the EU supported institutions in counties nearby. Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) offers numerous courses and also technical assistance to companies in Laois. The Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at AIT working in partnership with Enterprise Ireland provides incubation and business support for innovative start-ups. The centre delivers the New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme in collaboration with Maynooth University and makes available the resources and expertise of AIT to support client companies and enterprise in the region, including Laois. Many Laois students graduated from AIT in 2017.

SCIENCE WEEK IN LAOIS
Among a rich programme of events for 2017 in Laois there were interactive workshops with the Junior Einstein’s Science Club, an ‘Under the Microscope’ project and an exciting ‘Science Circus’ where an experienced presenter used juggling, plate spinning and all sorts of fantastic circus tricks to demonstrate the laws of physics. Other Laois events for 2017 included an engaging dinosaur show, science career talks and workshops from the Geological Survey of Ireland.

All classes were busy during Science Week 2017 in Rathenska National School. Magnetism was explored, lava lamps were made, properties of materials were examined and electric circuits were created.

CODERDOJO NINJA TRAINING IN PORTARLINGTON
Coderdojo is a global movement of free learning spaces for young people to learn creatively by programming. By introducing the creative aspects of technology to young people the movement is broadening their horizons and opportunities to become future entrepreneurs. The ethos is simple co-operation. The software is available online for free. The mentors volunteer their time for free. The space is available for free and there is no charge for students.

A digital mentoring programme for volunteers/parents in the Coder Dojo Club in Portarlington is being provided. This is delivered on a “train the trainer” basis, so that parents and volunteers are equipped with the skills needed to take on the role of mentors and passing on the knowledge to the new recruits or ‘ninjas’.

Successful applicants in County Laois were awarded over €600k under 2017 Better Energy Communities (BEC) scheme for community energy projects. Included in this was Energywise Ltd., who are active in promoting plans for energy efficient housing and a transport hub in Portlaoise. A number of both non-residential buildings and domestic households will also benefit under this project from measures such as heat pumps, boiler, window and door replacements and insulation and heating controls.
EU policy on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) aims to improve the approach to entrepreneurship in Europe, by providing a comprehensive SME policy for EU countries, including Ireland. Supported by EU funding passed directly to the Irish government, this is then implemented at local and national level.

As part of this drive to encourage entrepreneurship in Ireland, a network of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) was established to help local businesses. Working with Enterprise Ireland and the Enterprise Europe Network, the LEOs aim to support entrepreneurship and innovation amongst SMEs, to drive new firm creations, expansion and employment opportunities, as well as to assist in overcoming operational barriers.

The 31 LEOs, located in Local Authorities nationwide, have hands-on teams of experts to provide business advice and information. Each LEO is a gateway to a wide range of government and non-government supports that are available to help local businesses develop. A range of grant supports, from feasibility to local development, is also available. Their aim is to stimulate local business and economic growth and they do this through a number of initiatives.

Laois is serviced by one LEO, which is based in Portlaoise. There are new initiatives supported by Enterprise Ireland that Laois LEO runs.

**The Midland Engineering Cluster Programme** is a structured programme of market-led innovation, best practice transfer and product and trade development. It creates a new synergy between engineering enterprises, educational institutions and support agencies in the region.

The Midland Engineering Cluster, in conjunction with WestBIC and Almir Business, launched a new programme in 2017 to help ambitious engineering business owners grow their enterprises. The **Engenuity Midlands Innovation Programme** is an ideal opportunity for eligible small businesses in the Engineering sector to receive professional training, mentoring and access to networking and collaboration opportunities. WestBIC is the official EU Business and Innovation Centre for the Border, Midlands and Western Region and supports organisations and business people in Laois.

**The Midlands One to Two Growth Initiative** assists carefully selected solo entrepreneurs from across the Midlands in overcoming the legal, regulatory and administrative barriers to adopting employer status, thus stimulating employment creation and business expansion.

The **IE Domain Registry (IEDR)**, in partnership with the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland and LEOs, has launched **OPTIMISE Design Ireland**, a new programme to bring Irish design and craft to the world. OPTIMISE Design Ireland empowers innovative, design-led Irish brands to improve their online presence, hone their digital capabilities and grow their global e-commerce sales, by bringing together best-in-class expertise across the digital, enterprise and design sectors. Laois furniture makers Zelouf+Bell, who are based in Vicarstown, were chosen for the programme.

**SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS**

As part of the LEOs’ initiative to stimulate business development, Entrepreneurship competitions are held at a number of levels.

**Infrastruct AMS Ltd.** from Mountmellick was announced as a finalist in the 2017 National Enterprise Awards. Infrastruct AMS was set up in 2012 and offers a range of specialist inspection, testing and investigation services on all types of structures. The founder of the company, **Dr Thomas Callanan** represented the company at the National Enterprise Awards.

**Junior Entrepreneurs**

A group of girls from **Heywood CS** are winners of the Student Enterprise Programme for Laois schools. **Ellen McWey, Arianna Mezzepelle, Ruth Bergin and Megan Walsh** came up with the idea of producing therapeutic comfort aids for people living with sensory issues. These disorders range from dementia, a condition developed later in life, to Down’s Syndrome, a condition present from birth.

**Portlaoise Enterprise Centre** has a voluntary Board of Directors, committed to supporting and promoting enterprise development in Portlaoise. The Chairperson, **Brian Ogilvie**, is Head of Research and Commercialisation Support with the Institute of Technology Carlow. He assists local Laois companies, through the Centre.
For the period 2014-2020, the CAP will invest €10.7 billion in Ireland’s farming sector and rural areas, with additional co-financing from the Irish authorities. Under CAP, County Laois received almost €41.8m in 2016, giving an average payment of €14,728 per recipient. Direct Payments of over €35.1m were made to farmers, with an average amount of €13,104 per recipient.

Rural areas also receive other supports through the Rural Development Programme as well as through investment in towns and villages. The Leader programme continues to support rural communities, including tourism projects. Laois Community and Enterprise Development Company, trading as Laois Partnership Company implements the programme for the county. Laois was allocated €7.1m for the 2014-2020 programme.

Aerial Agri Tech is a Laois company that specialises in providing high-resolution spatial and temporal data across a range of industries. Funding to buy a drone was supplied through Leader funding.

More than €1.6 billion was paid to rural Ireland in 2016 under a variety of EU agricultural schemes. Currently, Irish farmers receive over €1.2 billion of EU funding per year through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). An additional €2.7 billion in funding over a ten-year period was received rural development programmes.

For further information please contact:
The European Commission Representation in Ireland
Tel: 01 6341111 Email eu-ie-info-request@ec.europa.eu

SICAP is the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. It is funded by the Irish Government with co-funding from the European Social Fund. The aim of SICAP is to reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalized in society, living in poverty or in unemployment. It does this through a community development approach.

Laois Partnership Company manages the programme in Laois.

FÁILTE ISTEACH - LAOIS
Fáilte Isteach is a unique project, which utilises the skills, talents and expertise of community-minded volunteers. It harnesses their desire to contribute positively to society and make a difference by providing conversational English classes for new migrants. The classes are taught by voluntary tutors from the local community and take place weekly the Respond Community Building, Mill Court, Portlaoise. To date, approximately 35 students and over 40 volunteers have participated in the project. This partnership called Fáilte Isteach involves Third Age Foundation, Laois Partnership Company, Respond Social Housing, the Adult Learning Centre and Laois Offaly Educational Training Board.

Erasmus+ is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. It provides funding and support for organisations and individuals to operate projects that encourage European exchange, co-operation and learning. The Erasmus Programme has had a profound impact on the internationalisation of Irish higher education. It led to the creation of international departments in our higher education institutions charged with managing the programme. Since it began in 1987, approximately 100,000 learners have come to Ireland generating an estimated 500,000 visitors drawn from family and friends.

Ireland will have a total €12.6m to allocate under the student/staff mobilities and strategic partnership actions in 2018 compared to €11.1m in 2017 – an increase of 13%. During the last academic year, there were 3,172 students and 262 staff outgoing participants from Ireland, with a further 7,579 students and 707 staff incoming.