Statement of Strategy 2016 – 2019
Minister's Foreword
This Statement of Strategy sets out the actions that my Department will take over the coming period to enrich the quality of life in Ireland through the protection and promotion of our rich culture, arts, heritage and language. In addition to their immense inherent value, our language, culture and heritage are valued amenities for communities and important resources for economic activity, including tourism and for the presentation of Ireland as an attractive destination for sustainable inward investment.

In 2016 the Department was also assigned responsibility for a series of actions under the Programme for Government designed to facilitate integrated rural development at local level and to foster the growth of vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities. These matters are also addressed in this Strategy. While there is already a lot being done to support rural development through various Government strategies, the Action Plan for Rural Development published in January 2017 provides, for the first time, a visible, cohesive and coordinated approach across the whole of Government to the implementation of both economic and social policies that impact on rural communities. It will serve as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives that benefit rural Ireland.

A further priority is the Creative Ireland Programme, which is the Government’s Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016, placing creativity at the centre of public policy. It is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential.

I would like to thank all those who participated in the development of this Strategy, especially the management and staff of my Department. My ministerial colleagues, Michael Ring T.D. and Séan Kyne T.D. and I look forward to working with our partners and our stakeholders to advance this important work for the benefit of people and communities across Ireland through the coming years.

Heather Humphreys, T.D.,
Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Secretary General's Introduction

I am pleased to present the first Statement of Strategy for the recently expanded Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

In addition to the responsibilities allocated in the area of Regional development and Rural Affairs, the Department continues to oversee, and have policy responsibility for, the conservation, preservation, protection, development and presentation of Ireland’s rich heritage, arts and culture. The Department also remains engaged in the promotion of the Irish language, the development of the Gaeltacht and the sustainable development of island communities.

This Statement of Strategy sets out the Department’s high level goals for the coming period, together with the strategies and outputs that we will focus on to deliver on these goals and the positive outcomes that we will work to achieve. The high level goals, strategies, outputs and outcomes in this Statement of Strategy will be reflected in the business plans and individual work plans of the staff of the Department so that each staff member has a clear understanding of the importance of their role and the contribution they will make to the achievement of these goals.

Katherine Licken
Secretary General
Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
1. Mission and Environmental Analysis

Environmental Analysis

Following the General Election in February 2016, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was assigned, in addition to its existing remit, further responsibilities in the areas of Regional Development and Rural Affairs. These included new initiatives in the area of rural and regional development, with certain functions transferring from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to our Department.

Under this expanded remit, the Department will oversee gross voted expenditure of over €368m in 2017 and an increased staffing complement which now exceeds 600 whole time equivalents.

The additional responsibilities assigned to the Department have brought a period of change which requires us to review our strategic priorities and deployment of resources to achieve delivery in key policy areas. Under the Programme for a Partnership Government, we are required to play a significant role in facilitating the advancement of long term sustainable economic and social progress across rural Ireland as well as continuing to work for the conservation and promotion of our arts, culture and heritage and supporting the Irish language, Gaeltacht regions and offshore Islands.
The high-level policy objectives for our new Regional and Rural Affairs function are:

- to facilitate the advancement of long-term sustainable economic and social progress across rural Ireland;
- to support the revitalisation of towns and villages;
- to improve the fabric of local communities and increase their potential to retain and develop vibrant local enterprises into the future; and
- to facilitate the roll out of rural broadband in conjunction with the Local Authorities and implement the report of the Post Office Network Business Development Group.

A key task for us in the coming period will be to implement the Action Plan for Rural Development, which will act as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives across Government for the benefit of rural Ireland. The objective of the Action Plan is to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life.

A key message in the Action Plan is that, while there are challenges to be overcome, rural Ireland in the 21st century is modern, dynamic and creative, and is an integral part of our identity and economy. In addition to working with other Departments and agencies to deliver this key Government priority, we will also continue to contribute to other priority projects of Government such as the Action Plan for Jobs and Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.
A further priority is the **Creative Ireland Programme**, a culture-based project, aligned with “Culture 2025 - Éire Ildánach”, and designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. The core proposition is that engagement with and participation in arts and culture drives personal and collective creativity with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement.

We will also continue to work to develop Ireland’s international reputation as a hub of cultural and artistic excellence and, together with the bodies under our aegis (Appendix 1), will work across the heritage, arts, culture and creative sectors, to ensure that they continue to make a significant contribution to Irish life, contributing to tourism and supporting job retention and growth.

In addition, we will continue to drive and support the implementation of the **20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030** and provide support for the Irish language while also supporting employment in Gaeltacht areas. The sustainable development of island communities will also be a priority for the Department, as will working to increase the level of North/South cooperation across the range of activities for which we have responsibility.
Delivery, Monitoring and Review

This Statement of Strategy will provide the basis for the organisation and management of the Department over the coming years. The assignment of responsibilities will be reflected in the Framework of Assignments and our strategic priorities will inform and guide the annual business planning process. The targeted actions identified through this business planning will dictate the setting of individual and team objectives through the operation of the Performance Management and Development System. Progress on delivery of priorities will be subject to regular review and we will publish an Annual Report reflecting the progress achieved in delivering on the strategic priorities set out in this Statement of Strategy.
Risk Management

A key challenge for all public sector bodies is the identification and management of emerging challenges and opportunities and especially those factors that may jeopardise the delivery of objectives. Robust risk management policies will be maintained at all levels within the Department to ensure that risks are identified and managed appropriately.

At a strategic level, the Department has identified potential adverse impacts from Brexit as being of particular significance for the delivery of our High Level Goals. The Department co-sponsors two of the six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. Waterways Ireland is the largest of the six, employing over 300 people, and is headquartered in Enniskillen. Curtailment of free movement, particularly free movement of people, could lead to difficulties in its operations and those of the Language Body.

Given the importance of the agri-food and tourism sectors in rural Ireland, and the fact that indigenous firms may be more vulnerable post-Brexit and less well able than the multinationals to take advantage of any opportunities presented by Brexit, the potential negative impacts of Brexit will be more keenly felt in regional and rural areas than in Dublin or the other major urban centres. Potential Brexit-related challenges have also been identified in relation to a number of other important areas for which the Department is responsible, including protection of natural heritage, promotion of the film industry and supporting the heritage and cultural tourism sectors.
Our Mission

To promote and develop Ireland’s arts, culture and heritage; to advance the use of the Irish language and to facilitate sustainable regional and rural development, including the development of the Gaeltacht and Islands.

The Mission will be fulfilled through the pursuit of six High Level Goals for the Department as follows:

- **Goal A** – To support and develop Ireland’s arts and culture thereby enriching lives through engagement in cultural activity; and to promote Ireland’s arts and culture globally;

- **Goal B** – To conserve, manage and present our heritage in compliance with legal obligations, both for its intrinsic value and as a support to economic renewal and sustainable employment;

- **Goal C** – To facilitate the advancement of long term sustainable economic and social development across rural Ireland and to contribute to the maximization of economic opportunity in the regions;

- **Goal D** – To support the Irish language throughout Ireland and to strengthen its use as the principal community language of the Gaeltacht.

- **Goal E** – To assist the sustainable development of Island communities.

- **Goal F** – To promote North-South co-operation, particularly in the context of An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland.
Each of these goals is explored in more detail in Part 3 where the specific strategies and actions which will contribute to the achievement of these goals are set out. In working to achieve these goals, we will:

- Cultivate Irish artistic and creative talent and enhance Ireland's reputation as a hub of artistic excellence;
- Realise Ireland’s full creative potential through mainstreaming creativity in the life of the nation;
- Improve access to the arts, the collections of the National Cultural Institutions and regional arts infrastructure;
- Support the development and expansion of the film and television production sector;
- Project and enhance our built and natural heritage as an important contributor to national health, wellbeing, enjoyment and sustainable economic growth;
- Increase public awareness of the immense inherent value of Ireland’s heritage and stakeholder buy-in to its protection;
- Adhere to our national, EU and international commitments and avoid any reputational and financial damage to Ireland;
- Protect our natural habitats and species;
- Protect and sustainably manage our built heritage for future generations;
- Implement a range of initiatives in a co-ordinated and timely manner through the Action Plan for Rural Development which contribute to the revitalisation and economic development of rural Ireland;
- Support the Post Office Network in adapting to a changing business environment by developing relevant services to rural communities;
- Prepare rural communities for the roll out of broadband across rural Ireland;
- Develop a cohesive national policy in relation to Social Enterprise leading to a more co-ordinated and focused approach to this sector;
- Support the Irish language, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht through the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030;
- Support the sustainable development of the Gaeltacht and island communities particularly through job creation and retention of existing employment;
- Continually develop the North-South institutions, with a particular emphasis on infrastructural development in the border region;
- Continue to promote Irish and Ulster-Scots language and culture on an all-island basis;
- Continue to maintain and develop the navigable inland waterways, principally for recreational purposes.
1. How We Will Carry Out Our Work

Our Values

We value our relationships with our stakeholders, our customers, and one another. We will demonstrate honesty, integrity, impartiality and fairness in those relationships and will be respectful in our dealings.

We will endeavour to look beyond organisational boundaries to build positive, collaborative, working relationships within the Department and with other Departments, public sector bodies and stakeholders, promoting a ‘joined up’ approach to managing what we do.

We will give objective, well-informed policy advice to the Minister, Ministers of State and the Government. In particular we will support positive engagement with the Oireachtas, through engagement with relevant committees and responses to individual members, in line with Government commitments.

We will continuously strive to improve the way that we work, the services that we provide and how we communicate what we do consistent with Government policies in relation to Open Government and the provision of quality Customer Service.

We recognise and value the contribution made by our staff in delivering our goals and serving our customers. We will support and develop our staff to assist them in the delivery of their work.

We will focus on achieving better outcomes from resources applied and we will promote a culture of accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in all that we do. We will listen to our stakeholders and customers and we will strive to constantly learn and improve.
Achieving Our Goals will be supported by these Enablers

**People**

- Provision of an appropriate physical workplace and promotion of a positive working environment.
- Building capacity through workforce planning and further commitment to Learning and Development.
- Effective arrangements for internal coordination and communications across the Department.

**Governance**

- Effective business planning processes and management of team and individual performance.
- Robust financial management and procurement policies and procedures to ensure that value for money is secured to the greatest extent possible and sustainable outcomes for the taxpayer are delivered.
- Good practice in corporate governance systems, structures and procedures including adherence to risk management procedures.
- Appropriate alignment of staff structures to ensure responsive and flexible deployment in response to strategic priorities.
- Implementation of the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies* in those bodies and agencies funded from its Vote to help ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and increased accountability.

**Technology and Processes**

- Enhanced use of digital and information and communications technologies to improve service delivery/communication, improve records management and make better use of the Department’s data and improve accessibility to the Department’s services for our customers.
2. Cross Cutting Issues

Programme for a Partnership Government:
Under the programme, the Department has a range of commitments (outlined in Appendix 2), some of which involve collaboration with other government departments and state agencies. These have been taken into account, and are reflected in the strategies and actions outlined in this document.

External Engagement

We are responsible for the development of policy and delivery of services and in a range of areas that impact the lives of citizens either directly or through their impact on the environment. We will further develop our capacity to engage with the public both through enhanced delivery of services and the use of appropriate mechanisms in place to allow for consultation in the development and design of policy and services.

Oireachtas and Cross-Government Initiatives

We will support the Minister and Ministers of State in their engagement with the Oireachtas and its Committees in relation to matters under the Department’s remit. We will also engage positively with members of the Oireachtas in relation to matters they raise directly with the Department.
We play a key role in a range of cross-Government strategies and initiatives and close co-operation with relevant Departments and bodies will continue, as required. This will include participating in, and supporting the work of, Interdepartmental Groups and Cabinet Committees. We will work to maintain effective relationships with other Departments and state bodies in order to improve service delivery to the public.

**EU and International Affairs**

EU and international legislation and initiatives have a significant impact on the policies and programmes for which this Department has responsibility. We will continue to work to meet our EU and international commitments and engage with partner Departments and other bodies to assist them in meeting shared obligations. We will participate in appropriate fora which encourage policy formation, sharing of information and development opportunities.

![Image of a flower](image.jpg)

**Equality**

Having regard to section 42(2) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, human rights and equality issues relevant to the Department have been considered in preparing this document. The Department contributes to a range of Government Strategies and Plans in the Disability and Social Inclusion area.
Corporate Governance of Bodies and Agencies

We will continue to positively engage with the bodies and agencies funded from the Department’s Vote and all other relevant stakeholders to implement our goals and strategies and to assist them in achieving their objectives. We will work with the bodies under our aegis to support the implementation of the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies* launched by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016.

Reform and Renewal

The Department is fully committed to the on-going programme of change in the Civil Service, which seeks to build capacity to respond to existing and future challenges and improve the performance of the Civil Service and its staff. The Civil Service Renewal Plan provides the framework for much of this work and outlines a vision for the Civil Service and the practical changes required to create a more unified, professional, responsive and open and accountable Civil Service, providing a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland. Strong leadership and active participation in the implementation of this programme of change will be a key focus over the period of this Strategy.
3. How We Will Achieve Our Goals

**MISSION**
To promote and protect Ireland's arts, culture and heritage; to advance the use of the Irish language and to facilitate sustainable regional and rural development, including development of the Gaeltacht and islands.

To promote North South cooperation, particularly in the context of An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland.

To support the Irish language throughout Ireland, to strengthen its use as the principal community language of the Gaeltacht and to assist the sustainable development of island communities.

To support and develop Ireland’s arts and culture to enrich lives through engagement in the cultural life of the nation; and to promote Ireland’s arts and culture globally.

To conserve, manage and present our heritage in compliance with legal obligations, for its intrinsic value and as a support to economic renewal and sustainable employment.

To facilitate the advancement of long-term sustainable economic and social development across rural Ireland and maximise economic opportunity in the regions.
GOAL
To support and develop Ireland's arts and culture to enrich lives through engagement in the cultural life of the nation; and to promote Ireland’s arts and culture globally.

High Level Strategies
- The publication and implementation of ‘Culture 2025’ policy and the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022 in partnership with national and local stakeholders
- Supporting our agencies and National Cultural Institutions in providing a high quality cultural offering to the public.
- Enhancing the role of local authorities in delivering arts and cultural services.
- Securing and upgrading a viable network of arts and cultural infrastructure.
- Supporting the international presentation of Irish artists globally, including the generation of new opportunities, as part of the Government’s international promotion strategy.
- Developing and delivering the Government commemoration programme.

Outcomes
- Cultivate Irish artistic and creative talent and enhance Ireland’s reputation as a hub of artistic excellence;
- Realise Ireland’s full creative potential through mainstreaming creativity in the life of the nation;
- Improve access to the arts, the collections of the National Cultural Institutions and regional arts infrastructure;
- Support the development and expansion of the film and television production sector;

Indicators
- The publication and implementation of ‘Culture 2025’ policy
- The completion and implementation of Creative Ireland Programme initiatives
- Levels of funding made available for support schemes and numbers of projects supported.
- The number of enhanced collections and exhibition programmes in place and visitor numbers achieved.
- Activity in the audiovisual industry as evidenced by turnover and employment levels.
- Increased career opportunities for Irish artists, as evidenced by contracts secured to present work internationally.
- Stakeholders’ and public response to commemorative events for Decade of Centenaries anniversaries.

GOAL
To conserve, manage and present our heritage in compliance with legal obligations, for its intrinsic value and as a support to economic renewal and sustainable employment

High Level Strategies
- Ensuring heritage services are delivered to the customer as effectively as possible, in collaboration with other partners;
- Implementing the appropriate policies, legislation, actions and to ensure the fulfilment of requirements in compliance with EU and National Heritage obligations;
- Ensuring effective implementation and compliance with heritage policies and legislation;
- Promoting greater awareness, appreciation and understanding of Ireland’s rich heritage as a cultural, educational and recreational amenity for individuals and communities, and also as a valuable resource for business;
- Improving digital data management and providing heritage services seminars

Outcomes
- Project and enhance our built and natural heritage as an important contributor to national health, wellbeing, enjoyment and sustainable economic growth;
- Increase public awareness of the immense inherent value of Ireland’s heritage and stakeholder buy-in to its protection;
- Adhere to our national, EU and international commitments and avoid any reputational and financial damage to Ireland;
- Protect our natural habitats and species;
- Protect and sustainably manage our built heritage for future generations;

Indicators
- Feedback on visitor experience at National Parks, Reserves and Heritage Sites.
- Further development of legislative framework for heritage protection.
- Compliance with EU and National legislation as reflected in transposition of directives, making of designation orders and levels of enforcement activities.
- Level of protection afforded to protected habitats and species.
- Levels of investment in our Built Heritage Assets.
- Development of policies for modern architecture and urban design.
- Delivery of key heritage initiatives by the Heritage Council and Waterways Ireland
GOAL
To facilitate the advancement of long-term sustainable economic and social development across rural Ireland and maximise economic opportunity in the regions.
• Implement the Action Plan for Rural Development which will act as an over-arching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives across Government for the benefit of rural Ireland.
• Roll out LEADER funding across Ireland
• Develop and deliver national schemes and initiatives to revitalise rural Ireland
• Develop a cohesive national policy on Social Enterprise
• Support the Post Office Network to adapt to a changing business environment
• Overseer preparations for the timely roll-out of broadband in rural Ireland

GOAL
To support the Irish language throughout Ireland, to strengthen its use as the principal community language of the Gaeltacht and to assist the sustainable development of island communities
• Drive the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030, with particular focus on selected key priorities over the coming five years.
• Continue the roll-out of the language planning process under the Gaeltacht Act 2012 in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge.
• Support Údarás na Gaeltachta as the regional development agency for the Gaeltacht.
• Continue to support viable communities on our offshore islands.

High Level Strategies
• Support the Irish language, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht through the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030;
• Support the sustainable development of the Gaeltacht and island communities particularly through job creation and retention of existing employment;

Outcomes
• The revitalisation and economic development of rural Ireland;
• Support the Post Office Network in adapting to a changing business environment by developing relevant services to rural communities;
• The roll out of broadband across rural Ireland;
• Development of a cohesive national policy in relation to Social Enterprise leading to a more co-ordinated and focused approach to this sector;

Indicators
• Progress on implementation of Rural Action Plan
• Progress on implementation of LEADER Programme
• Number of projects and beneficiaries supported
• Policy on Social Enterprise developed and implemented
• Increase in services provided by post office network
• Barriers are removed ahead of the roll out of broadband in rural Ireland

Progress achieved across the action areas in the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language.
• Number of active language planning processes in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks
• Number of Irish language speakers and usage of Irish outside the Education system as reflected in the Census.
• Number of jobs created/maintained in the Gaeltacht.
• Level of direct supports to Irish language/Gaeltacht activities.
• Population levels on offshore islands and numbers using subsidised transport services.
GOAL

To promote North South co-operation, particularly in the context of An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland

High Level Strategies

• Continued engagement with the joint funding Departments in Northern Ireland to support the work of the two North/South Implementation Bodies, An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland.

• Working with Waterways Ireland to advance its investment programme in critical waterways infrastructure.

• Pursuing opportunities with partners in Northern Ireland to enhance co-operation across other areas within our remit, including arts, culture, heritage, commemorations and rural affairs.

Outcomes

• Continue to develop the North-South institutions, with a particular emphasis on infrastructural development in the border region;

• Continue to promote Irish and Ulster-Scots language and culture on an all-island basis;

• Continue to maintain and develop the navigable inland waterways, principally for recreational purposes.

Indicators

• Availability of resources to An Foras Teanga and number of organisations/activities supported by Foras

• Availability of resources to Waterways Ireland and number of capital projects completed.

• Percentage of waterways navigable during boating season and numbers using waterways for recreational purposes

• Level of co-operative engagement across other areas of our remit.
Appendix 1 – Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

Cross Border Implementation Bodies under the aegis of this Department:

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<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Website Address</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waterways Ireland</td>
<td><a href="http://www.waterwaysireland.org">www.waterwaysireland.org</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

An Foras Teanga, which comprises:

1. Foras na Gaeilge                         | [www.gaeilge.ie](http://www.gaeilge.ie) [www.forasnagaeilge.ie](http://www.forasnagaeilge.ie)

2. Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch               | [www.ulsterscotsagency.com](http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com)

Other Bodies under the aegis of this Department:

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<th>Oifig An Choimisinéara Teanga</th>
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<th>National Museum of Ireland</th>
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<td><a href="http://www.museum.ie">www.museum.ie</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Library of Ireland</td>
<td>Chester Beatty Library</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.nli.ie">www.nli.ie</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.cbl.ie">www.cbl.ie</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Gallery of Ireland</td>
<td>Irish Manuscripts Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><a href="http://www.irishmanuscripts.ie">www.irishmanuscripts.ie</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)</td>
<td>Arts Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.modernart.ie">www.modernart.ie</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.artscouncil.ie">www.artscouncil.ie</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Concert Hall</td>
<td>Heritage Council</td>
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<tr>
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<td><a href="http://www.heritagecouncil.ie">www.heritagecouncil.ie</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford Gallery</td>
<td>Irish Film Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.crawfordartgallery.ie">www.crawfordartgallery.ie</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.irishfilmboard.ie">www.irishfilmboard.ie</a></td>
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<td>Western Development Commission</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.wdc.ie/">www.wdc.ie/</a></td>
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Appendix 2 – Commitments relevant to the Department in the Programme for Government

- We will support a new Cabinet level Minister and Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work in other Departments in relevant areas that impact on rural Ireland. The Minister will create a clearing house forum to investigate the best ideas to advance economic and social progress in rural Ireland and will work to implement the best proposals in partnership with the rest of Government.

- Within the new Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs], we will task a coordinating unit to work with communities to develop co-operative structures to keep vital local services in place and to retain and develop vibrant local enterprises.

- The new Government will deliver balanced national development. One way in which we will achieve this goal is by creating sufficient scale in the west of Ireland, through an Atlantic Economic Corridor, to match other areas in developing infrastructure, attracting Irish and multinational investment, and growing jobs and wealth in local communities.

- We want to attract people back into main streets and town centres by examining new incentives to regenerate derelict and underused buildings. To achieve this we will seek Oireachtas support for a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme to support the revitalisation of our towns and villages and improve the living and working environment of communities. Using the €30million available from this year to local authorities for town and village regeneration, the scheme will, among other things, seek to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of our towns and villages as places to live and work. (Year 1 Action)

- We will also reinforce the role of the Western Development Commission (WDC), so that it supports the implementation of regional jobs plans in the West and North-West. As part of this, the WDC will be given a specific mandate to stimulate the development of enterprise networks in these two regions and to stimulate innovative approaches to development. This will build on the recent allocation of €2million in additional funding to support regional economic development in the West of Ireland, which the WDC will administer across a number of economic development projects.
• LEADER groups will continue to play a central role in the rejuvenation of communities throughout Ireland and the new Partnership Government is committed to increasing funding for the LEADER programme. We will work with local authorities, local action groups and local communities to ensure that LEADER funding delivers the maximum possible benefit for communities throughout the country. In addition, we will make available more competitive capital funding to allow LEADER groups bid for additional resources for projects that best support rural economic development.

• Building on the €3million provided to support CEDRA initiatives, we will implement the recommendations of the CEDRA report and the new Rural Charter as appropriate; in order to further support the long-term sustainable development of rural Ireland. The new Minister for [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] will take charge of implementing the CEDRA report.

• To deliver on this goal the new Minister will develop a new and improved Town and Village Renewal Scheme with input from the Oireachtas in time for Budget 2017. As part of this scheme we will propose to commit additional funding to support the development of rural towns and villages, as a key priority for revitalising rural Ireland.

• As part of this additional funding, we will double the funding available for the Rural Walks Scheme from €2million to €4million to increase the number of walks covered from 40 to 80.

• Following the completion of the tender process and the awarding of the contract, targeted for June 2017, the new Government will work with the winners to accelerate the roll out of the infrastructure next year. We will work with local councils to establish broadband taskforces to help facilitate the local rollout of commercial and National Broadband Plan infrastructure in each county area. The relevant Cabinet Committee will be updated regularly on the progress of the National Broadband Plan.

• The new Government will act swiftly on the recommendations of the Post Office Business Development Group by supporting the introduction and rollout, by An Post, of an “ePayment Account” in 2016, to enhance post office activity in financial services and increase footfall.
• We will also advance a new model of ‘community banking’ by requesting An Post and the League of Credit Unions, as well as any other interested stakeholders, to investigate and propose a new model of community banking that provides a suite of banking services through the large network of Post Offices. This could be based on the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, where the Post Office owned bank provides a comprehensive suite of financial services, from personal loans and bank accounts to credit cards, business banking, and insurance. We will thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

• The new Government will also establish the feasibility of offering motor tax services and other State services in post offices.

• We will establish a working group to identify the potential for local post offices to act as ‘hubs’ to facilitate other services such as health and transport and a one-stop-shop for Government services.

• We will also support the establishment of a post office network renewal process to build on An Post’s existing 5-year strategy for the network.

• The Government commits to the continuation of the current process involving all stakeholders including the NPWS, Government appointed scientists and the TCCA. The Government will do all in its power to facilitate and expedite this process, including providing additional resources, to provide impacted turf cutters with an agreed and reasonable alternative, with the aim of making substantial progress within the lifetime of this Government.

• The Government will publish new legislation to de-designate 46 NHAs within the first 100 days of Government.

• The Government commits to reviewing the timetable for the implementation of actions relating to NHAs in consultation with the EU.

• The Government is committed to building on the progress already made on SACs and will continue working to expedite the relocation process.

• We will introduce a new small grants scheme to provide essential upgrades to existing regional arts and culture centres and support the Heritage Council.
• We will respond to the Western Development Commission’s Creative West report within three months.

• We will also boost supports to facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums.

• We will also expand the Historic Towns Initiative to include more towns.

• We will support the traditional heritage of literature, music, song & dance.

• The new Government will continue to commemorate the most significant events in the history of this State, ensuring that these commemorations are inclusive, and enhance our understanding of our shared history, particularly among children and young people, so that they have a meaningful and lasting impact.

• We will develop and publish an updated National Heritage Plan that sets out policies for the protection and promotion of our built and natural heritage and responds to challenges within the heritage sector.

• We will also implement the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage so that Ireland’s unique cultural heritage assets, such as hurling, uilleann piping and the Folklore Collection in UCD, are given UNESCO recognition and status.

• Work to progressively increase funding to the arts, including the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board, as the economy continues to improve.

• Implement the Arts in Education Charter, which provides an unprecedented opportunity for children and young people to engage in a proactive and meaningful way with arts in education in Ireland.

• Encourage each local authority to strengthen the role of arts and heritage officers. We will establish stronger links between arts and heritage officers, the OPW, Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council, as well as with Local Enterprise Offices, to develop and promote opportunities for arts and cultural tourism.

• Introduce a new small grants scheme to provide essential upgrades to existing regional arts and cultural centres around the country, including regional theatres.
• Prioritise the publication of Culture 2025, the first national cultural policy. It will consider a range of important issues including: supporting artists and creative workers, improving access to culture, breaking down barriers in areas of social exclusion and disadvantage, and how culture is enriched by greater cultural diversity. The publication of Culture 2025 follows a widespread consultation process with relevant stakeholders.

• Boost supports to regional museums and facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums.

• Work with the Irish Film Board/Screen Ireland to ensure that Ireland is maximised as a location for international film production.

• Support a built heritage investment scheme on an annual basis to support the conservation of heritage structures and the regeneration of urban and rural areas.

• We will further encourage strong, mutually beneficial links between the business community and arts organisations. This approach will be based on helping arts organisations to capitalise on sponsorship opportunities, and develop business partnerships and fundraising skills.

• The Irish language is of crucial importance to our heritage and culture. The new Government needs to systematically implement the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language, increase the number of people using Irish in their daily lives and ensure that Irish becomes a more visible language in today’s society, both as a spoken language and also in areas such as signage and literature.

• Focus on job creation in the Gaeltacht, through Údarás na Gaeltachta.

• Encourage the attendance by children in Irish-medium pre-schools or naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas.

• Recognise the importance of the status of Irish as a full working language of the EU institutions and work towards ending the derogation, as circumstances allow.

• Increase investment in the Irish language.
Commitments Led by other Departments to which we will contribute:

- The Action Plan for Jobs
- The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness
- The provision of an extra €300million in capital funding between Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta to allow them to provide additional support to Irish owned enterprises.
- The encouragement of local authorities to play a significant role in the Regional Action Plan for Jobs and ensure that economic recovery is felt inside every door of their county.
- To aid the development of Greenways, the Minister for Transport will develop national guidelines for Greenway public consultation, planning, and construction to help guide local authorities and agencies.
- Invest further in developing a nationwide Greenway network
- The review of the position in relation to the planning code as it relates to turf cutters for domestic use.
- The making of Social Protection payments at Post Offices.
- The examination of how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network within regions, including public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks.
- An examination of new incentives to regenerate derelict and underused buildings in urban centres.
Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs