



Learning Limerick

Together for a brighter future

LEARNING LIMERICK STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 - 2022

Helping to Grow Limerick as a Learning Region



Foreword

On behalf of Limerick City and County Council, I am delighted to present this Strategic Plan for the Learning Limerick Steering Group. Entitled *Helping to Grow Limerick as a Learning Region*, it sets out the priorities and objectives that will guide group members, over the next five years, as they promote Lifelong Learning as a critical tool for the development of people, communities and workplaces in Limerick. Learning Limerick is a multi-sectoral partnership group, which is chaired by a Director of Services from Limerick City and County Council and includes representatives from education, childcare, social welfare, enterprise, youth work, local development and migrant integration.

This Learning Limerick Strategic Plan: 2018 – 2022 is the second plan dedicated to progressing Limerick as a Learning City-Region. It follows, and builds on, the achievements and learning that resulted from implementation of the earlier *Limerick City of Learning Strategy: Together for a Brighter Future – A Collaborative Framework for Progress*. The title of this new strategy: *Helping to Grow Limerick as a Learning Region*, reflects the role that it will play in supporting Limerick City and County Council’s “Growing Limerick” Initiative.

There are strong synergies between the priorities and objectives of this plan and the action areas identified in the Council’s recently published *Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP): 2016 – 2021*. By promoting access to lifelong learning and increasing awareness of the importance of learning for all aspects of living and working, implementation of this plan will contribute hugely to the achievement of the Council’s primary goal, which is to:

“Promote improved quality of life and well-being of people and communities in Limerick City and County. This means striving to create safe and sustainable communities where there is access to quality services including housing, transport, health, education, recreation and promoting an agenda of diversity, equality and partnership.”

LECP, (2016) p.32

Limerick recognises that learning is critical to the success of all local government work, including the implementation of policies in areas such as social inclusion, culture, entrepreneurship and employability.



Since Limerick is a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), this Learning Limerick Strategic Plan is also aligned with UNESCO's Framework of Key Features of Learning Cities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set down in its *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)*. Three SDGs are particularly relevant in the Limerick context: SDG 4 - Inclusive Quality Education, SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities and SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Limerick City and County Council see this Strategic Plan as a road map that will plot the direction for Learning Limerick partner organisations, Council members, Council staff and others, who want to contribute to the growth of Limerick as a vibrant Learning Region. It will focus and guide their efforts, as they work together to realise its vision: *"A vibrant Limerick region where people are living healthier, happier and more productive lives as a result of their involvement in Lifelong Learning."*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Keary". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Cllr. Stephen Keary
Mayor of the City and County of Limerick



Definition of a Learning Region

A Learning Region mobilises its resources in every sector to:

- Promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education
- Revitalise learning in families and communities
- Facilitate learning for and in the workplace
- Extend the use of modern learning technologies
- Enhance quality and excellence in learning
- Foster a culture of learning throughout life

In so doing it promotes individual empowerment, social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity and sustainable development.

Adapted from UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities: Guiding Documents



What is Learning Limerick?

Learning Limerick has its beginnings in the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group, which was established, in 2003, as a statutory sub-committee of Limerick City Development Board. In 2008, the steering group launched the first Limerick City of Learning Strategy: *Together for a Better Future – A Collaborative Framework for Progress*. This earlier plan highlights the fact that learning is not just for young people - nor does it happen only in schools, colleges and universities: it happens everywhere, every day for everyone - in homes, communities, workplaces and in all leisure and social settings. It wasn't until 2010, however, that the City of Learning Project finally secured funding from the Limerick Regeneration Agency, allowing for the employment of a part-time Lifelong Learning Facilitator. This grant was allocated in recognition of the critical role that learning has to play in the sustainable regeneration of disadvantaged communities. The first Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival was held in 2011. Since then, this event has gone from strength to strength and now, in its 7th year, is a visible testament to the multiple forms of learning that are happening in every part of the Limerick region. It has proven to be an extremely effective mechanism for bringing education providers together to promote both formal and informal learning activities and connect with learners throughout Limerick.

In 2013, in advance of the merger of Limerick City and County Councils, the Limerick City of Learning Steering Group was expanded to include representation from key organisations and groups from County Limerick. The name of the group was then changed to "Learning Limerick", to reflect its wider regional remit.

Learning Limerick is a multi-sectoral partnership group that is committed to advancing Limerick's progress as a Learning Region. Current membership is representative of Local Government, Higher Education, Further Education and Training, Local Development, Community Education, Youth Work, Social Welfare, Childcare, Migrant Integration and Limerick Chamber Skillnet.

Partners in “Learning Limerick”

- Limerick City and County Council (Chair)
- PAUL Partnership
- Mary Immaculate College
- Ballyhoura Development
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- West Limerick Resources
- University of Limerick
- Limerick and Clare Further Education & Training Service
- Youth Work Limerick
- Limerick Childcare Committee
- Limerick Community Education Network
- Department of Social Protection
- Limerick Chamber Skillnet
- Limerick Integration Working Group
- Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed
- Limerick Mental Health Association

The steering group meets six times a year and organises a number of wider networking meetings, which are open to all city and county partners. These meetings engage a wide range of stakeholders and help to build a shared and socially diverse view of Limerick as a Learning Region.

Limerick City and County Council and the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board provide joint funding to employ a part-time facilitator to work with the Learning Limerick Steering Group. The PAUL Partnership, which is a local development company based in Limerick city, hosts and supports the facilitator.

In 2016, the hard work, commitment and perseverance of the Learning Limerick partners was rewarded: UNESCO confirmed with the Mayor of Limerick that Limerick had been approved to receive the UNESCO Learning City Award 2017. The Award Ceremony will take place at the International Conference on Learning Cities, which will be held in Cork, in September 2017.



Learning Limerick

OUR PURPOSE

The Purpose of Learning Limerick is to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to:

1. Promote awareness of the importance of lifelong learning for every person, family, community and workplace in Limerick.
2. Influence education and skills policy; locally, nationally and internationally.
3. Position learning at the centre of development planning in the Limerick region, in all communities, sectors and settings.



OUR VISION

Our vision of Limerick is a vibrant region where people are living healthier, happier and more productive lives as a result of their involvement in lifelong learning.



OUR VALUES

Learning Limerick partners believe that learning can transform lives, workplaces and communities for the better. We seek to promote lifelong learning, in all its forms, in all settings for the people of Limerick, by being:

Inclusive and Respectful

We listen to each other and to the people of Limerick, valuing diversity and actively encouraging different opinions.

Competent

We have extensive experience and expertise across a wide range of education, training and development settings.

Agile and Innovative

We are forward-thinking, pro-active and open to change.

Creative

We want to deliver results in new and interesting ways.

Connected & Collaborative

We engage with all of the stakeholders in lifelong learning in the Limerick region, and further afield.

Learning Leaders

We exchange knowledge and ideas in order to create new knowledge and build a strong local evidence base.





The Limerick Context

Prior to enactment of the Local Government Reform Act, in 2014, Limerick City and County councils operated independently as separate administrative bodies. In 2014, however, they were amalgamated into a single local authority for the Limerick region, heralding a new, integrated approach to local governance, policy-making and service delivery. Since then, there has been a renewed sense of optimism in the region, with the announcement of over 9,000 jobs, investment of over €1bn in enterprise and investment infrastructure and significant reduction in unemployment. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the unemployment rate in Limerick dropped from 20.7% in 2012 to 14.4% in July 2017 (Census data, 2011 and 2016).

With a population of 194,899, three world-class Higher Education Institutions, over 20,000 third level students and many attractive and affordable urban and rural living environments, the Limerick region is now one of the fastest growing investment and development locations in Ireland. Limerick City, which is the third largest city in Ireland and just 20 minutes from Shannon Airport, is a vibrant hub for transport, retail, commercial, social, cultural and educational activity. It is the principal urban centre in the Mid-West and the key driver of economic activity in the locality. In 2016, it was ranked a top European City of the Future by the Financial Times *fDi Magazine*.

Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) recently launched its *Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP): 2016 - 2021* which aims to “*promote improved quality of life and well-being of people and communities in Limerick City and County*”. It is structured around three pillars: Economic, Social and Physical / Environmental. Its themes and action areas correlate closely with the Europe 2020 aim of boosting “*smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive growth*”. While the actions and initiatives to be delivered under the three pillars will help to create the conditions necessary for the on-going growth of Limerick as a Learning Region, the work of Learning Limerick is highlighted as a key action under the Social Pillar.

Limerick has a well-deserved reputation for effective cross-sectoral collaboration and successful partnership-working. In the years ahead it will be important that existing linkages and relationships are maintained and new ones established, particularly where they facilitate collaboration and sharing between related strategies, structures and initiatives. Those most relevant to the Learning Limerick Strategy are outlined below.

LCCC Structures, Strategies & Initiatives

Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan

Limerick Cultural Strategy: 2016 - 2030

Digital Strategy for Limerick

Limerick Age Friendly Strategy: 2015 - 2020

Limerick Public Participation Network

Limerick 2030 (Including Limerick 2030 Charter)

Innovate Limerick

Limerick Local Enterprise Development Plan

Healthy Limerick

Other Local Structures, Strategies & Initiatives

Limerick Children and Young People's Plan: 2015 -2018

Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme

Leader Programme

Mid-West Regional Cluster of HEIs

Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs

Mid-West Regional Skills Forum

Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board

Integration Working Group

Limerick's Key Assets as a Learning Region

- A **joined-up approach to local governance** along with new regional structures in areas such as Higher Education, Further Education and Training, Enterprise, Childcare, Children and Young Peoples Services, Employment Services and Welfare.
- A **strong educational infrastructure** with 149 primary schools, 25 secondary schools, an extensive network of further education and training centres, numerous community learning venues and three of Ireland's most prestigious third level academic institutions: University of Limerick (UL), Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) and Mary Immaculate College (MIC).
- A community that prides itself on its **spirit of partnership** and collaboration, with a reputation for undertaking successful multi-sectoral projects and initiatives. In 2016, the OECD highlighted the Limerick region as a best practice collaborative model for education, local authority and industry partnerships.
- Effective models for **market-led training involving cooperation** between education and training providers and industry, in areas that include hospitality, film, engineering and ICT. Over a longer-term timeframe, it is intended that these models be extended to engage with schools and parents to create a pipeline of skills in areas where there is likely to be a future skills demand.
- **Well-developed community organisations** with strong community spirit and sense of pride and attachment to local areas.
- A **strong sporting culture** with Limerick widely regarded as the sporting capital of Ireland. Plans to establish a National Sports Cluster, with the potential for 500 new jobs in the region, are at an advanced stage.
- Limerick and the Mid-West Region is now Ireland's fastest growing region for **foreign direct investment**. *Site Selection*, a major international business magazine, has rated Limerick among the top ten metropolitan areas of Western Europe to invest in.

Key Challenges facing Limerick as a Learning Region

- While the economic recovery in the Limerick region has been one of the most remarkable stories of the post-recession era, **long-term unemployment and youth unemployment** continue to constitute serious challenges. According to Census 2016 figures, Limerick has almost one third of the country's unemployment blackspots, the majority of which are in the city.
- Despite having an above average unemployment rate of 14.4% (Census 2016), the Limerick region also has one of the highest job vacancy rates in Ireland. **Skill shortages** are evident in the mismatch between the new highly skilled job vacancies and the existing pool of talent in the region.
- Even with a single local government structure a clear **urban-rural divide** persists. While the main issues in rural areas relate primarily to access to services, transport and connectivity, a key problem in the urban area is the low level of education attained by many children and adults. According to Census 2016, County Limerick has tended to be above the state average in terms of education levels and indicators and Limerick City well below.
- **Significant inequalities** exist, particularly in some areas of the city, which are classified as extremely disadvantaged. There are also some pockets of deprivation to be found in rural areas. Disadvantage is linked to a range of social, economic and geographic factors including unemployment, low education, immigrant integration, poor physical, mental health & wellbeing, social isolation and limited income and opportunities. Given the strong evidence of poor outcomes associated with low education, the serious structural problem of low education in the most disadvantaged parts of the city must be a priority for action.

“We need to invent a new learning model for business, education, health care, government and the family. This invention will come from the patient, concerted efforts of communities of people...”

(Ron Faris, 2007)

The Strategic Planning Process

Development of the Strategic Plan was driven by steering group members who participated in a series of strategic planning workshops which were facilitated by an external consultant. Findings from a survey carried out with staff in partner organisations, and from one-to-one interviews conducted with key local stakeholders, were used to corroborate and develop the views of steering group members. Respondents were invited to give their views on the role of the Learning Limerick Steering Group and the status of Limerick as a Learning Region. Their informed perspectives were very useful in helping to identify the strategic priorities and objectives of this plan.

This document outlines the Purpose, Vision and Core Values that will drive the work of Learning Limerick over the next five years. The following five Strategic Priorities were identified as central to the Plan:

1. Promoting Access to Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All
2. Influencing Lifelong Learning Policy and Practice
3. Enhancing Visibility and Reach of Learning Limerick
4. Networking, Connecting and Collaborating
5. Monitoring, Accountability and Sustainability

Each Strategic Priority is underpinned by a number of High-level Strategic Objectives, which spell out what the Learning Limerick Steering Group needs to do over the five year period in order to achieve its vision. Following approval of the Strategic Plan by the Council's Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), the Steering Group will draft annual Action Plans with shorter-term Operational Objectives detailing how they will do things, who will do them and when they will be done.

The objectives set down in this Strategic Plan recognise the complexity and interconnectedness of the four key challenges facing the Limerick region: long-term unemployment, inequality, skills mismatch and the urban-rural divide. The Steering Group accepts that these problems cannot be tackled individually, or by single organisations or sectors. Addressing them will require innovative, collective actions and approaches that fully engage the social partners, recognise informal and non-formal learning, increase participation in adult learning and link education and training provision to local skill needs.





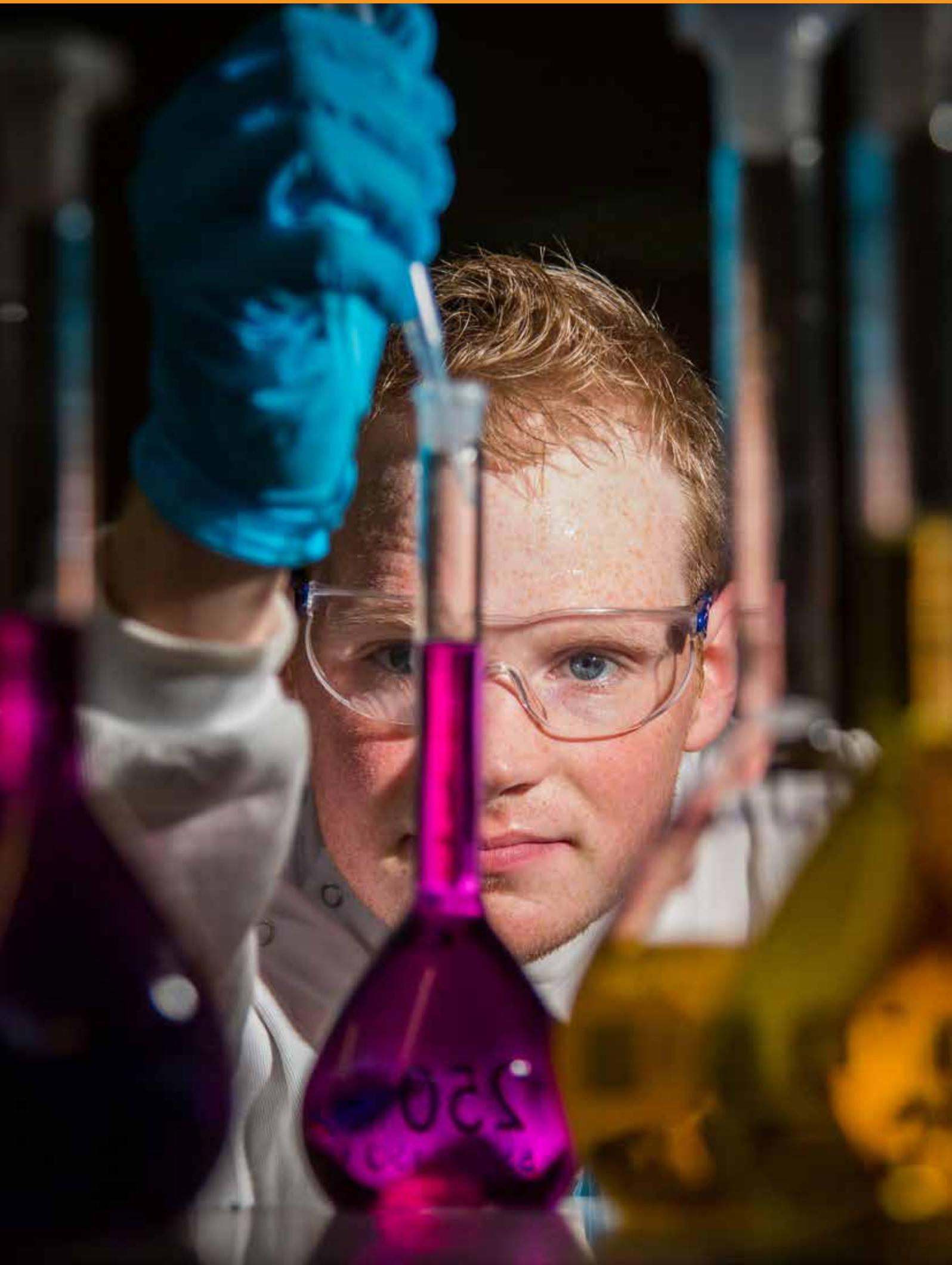
Strategic Priority 1

Promoting Access to Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All

This is about recognising that if people, communities and enterprises are to prosper and thrive in our increasingly globalised world, they must have easy and equal access to lifelong learning opportunities.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- 1.1** Highlight the range of education, training and learning opportunities available in the Limerick region.
- 1.2** Raise awareness of the importance of lifelong learning for sustainable development, global citizenship and improvement in people's lives.
- 1.3** Advocate for the expansion of innovative and flexible learning arrangements that prioritise social inclusion, promote equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities and tap into the possibilities offered by technology.
- 1.4** Build-on the success of the annual Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival to establish active, year-round links with partners right across the region.
- 1.5** Champion community-based networks and groups across the Limerick region in their efforts to provide relevant, high-quality lifelong learning programmes and support services.





Strategic Priority 2

Influencing Lifelong Learning Policy and Practice

This is about bringing together the knowledge and expertise of the individual partners in Learning Limerick and using it to influence learning-related policy and practice at local, national and international levels.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- 2.1** Support Limerick City and County Council in its efforts to integrate lifelong learning with the implementation of all aspects of the *Limerick Economic and Community Plan: 2016 - 2021*.
- 2.2** Share information, knowledge and lessons learned in the various sectors and use it to inform on-going development of learning provision in the Limerick region.
- 2.3** Gather relevant local data and statistical information that can be used to influence education and skills priorities, policies and budget allocations, at local and national levels.
- 2.4** Promote a paradigm shift in thinking about education and learning: from teaching to learning, from time-bound to lifelong, from formal to non-formal and from types of learning provision to types of learners.
- 2.5** Capture and share examples of good practice in learning and innovation that is happening in the Limerick region.
- 2.6** Work with the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning and UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) to explore best practice at international level and use this to inform developments at local and national levels.
- 2.7** Work through official communication channels, fora and policy-shapers to advocate on behalf of learners in Limerick, particularly those who are most excluded; for example, low-skilled adults, migrants, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed and unemployed youth.





Strategic Priority 3

Enhancing the Visibility and Reach of Learning Limerick

This is about ensuring that the purpose of the Learning Limerick Steering Group is widely understood across the city and county, so that the group can be more effective in promoting awareness of the value of learning and in shaping lifelong learning policy and practice.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- 3.1** Heighten awareness of the expertise of the Learning Limerick Steering Group and use it to inform economic, social and environmental developments in the Limerick region.
- 3.2** Work with regional stakeholders to promote lifelong learning throughout County Limerick, strengthening the regional dimension of our work and helping to bridge the urban-rural divide.
- 3.3** Engage the interest and support of a widely-respected Patron, who will champion lifelong learning in the Limerick region and raise the profile of the Learning Limerick group.
- 3.4** Create a strong digital presence for Learning Limerick and ensure that it is fully integrated with Limerick City and County Council's Digital Strategy.
- 3.5** Support Limerick City and County Council in establishing a prestigious Award Scheme to recognise achievements in lifelong learning in the Limerick region.
- 3.6** Organise a range of flagship events, such as festivals, conferences and exhibitions, to promote Limerick as a learning region.





Strategic Priority 4

Networking, Connecting and Collaborating

Learning Limerick is committed to building relationships with stakeholders in the Limerick Region in order to highlight the value of learning and to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for individuals, families, communities and enterprises.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- 4.1** Update Learning Limerick's membership, structure and procedures in order to widen engagement and ensure participation of all relevant stakeholders and sectors.
- 4.2** Promote innovative multi-stakeholder learning partnerships and initiatives, particularly those targeting individuals and groups that are most disadvantaged in terms of access to quality learning opportunities.
- 4.3** Secure partners' commitment to attend, and participate in, an agreed calendar of activities and events that facilitate promotion of the Learning Limerick Group's work.
- 4.4** Liaise with the Coordinator of Limerick's Public Participation Network (PPN) to create a Lifelong Learning Linkage Group.
- 4.5** Work in partnership with other learning regions in Ireland to advance the Learning Region movement nationally.
- 4.6** Explore opportunities for international partnerships and exchanges with other city regions participating in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.





Strategic Priority 5

Monitoring, Accountability and Sustainability

This is about providing evidence that the work of Learning Limerick, through its partnership activities, contributes to Limerick becoming a Learning Region. This will help to mobilise the resources necessary to ensure its sustainability and enable it to fulfil its mission and vision for Limerick.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- 5.1** Set localised targets, which reflect current challenges facing the Limerick region while also advancing the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals relating to Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities and Sustainable Cities and Communities.
- 5.2** Devise dynamic, annual action plans, which identify key outcomes, responsibilities, timelines and resources for implementation of Learning Limerick's strategic objectives.
- 5.3** Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to keep track of implementation of the strategic plan and annual action plans and to facilitate the on-going learning of the group.
- 5.4** Monitor Limerick's progress towards becoming a learning region, using the UNESCO Framework of the Key Features of Learning Cities.
- 5.5** Secure resources for the employment of a full-time Co-ordinator to lead the implementation of the Learning Limerick Strategic Plan.
- 5.6** Attain financial sustainability in order to support Learning Limerick's partnership activities and project work and to ensure its long-term stability.

Making the Strategic Plan a Reality

Resource Implications

Considerable time, effort and funding have gone into the development of this Strategic Plan. Effective implementation is going to require secure allocation of adequate resources including finance, support structures and systems and administrative supports. Many of the tasks and initiatives which are essential for successful implementation, such as promotional events, document production and monitoring and evaluation, have significant financial and human resource implications. A full-time Learning Limerick Co-ordinator will be required to provide the leadership and relationship-building necessary for the development of Limerick as a Learning Region.

Consultation

As we begin the process of developing operational objectives and indicators for our annual Action Plans we will seek out opportunities to check in with the wider stakeholders to ensure that implementation of the strategic plan is co-ordinated and consistent with on-going developments in policy, planning and practice across the region. In particular, we will liaise closely with colleagues in Limerick City and County Council because we know our relationships with local government partners are crucial to the implementation and ultimate success of this strategic plan.

Communication

We intend to share this strategic plan with the elected members and staff of Limerick City and County Council, the Boards of Management of our partner organisations, management and development staff of our partner organisations and other key local stakeholders. We hope that by doing this we will ensure that there is a shared understanding of the profile, purpose and strategic direction of the Learning Limerick group. The plan will also be available on www.limerick.ie

Alignment with Other

As it is set down as a specific action within the *Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP): 2016 - 2021*, the Learning Limerick Strategic Plan is directly informed by its guiding principles and key priorities and seeks to contribute to the achievement of pertinent LECP objectives over the next five years. In addition, we will look for linkages and alignments with all other relevant policies and plans that are in place at local, national and international levels.

Annual Action Planning, Monitoring and Reporting

This Strategic Plan has been developed as a living document, with flexibility that will allow it to reflect changing global, national and regional needs and conditions over the next five years. It will be reviewed annually in order to operationalise the vision and strategic objectives in preparation for the following year's action plan. A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed and benchmarks and indicators will be established to measure and report on progress.

Each year an annual report on implementation of the strategic plan will be prepared and presented to the Limerick Local Community Development Committee. Annual reports will document progress and blockages and highlight issues relevant to local and national policy development. These reports will be shared with partner organisations and will also be available on the Council's website www.limerick.ie



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Together for a brighter future

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