Statement issued by Anna Ní Ghallachair, Chairperson and Mícheál Ó hÉanaigh, Chief Executive, Údarás na Gaeltachta

- 630 new jobs created in 2017
- An increase in employment base for five consecutive years
- A net increase of 155 full-time jobs in 2017
- 7,503 full-time jobs in client companies at the end of the year
- 25 new businesses created with 57 people employed in 2017
- New projects approved to create an additional 471 jobs with investment of €28m
- Approval of the first 3 Gaeltacht language plans & 5 other language plans finalised
- Development of Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network) underway

**2017 Review**

630 new full-time jobs were created in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in 2017. This culminated in a net increase of 155 jobs on the previous year, which means that there were 7,503 full-time and 606 part-time jobs in companies in receipt of support from Údarás at year end. There has been a steady increase on the employment base in the Gaeltacht for five consecutive years as Gaeltacht companies become increasingly stable.

2017 was an historic year in terms of language planning, where the Gaeltacht communities’ dedication and efforts bore fruit as the first three language plans were approved during the year. Five further language plans have been submitted to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

**Employment in the Gaeltacht**

There was an increase in employment supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta in every Gaeltacht county in 2017. This is the first time since 1996 that there was in
increase in every county in any one year. Employment in Gaeltacht areas has recovered somewhat but significant challenges lie ahead of certain areas as has been reported during the year. An tÚdarás has shown that certain progress can be achieved with small increases in budget and an tÚdarás believes that we have the appropriate strategies to make significant progress in coming years if the appropriate budgets are made available.

Employment stability with marginal increases was evident in all counties except Donegal, where there was a significant increase of 103 jobs in 2017. Údarás na Gaeltachta has placed a particular focus on Donegal in recent years, due to the large number of jobs lost in the county in 2014 and, for the most part, the results of that investment are now evident in certain parts of the county. Over the past three years 242 additional people have been working in Údarás-supported jobs in the county and companies in the Donegal Gaeltacht are also currently recruiting.

In general, it is a source of encouragement that the employment base in Gaeltacht companies is now at a consistent level and at its highest level since 2008. This is the fifth year in a row that the Gaeltacht employment base has increased, where there were four years of decline prior to that. During the year, 25 new companies were created in the Gaeltacht during the year; there was in excess of fifty people employed in these at the end of the year. This year’s figures show that the food & drink, services, medical device and traditional manufacturing sectors reflected the highest net increase in employment levels, although these sectors did not avoid some job losses. The highest net loss in employment levels was seen in the filming/television, fish farming/processing and data processing sectors.

Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies have a significant economic impact on the Gaeltacht and the national economy. According to ABSEI research conducted in 2017, it is estimated that client-company total sales were in the region of €844m the previous year and that direct expenditure in the Irish economy was €425m. This reflects the fact that the state is getting good value for its investment in employment in the Gaeltacht. In addition, during the past year Údarás na Gaeltachta continued with a number of strategic investments in new infrastructural facilities which will upgrade some sections of our property portfolio to a standard which will help attract new projects and employment in the future.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Chief Executive, Mícheál Ó hÉanaigh, said, “We are very happy with the level of job creation this year in the context of our current resources and that we managed to double our net increase in employment since last year. It is a huge boost for us to see that our development strategies have been a success and therefore that we are achieving our employment targets. We
will be implementing our new strategy over the next three years and we are very happy to add to the organisation’s positive results and consequently support the sustainable development of the Gaeltacht. We always welcome new businesses, both large and small, which will contribute to strengthening the employment base in rural Gaeltacht areas.”

The Chief Executive also acknowledged the spirit and dedication of Gaeltacht communities: “Gaeltacht areas are at a critical juncture at the moment, where they have significant linguistic and socio-economic challenges to surmount. Údarás na Gaeltachta is satisfied that we have the appropriate strategies to ensure that the national economic recovery being referred to will be realised and with the proper resources we will facilitate Gaeltacht areas in growing, developing and flourishing as vibrant language communities. We will place a strong emphasis in the years ahead on developing the natural and human resources of the Gaeltacht for the benefit of the communities that we serve.”

The Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at the Department of Culture with responsibility for Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Joe McHugh TD, commented, “The results announced by Údarás na Gaeltachta today are very positive for the Gaeltacht. It is noteworthy and encouraging that results show a stable level of employment is emerging and that there are green shoots to be seen also with 25 new companies having commenced trading with the support of Údarás in 2017 and 57 jobs created in those businesses. I am certain that, with the appointment of the new board of Údarás recently that every effort will be made so that the ongoing progress Údarás is making will continue.

The Gaeltacht communities and An tÚdarás must be applauded for the immense work undertaken by them in creating language plans for their communities in the past year. This work is very important in the context of the aims of the 20 year Strategy for the Irish language as it pertains to the Gaeltacht. I am very pleased that Údarás ensured in 2017 that the process was underway in each of the 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (LPA) and that it is consistently prioritised as appropriate.”

**Economic impact of Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies**
Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies generate expenditure of €425 million, which flows directly into the national economy, on payroll, services and raw materials. In 2016, client companies had a payroll of €181 million, with an average salary of €41,000 per employee in companies with ten or more employees. Figures from ABSEI research conducted in 2017 show that Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies had aggregated total sales of €844 million the previous year.
€502 million of sales consisted of exports, an export-sales ratio of 60%. It is significant that 20% of total sales are attributed to the Food & Drinks industry and that 40% of medical products are exported to Asia.

471 new jobs approved for the Gaeltacht in 2017
Last year, Údarás na Gaeltachta approved a series of new projects which will create 471 jobs, in which an estimated total of €28 million will be invested as they are developed over the next few years. The majority of job approvals during 2017 were for projects in Counties Galway, Donegal and Cork, with significant approvals for Counties Kerry and Mayo also. Companies in the medical device, food, services and niche manufacturing sectors continue to grow and develop.

Social Employment Schemes
There was an increase of 72 in the number of participants on Social Employment Schemes in the Gaeltacht during 2017, with 1,048 participants and 50 supervisors employed throughout the Gaeltacht. In 2017 a total of 412 new participants were placed on these schemes and 340 participants completed their scheme period. Social employment schemes (Community Employment Scheme, Rural Social Scheme & TÚS Scheme), managed by An tÚdarás play an important role in providing work experience and training for the Gaeltacht community.

Brexit Challenges and International Policies
There is no escaping the fact that Brexit may well be one of the biggest challenges Gaeltacht companies will face in the years ahead. It is generally estimated, as details of the process become clearer, that this huge political change will affect every business and citizen on this island. The United Kingdom is generally the first port of call when a company begins exporting for the first time. According to this year’s updated ABSEI research, almost 30%, which is estimated at €147 million, of our client companies’ export sales go to both the United Kingdom and the European Union. There will be implications also for company running costs, as 60% of raw materials worth €227m, are imported.
Údarás na Gaeltachta has carried out significant work individually and directly with the client companies who will be most affected by Brexit to ensure that they undertake strategic planning and to ensure that their business is as competitive and ‘lean’ as possible. Údarás na Gaeltachta is cooperating with other State agencies as part of a coordinated response to international affairs in 2018 and will continue to administer our Brexit support and consultancy scheme, ‘Bí Réidh’, for our client companies.

The majority of exports by Údarás client companies to the UK are in Wood/Timber products, which account for 23%, paper 16%, basic & fabricated
metal 13%, and food/drink 12%. The biggest exports to the European Union are products in the marine, food/drink, computer products and medical device sectors. Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies have significant sales (25% of export sales) in North America also and these will be monitored closely to assess the effects of any political or policy changes.

**Language Planning Activities**

Language planning activities were underway in each of the 26 Language Planning Areas (LPA) for the first time in 2017. Not only had 18 communities begun the language planning process at the beginning of the year, preparations began in five other LPAs and one Gaeltacht Service Town during the year. These were Cléire LPA, Maigh Eo Thiar LPA, Na Rosa LPA, Maigh Cuilinn LPA and An Ghaeltacht Lár LPA. A language plan was being prepared for Daingean Úi Chúis, which is listed as one of the 16 towns which may be recognised as a Gaeltacht Service Town when a language plan has been approved for those towns.

A series of public meetings was held in the three LPAs surrounding Galway City, which were well attended, and applications were sought from lead organisations to prepare language plans for these areas. The applications have since been assessed and a recommendation will be submitted to the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta shortly to allow for the next steps in the process to be taken.

An historic event took place in Amharclann Ghaoth Dobhair, when the Government Chief Whip and the Minister of State with responsibility for Gaeilge, the Gaeltacht and the Islands announced that the first three language plans, which had been prepared as part of the process, had now been approved. These language plans were for the Iar-Thuaisceart Dhún na nGall LPA, Cois Fharrage LPA and Cloich Cheann Fhaola LPA. Five other LPAs: Na Déise LPA, An Cheathrú Rua LPA, Dúiche Sheoigeach/Tuar Mhic Éadaigh LPA and Ciarraí Theas LPA were also submitted to the Department for approval during the year. All of these plans are expected to be approved in the first quarter of 2018. Due to the considerable progress made in the language planning process and an increasing number of plans reaching the implementation stage, budgetary provision increased for 2018.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Chairperson, Anna Ní Ghallachair said, “The commitment shown by Gaeltacht communities in preparing language plans for the areas has given us a great sense of hope and encouragement, and this work is still ongoing in many areas. The most important step of the process will be taken in 2018, when the implementation of the plans begins in communities throughout the Gaeltacht.”
She added, “The sustainable development of the Gaeltacht, the Gaeltacht islands and the fostering and maintenance of vibrant Irish language communities is our main objective and focus, and this will guide the organisation in our policies and decisions over the next five years.”

**Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network)**

Údarás na Gaeltachta opened Digital and Innovation Hubs in Gaoth Dobhair and Béal an Mhuirthead in 2017, and, in conjunction with other partners, a further digital hub opened in Daingean Uí Chúis. The hubs are part of Údarás na Gaeltachta’s strategy to establish Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network) when hubs are developed in 30 locations throughout the Gaeltacht, including on seven Gaeltacht islands and six non-Gaeltacht islands to support the sustainability of these communities and off-shore islands. These hubs will include innovation units with office space with high speed internet access as well as an incubation hub and innovation facilities.

**Vision for 2020**

Údarás na Gaeltachta’s strategy for the 2018 – 2020 period is based on two main principles: maintenance and development of the Irish language and the fostering of Innovation & Employment with a view to enabling Irish speakers to live in the Gaeltacht. These principles are at the core of the organisation’s strategy; every effort will be made to create the appropriate circumstances to assist in ensuring that the Irish language will be the main community language in the Gaeltacht, a place which will attract ordinary people, entrepreneurs and visitors to live and work there.

Furthermore, resources for language, communities and culture will continue to be supported and developed, and innovation and enterprise will continue to be encouraged and fostered. We will focus on research programmes and projects to cultivate innovation and enterprise as drivers of the development programme. An tÚdarás believes that there are significant opportunities here for all the Gaeltacht areas so long as the appropriate resources are provided to implement its strategy in its entirety.

**Fóram Fiontraíochta Ghaoth Dobhair**, which is heading towards completion, and the **Interagency Taskforce for the Uíbh Ráthach Gaeltacht** which is in its infancy, will focus on developing enterprise and increasing employment opportunities, while best utilising all of the available resources. **Fóram Fiontraíochta Ghaeltacht na Mí (Enterprise Forum for the Meath Gaeltacht)** was established at the end of 2017 to place a new focus on the
enterprise development opportunities in this area and to utilise its proximity to Dublin.

The **Language Planning Process** will continue and every possible support will be provided to the communities at various stages of the process in preparing language plans or implementing them in their areas. The language planning process will play a pivotal role at this critical juncture in the maintenance and development of the Irish language as the daily community language of the Gaeltacht.

**Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network)** is at the heart of the organisation’s strategy and will provide 30 innovation units with high speed broadband connectivity and provide new technology companies starting out or wishing to locate in the rural areas which encompass the Gaeltacht with many opportunities.

These developments will give the Gaeltacht community an opportunity to return home and stay at home through remote working opportunities at offices or hot desks. As a result, the **Diaspóra na Gaeltachta** project will form a central part of Údarás na Gaeltachta’s strategy to encourage the emigrant Gaeltacht community abroad or in Ireland to return home to their families and communities and, thereby, bolster the Irish language. We will make them aware of the employment, living, social, language and cultural opportunities available in the Gaeltacht areas and provide them with any information, advice and support they may need when choosing to return home.

The development of renewable energy projects, natural resources and enterprises based on natural resources are central to the organisation’s strategy. Planning work for **Páirc na Mara**, a marine innovation park in Cill Chiaráin in Conamara has begun and we look forward to bringing to fruition this strategic marine project which will include research and business activities. Údarás na Gaeltachta has mobilised other strategic partners to draw up plans on a cooperative basis to enable us to develop this modern marine innovation park to promote growth in the industry and to facilitate economic growth in the area, and, as a result, provide productive employment for future generations in this rural Gaeltacht area. It is envisaged that Páirc na Mara will be an important facilitator for the entire marine industry not only in Cill Chiaráin and Conamara but at a regional and national level also.

Údarás na Gaeltachta’s stated ambition is ‘**that the Gaeltacht is developed as a tourist destination, which is recognised internationally as a unique area where our natural resources, our language, culture, environment and heritage, are celebrated and developed.**’ As a result, in early 2018 an tÚdarás will announce
strategic tourism projects, which will be supported by the **Tourism Management Development Scheme**, an initiative to support the management development of strategic tourism projects, operational on a two-year, pilot basis.

As has already been stated, Údarás na Gaeltachta’s main aim is to preserve and strengthen the Irish language by developing the Gaeltacht, and to inspire and strengthen indigenous, confident Gaeltacht communities. Údarás na Gaeltachta has strategic responsibilities and duties to the Gaeltacht and has adopted an integrated approach with regard to the development of the Gaeltacht. An tÚdarás is in a unique position to undertake a leading role in furthering the development and expansion of the Irish language as a community language and to drive the integrated economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht, commensurate with the resources at its disposal.

**Review by Gaeltacht Region**

**Donegal Gaeltacht**

243 new jobs were created in the Donegal Gaeltacht in 2017. When job losses are taken into consideration, there was a significant net increase of 103, which means that by year end there were 2,193 jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies. This is the highest number of jobs since 2009. Despite the heavy blow dealt to Gaoth Dobhair at the end of the year due to the closure of SLM Ceangal Éire Teo., it is a positive indication for the Donegal Gaeltacht that, through Údarás na Gaeltachta’s support over the past three years and as a result of the particular focus placed on the county in that period, 242 new jobs have been created and a substantial number of projects are also in the pipeline.

New jobs were created in companies throughout the Donegal Gaeltacht, including Arán Ard Teo, Ard an Rátha, R.A. Pacáistí Teo., VHI, Meastóirí Domhanda, Kombucha Éireannach Teo., and Fáisc Miotáil Teo. in Páirc Ghnó Ghaoth Dobhair; Bá Dhún na nGall Teo., Oileán Glas Teo., and Cuan Tamhnaigh Teo., in Cill Charthaigh; Cora Tine Teo. in Fál Carrach; and Randox Teo. and Ostre’ an Teo., in An Clochán Liath. The growth in jobs has been experienced across a wide range of sectors and companies.

**New Projects**

Last year the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta approved a number of new projects for the Donegal Gaeltacht, which will result in 239 new jobs and a projected total investment of €14.23 million when these projects are underway. The majority of
job approvals for future employment were in the food, marine and services sectors.

During 2017, some 6 new businesses were established in the Donegal Gaeltacht and seven people were employed in these businesses by year end.

Enterprise Development Forum Action Plan
Údarás na Gaeltachta announced the action plan Ag Forbairt na Fiontraíochta ar Pháirc Ghnó Ghaoth Dobhair in 2015 and focused on growing employment and enterprise in North-West Donegal. An tÚdarás indicated its objective to support the creation of 300 new jobs and to invest €4.7 million in Páirc Ghnó Ghaoth Dobhair over a three-year period (2015 – 2017). The implementation period of the plan comes to an end in March 2018 and a final report by the Enterprise Development Forum will be published before the summer.

LEADER Programme
Údarás na Gaeltachta approved grants for 13 projects totalling €113,276 under the LEADER Programme in the Donegal Gaeltacht at the end of 2017. The grants were sanctioned for various community groups and individuals. Up to 75% of the cost of the projects is covered by the grants. When the local contribution is taken into consideration, this means a total investment of €154,726. The majority of projects will improve community amenities, and sports and recreation facilities.

These are the first projects to have reached the final stage of authorisation and a further two projects have also been approved by Donegal LCDC which will involve supports of over €50,000 and a total investment of €62,736. Údarás na Gaeltachta is one of four partners under the Donegal LCDC with responsibility under the LAG to administer the implementation of the LEADER Programme in the Donegal Gaeltacht (excluding the Gaeltacht islands which come under the remit of Comhar na nOileán).

Social Employment Schemes
A total of 331 people were employed on social employment schemes in the Donegal Gaeltacht at the end of the year. This included 133 on the Rural Social Scheme, 12 on the Tús Nua Scheme, 107 on the Community Employment Scheme and 79 on the Tús scheme. The schemes are managed by 14 supervisors, administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta and funded by the Department of Social Protection.

Cooperative- and Community-Based Company Schemes
Funding of €556,000 was provided for nine organisations under the Community Development Programme in 2017, and these in turn implemented and agreed a community development agenda. Arrangements have been made to establish a community development organisation in Baile na Finne, which will receive funding under this programme and which will be established early in 2018.

Language Planning

During 2017 each Language Planning Area in the Donegal Gaeltacht was engaged in the language planning process. Language plans were approved for two Language Planning Areas: the Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire and Loch an Iúir LPA and the Cloich Cheann Fhaola LPA (Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach and Machaire Rabhartaigh). Arrangements are being made at present with two Lead Organisations to enable them to implement the language plans in their respective LPAs. Language plans were being prepared for the Na Rosa LPA and the Gaeltacht Lár LPA during the year and this work will continue in the four other LPAs, the Tuaisceart Dhún na nGall LPA, the Toraigh LPA, the Árainn Mhóir LPA and the Dún na nGall Theas LPA. It is expected that the language plans for those four LPAs will be ready for submission to the Department in the second and third quarter of this year.

It is also expected that An Clochán Liath will be named a Gaeltacht Service Town early in 2018.

Mayo Gaeltacht

A total of 60 new jobs were created in the Mayo Gaeltacht in 2017. This amounted to a net increase of 8 jobs on the previous year and means that there were 648 full-time jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Mayo Gaeltacht at the end of the year.

With the support of Údarás na Gaeltachta 4 new companies were established in the Mayo Gaeltacht during the year and 10 people were employed in these companies at year end. New jobs were created in a number of companies such as Crannchur Cliste Teo. in Gaoth Sáile; Cow Comforts Ltd. and Bácús Uí Dhonchadha Teo. in Béal an Mhuirthead; Idoman Teo. in Tuar Mhic Éadaigh; Bioshell Teo. in Port Durlainne; and Struttech Technology and Sciana Mara Teo. in Bun an Churraigh.

During 2017 the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta approved new projects which will result in up to 53 jobs in the Mayo Gaeltacht in the future, in both established...
companies and in companies currently being founded. These projects have a projected total investment of €2.47 million once operational.

Official opening of the digital hub ‘GTeic @Béal an Mhuirthead’
A new innovation and digital hub was officially opened in Béal an Mhuirhead by Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural & Community Development on September 29th, 2017. The development of the digital hub is part of a strategy by Údarás na Gaeltachta to develop a number of innovation and digital hubs across all Gaeltacht regions.

A significant investment of €200,000 was made by Údarás na Gaeltachta in developing GTeic @Béal an Mhuirhead, which will have a fibre-optic connection of 100MB initially and a capacity to increase this amount. GTeic @Béal an Mhuirhead offers a flexible workspace for up to 60 people and this will increase to 75 early in 2018, when additional space for hot desks and remote working becomes available.

The newly developed space is 700 square meters, with 14 office spaces, which can be increased or decreased depending on the requirements of the centre as businesses start up and grow. The hub will be a great boost for North-West Mayo by providing start-up businesses or newly established businesses with a base. Start-up enterprises will have an opportunity to locate in the new hub in Béal an Mhuirhead, which will also allow people from the area to spend time working remotely from the facility. In addition, it provides people from the area, who work elsewhere and who wish to return home, the option to work remotely for part or all of their working week, both nationally and internationally. This will be an important step in sustaining a stable rural community.

Social Employment Schemes
A total of 242 people were employed on social employment schemes in the Mayo Gaeltacht at the end of the year. These schemes are managed by 12 supervisors, administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta and funded by the Department of Social Protection.

Language Planning
In 2017 two Lead Organisations were at various stages of their language plans for the Language Planning Areas (LPA) in the Mayo Gaeltacht (Maigh Eo Thuaidh LPA & Maigh Eo Thiar LPA). Gaeilge Iorras, which comes under the auspices of Comharchumann Forbartha Ionad Deirbhile Eachléim Teo., is putting the finishing touches to the language plan for the Maigh Eo Thuaidh LPA at present and it hopes to submit the plan to the Department by March 2018. Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla Teo. was also working on a language plan for the Maigh Eo Thiar LPA during the year.
It is expected that Béal an Mhuirthead will be named a Gaeltacht Service Town in 2018.

**Galway Gaeltacht**

A total of 211 new jobs were created in the Galway Gaeltacht in 2017 with Údarás na Gaeltachta’s support. The number of jobs created meant that employment in the Galway Gaeltacht remained stable in 2017, with more than 3,000 employed – 2,933 fulltime jobs and 177 part-time jobs – in Údarás client companies at the end of the year. When the number of job losses is taken into account, there was a net increase of one job on the previous year.

New jobs were created throughout the year, primarily in companies operating in the medical-device, niche manufacturing, services and marine sectors, including Aran Biomedical, Cambus Medical Teo., Sidheán Teo., ECC Teo., Oileán Mara Teo., Bradán Beo Teo., and Éire Composites Teo. Companies operating in television and film saw job numbers fall as major projects came to an end and some companies involved in data processing, software, computing and manufacturing also experienced some job losses.

**New Projects**

A total of 5 new businesses were established during the year throughout the Galway Gaeltacht, and these employed 9 staff by the end of the year.

A number of projects were approved during 2017 in which more than 76 jobs will be created and in which €4.15 million will be invested when the proposed developments are operational. The main proposed developments will be in the fields of medical products, food and manufacturing.

**Social Employment Schemes**

A total of 368 people were employed on social employment schemes in the Galway Gaeltacht at the end of the year. These included 171 on the Community Employment Scheme, 115 on the Rural Social Scheme, 61 on the Tús Scheme and 21 on the Tús Nua Scheme. The schemes are managed by 18 supervisors, administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta and funded by the Department of Social Protection.

**Páirc na Mara**

In 2017 significant steps were taken by Údarás na Gaeltachta in the planning and development of Páirc na Mara, a new marine innovation park which is to be developed in Cill Chiaráin in the Conamara Gaeltacht of County Galway. The
success of the expression-of interest-process, which took place towards the end of the year, was an encouraging sign for An tÚdarás. More than a dozen companies and organisations expressed an interest in the project. There are ongoing discussions, visits and meetings with clients regarding the park’s possibilities and environmental studies which must be completed in order to compile the planning application have commenced. A planning application has already been submitted for an initial office building on the site, with a decision due on the application early in 2018.

Páirc na Mara will be developed as a state-of-the-art, low carbon, Marine Innovation Park, located on a greenfield site on the southern edge of the Conamara Gaeltacht, approximately 45 miles west of Galway City. The site, which will accommodate the Marine Innovation Park comprises approximately 9.01ha and will encompass a variety of marine related activities, where productive sector enterprises, public bodies, state development agencies and the research community will work together to add value to their products and services and to maximise the development potential of the marine sector in the region. An tÚdarás has engaged a group comprised of key strategic partners to formulate plans on a collaborative basis that will enable Údarás to develop a modern marine innovation park to help drive development in the sector and enable economic growth in the area, thus providing productive employment for future generations in the Galway Gaeltacht.

Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network) in Conamara
In 2017 the Údarás na Gaeltachta Board approved various development steps leading to the establishment of digital hubs in An Spidéal, An Cheathrú Rua and Carna. The Board approved funding to design and prepare a planning application for a Digital Hub and Innovation Unit at Páirc na Meán in An Spidéal. Planning permission has been granted for the hub which will house 14 offices as well as hot desk facilities and a proposal will be submitted to the Board shortly to approve capital funding for the construction work which is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.

In furtherance of Údarás na Gaeltachta’s digital hub strategy, capital funding was approved to develop a hub in conjunction with Comharchumann Mhic Dara on the Industrial Estate in An Cheathrú Rua and to develop an Enterprise Unit and Business Incubation Hub on 100 sq metres at the Enterprise Unit on the Údarás na Gaeltachta Industrial Estate in Carna; it is hoped construction work will be completed on these hubs by mid-2018. Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta is an important part of the organisation’s strategy and will provide 30 innovation units with high-speed broadband connectivity which will allow the Gaeltacht
community to return home or stay at home by providing them with remote working opportunities in offices or at hot desks.

Tourism
Tourism is a central part of Údarás na Gaeltachta’s vision over the next three years and it is hoped to gain the best possible advantage from the Wild Atlantic Way for the country’s Gaeltacht communities. Various consultancy sessions were held in Conamara and an announcement came at the end of 2017 that Údarás na Gaeltachta intended to re-establish Cósta Chonamara in early 2018.

As a result of overwhelming support from the community and local businesses, An tÚdarás opened a tourist office in Casla in 2017 in conjunction with Comhairle Ceantar na nOileán. The office provided a large number of tourists who travel along the Coast Road with tourism information and a review will be carried out in early 2018 into the running of the office in order to make arrangements for this year.

Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh in Ros Muc is a valuable asset which celebrates the Irish language, the Gaeltacht’s rich culture, the area’s heritage and the beautiful Conamara landscape. The centre will provide an attractive destination for tourists to the Ros Muc area and the Conamara Gaeltacht for many years to come. An tÚdarás has continued with its support to Ionad na nImirceach in Carna, which is currently being built, and which will serve to entice tourists to the Iorras Aintheach area.

Language Planning
The Galway Gaeltacht comprises ten Language Planning Areas. During 2017 the Language Plan prepared by Fóram Chois Fharrage for the Cois Fharrage LPA was approved. A further two plans were submitted to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in December 2017, by the An Cheathrú Rua LPA and the Dúiche Sheoigheach & Tuar Mhic Éadaigh LPA. It is hoped these language plans will be implemented as soon as they have been approved by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Announcements were made in relation to three other LPAs: Bearna and Cnoc na Cathrach, Oirthear Chathair na Gaillimhe and An tEachréidh and preparation of the plans for these three areas will begin early in the new year. Four other Lead Organisations were at various stages of language-plan preparation in the Galway Gaeltacht during the year and it is hoped three of those plans will be ready for submission to the Department in the middle of the year. The language planning process has now begun in earnest in each of the ten LPAs in the Galway Gaeltacht.
Meath Gaeltacht
There were 219 full time jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Meath Gaeltacht at the end of the year. 8 new jobs were created in client companies of Údarás na Gaeltachta during 2017. There were no job losses in our client companies during the year.

Enterprise Forum for the Meath Gaeltacht is launched
As a result of an information visit to the Meath Gaeltacht by board members earlier in the year, Údarás na Gaeltachta approved the establishment of an Enterprise Forum for the area to research and assess opportunities for development and employment. The Government Chief Whip and the Minister of State with responsibility for Gaeilge, the Gaeltacht and the Islands Joe McHugh, TD., officially launched the Enterprise Forum in Ráth Chairn in November.

The aim of this enterprise action group is to attract greater attention to Ráth Chairn / Baile Ghib, a Gaeltacht area close to Dublin, as an excellent location for employment creation. The following outcomes are expected:

- Research on the resources/possibilities/opportunities through discussion with local entrepreneurs, local committees, language-based organisations and other relevant parties;
- Assessment of the research results and submission of recommendations on the most suitable ways to create employment in this Gaeltacht area;
- Collation of a range of priority-driven actions through a three-year strategy for the Ráth Chairn/Baile Ghib area as well as a detailed budget to implement this strategy.

A coordinated approach will be adopted and other relevant organisations have accepted an invitation to be members of the Enterprise Forum. Some of the organisations sharing their expertise with the forum include Meath County Council, SOLAS, the Regional Skills Forum, the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Maynooth University, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as well as business and community representatives. Up to six months has been allocated for the work of the Enterprise Forum and a three-year action plan for the Ráth Chairn / Baile Ghib Gaeltacht will be produced with a view to promoting enterprise and resources in the area.

Language Planning
Comharchumann Ráth Chairn Teo. is the Lead Organisation developing a language plan for the Ráth Chairn and Baile Ghib Language Planning Area (LPA). It is
expected the plan will be submitted to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht by the end of March 2018.

**Kerry Gaeltacht**

In 2017 a total of 64 new jobs were created in the Kerry Gaeltacht. These new jobs were created in companies which are operating in the manufacturing sector primarily. Several small businesses closed down during the year. These were in the food and drinks sector. There were also smaller-scale losses in the manufacturing and television industries. A net increase of 17 jobs in total in 2017 means that there were 688 full-time positions in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Kerry Gaeltacht at the end of the year.

It is encouraging that the approval of a number of projects during the year will see 38 new jobs created and a total investment of €2.1 million when the projects are brought to fruition. The majority of projects will be in the manufacturing, food and drinks and crafts sectors.

**Digital Hub ‘Mol Teic’ an Daingin**

As a result of the collaboration between a community-based company, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry County Council, and with support from Eir, a digital hub ‘Mol Teic’ was founded in Daingean Uí Chúis in 2017. This is a community based project which is being steered by a local committee and has made considerable progress in terms of economic development since its establishment. The hub hopes to create 200 jobs in Corca Dhuibhne over a five-year period and funding has been approved and strong support for the project has been provided by Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry County Council. Enterprise Ireland approved a significant grant in December 2017 to employ a development executive as part of the project.

The company is also focused on examining the development potential of the old hospital in Daingean Uí Chúis. The main objective of the study would be to draft a comprehensive plan to establish and develop an innovation centre and to create additional employment in the area. Mol Teic will operate as part of Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network), which is being developed by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

**Delpac (South Kerry)**

Capital, consultancy and marketing support was approved for the Delpac Teo. company in Baile an Sceilg in 2017 to grow and develop in Údarás na Gaeltachta’s
Business Park in Dún Géagáin, Co. Kerry. Additional space was provided for the company to enable it to grow its Styrofoam cup business. This innovative company has developed biodegradable cups for the market, an intelligent move, as national legislation will be implemented in the coming years so that only biodegradable cups will be produced for the market. The company employs 19 people on a full-time basis at present and it aims to have 30 full-time staff members by 2020.

Tascfhórsa Idirghníomhaireachta Uíbh Ráthaigh /Interagency Taskforce for the Uíbh Ráthach Gaeltacht
The national interagency taskforce was established and launched in 2017 to address the significant decline in population in the Uíbh Ráthach Gaeltacht and to revitalise the area in order to attract enterprise and investment. The Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Brendan Griffin, TD, launched the taskforce with Kerry football star Pat Spillane, who is an Ambassador for the Rural Action Plan, and Micheál Ó hÉanaigh, Chief Executive Officer of Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The aim of the Interagency Taskforce is to develop a cross-sectoral action plan for the Uíbh Ráthach Gaeltacht and for the Uíbh Ráthach peninsula in general. The resources needed to implement this objective will be detailed in the plan and the initiative is at the heart of the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development. It is intended that the cross-sectoral action plan for the Uíbh Ráthach Gaeltacht will be completed within a six-month period. The taskforce has already held a series of meetings since its launch.

The taskforce is made up of various Government agencies, which include Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Rural and Community Development, Kerry County Council, Fáilte Ireland, the Department of Social Protection, Enterprise Ireland, Kerry Local Enterprise Office, Kerry Education and Training Board and South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd. Local businesses and community development groups are strongly represented on the taskforce also.

Social Employment Schemes
There were 80 people employed on social employment schemes in the Kerry Gaeltacht at the end of the year. The schemes are administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta and funded by the Department of Social Protection.

Language Planning
Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne Teo. is the Lead Organisation preparing the language plan for Ciarraí Thiar LPA. It is expected that the language plan will be ready for submission to the Department in the spring of 2018.
Comhchoiste Ghaeltachta Chiarraí Theas Teo. is the Lead Organisation preparing a language plan for Ciarraí Theas LPA and that plan has been submitted to the Department.

An Lab Teo. was selected to prepare a language plan for the Daingean Uí Chúis LPT and the organisation is currently preparing a language plan in conjunction with the community, which it hopes to submit to the Department in the spring of 2019.

**Cork Gaeltacht**

In the Cork Gaeltacht 34 new jobs were created in 2017. When the number of job losses is taken into account there was a net increase of 9 jobs. There were 684 full time positions in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Cork Gaeltacht at the end of the year.

A number of projects were approved in 2017 which will see the creation of 63 jobs and an investment of €5.2 million, when those proposed developments are operational. The main developments are projected to take place in the food, manufacturing and services sectors.

Support was approved for Firebird Teo. during 2017, to enable them to research and develop their range of products.

The food and drinks sector in the Múscraí Gaeltacht has been very successful in the past few years with companies like 9 Fia Bán, Folláin and others winning national awards and adding to their product range during the year. Táirgí Cáise Buabhall Mhaigh Chromtha in Cill na Martra had another very successful year. Not only was the owner Johnny Lynch the star of a television advert for Aldi, the company won the gold award at the World Cheese Awards for the second consecutive year. With Údarás na Gaeltachta’s support, the company plans to expand their business considerably, given the success of their product, and it hopes to double employment within three to four years.

**Social Employment Schemes**

There were 22 people employed on rural social schemes in the Múscraí Gaeltacht at the end of the year. The schemes are administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta and funded by the Department of Social Protection.

**Language Planning**

Comharchumann Forbartha Mhúscraí Teo. prepared a language plan for the Múscraí Language Planning Area (LPA). Work was completed on the language plan
and it was submitted to the Department in October. As soon as it is approved by the Department, the initial stages of implementing the plan will begin in earnest. Comharchumann Chléire Teo. is preparing a language plan for the Cléire LPA, which it hopes to submit to the Department in the spring of next year.

**Waterford Gaeltacht**

Ten new jobs were created in the Waterford Gaeltacht during the year and when the number of job losses is taken into account, there was a net increase of 9 jobs. There were 138 full-time jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Waterford Gaeltacht at the end of the year. The majority of job increases were in the film and marine sectors.

**The Déise in the White House**

An Údarás na Gaeltachta client company was centre stage in the White House on St. Patrick’s Day 2017. Eamonn Terry, a Gaeltacht craftsman from Criostal na Rinne, made the crystal bowl which held the shamrock presented by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny to Donald J. Trump, President of the United States of America in the White House in Washington on Thursday, March 16th, 2017.

Criostal na Rinne, which has been located in the Waterford Gaeltacht since 1987, was chosen by the Office of An Taoiseach in 2017 to create a bowl, which was designed and hand cut by Eamonn Terry, the owner of Criostal na Rinne. The design of the bowl was based around The Book of Kells and his company garnered a lot of publicity and attention as a result of its work. The company has worked hard on its marketing and sales over the past year and has been invited to showcase its work at many business events.

**Language Planning**

Comhlucht Forbartha na nDéise Teo. is the Lead Organisation which has prepared a language plan for the Na Déise LPA. The finalised plan was submitted to the Department in October. It is hoped the operational steps of the language plan will be undertaken as soon as the plan has been agreed by the Department.

**Ends**

Further information: Páid Ó Neachtain, Public Relations Executive, Údarás na Gaeltachta – 091 503111 / 087 3012510 / pon@udaras.ie