

LEADER Thematic Workshop Highlights Report

December 4th 2018 - Part 2: Broadband

Organised by the [National Rural Network](#) and the [Department of Rural and Community Development](#) (DRCD), the LEADER Social Inclusion and Broadband workshop on December 4th 2018 brought together over 80 members of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs).

The workshop aimed to strengthen capacity around delivery of the social inclusion and broadband LEADER Programme themes through sharing ideas, knowledge and challenges.

This short highlights report draws together key evidence and messages emerging from the broadband part of the workshop.

At the workshop, two DRCD staff gave presentations. Dympna Harney gave an update on the LEADER Programme, focusing on progress specifically relating to broadband projects. Dr Stjohn O'Connor discussed LEADER project funding possibilities in the context of the [National Broadband Plan](#) (NBP) and the need for no duplication of funding. Next focus changed to local supports and project ideas. Local Authority Broadband Officer Christine Collins gave an overview of the work of a Broadband Officer in the Longford context. David Hodge of [CoderDojo Ireland](#) gave an introduction to CoderDojo, the aims of this global organisation and the need for more local coding clubs in rural Ireland.



LEADER Update – Dympna Harney, DRCD LEADER Unit

Progress on delivery of the €250 million LEADER Programme has seen a steady rise in project approvals with approximately 1,500 projects approved in early December 2018.



Key messages

The enterprise development and social inclusion LEADER themes have received the greatest allocations of funding. Over €10 million in project payments have been issued in 2018.

Allocations under the broadband sub-theme have been low to date and the DRCD would welcome an increase in funding approvals. Figures from December 2018 indicate just 15 broadband projects have been approved with just under €115,000 in funding allocated to these projects. The Local Action Groups have indicated in their Local Development Strategies that €3.5 million in funding will be made available to support projects under the broadband sub-theme.



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LEADER and Broadband, Dr Stjohn O'Connor, DRCD Regional Telecommunications Development Unit

In the context of the NBP, Stjohn discussed how LEADER can complement it emphasising the importance of demand focused digital initiatives utilising broadband in rural communities.



Key messages

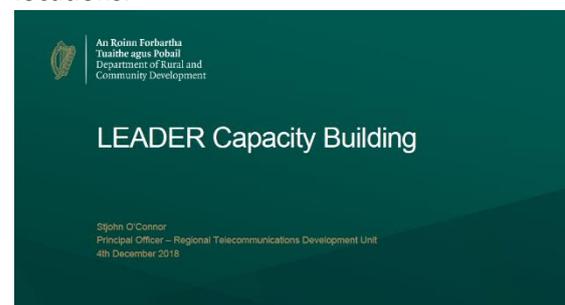
Small scale infrastructure projects (i.e. less than €10,000 in grant aid) may be funded under LEADER. Other types of projects should focus on demand elements (e.g. digital skills and services) that support digital engagement once infrastructure is in place. The State cannot double fund and the NBP is an infrastructure investment plan to roll out high speed broadband across Ireland.

A Broadband Officer has been appointed in 30 of 31 local authorities. In relation to the broadband theme, the local Broadband Officer is an important contact for those implementing the LEADER Programme. Consult the [List of Local Authority Broadband Officers](#) for details. A [FAQ Guide](#) for each of the NBP intervention areas (amber, blue and light-blue) is available on the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment website.

LEADER funding under the broadband theme should focus on uptake and use of high-speed broadband. Opportunities exist for example in relation to Internet of Things (IoT), smart elderly care, smart farming and more broadly

around how digital technology and high speed broadband can be applied in rural areas to deal with rural issues.

Planned Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) provide a space for potential LEADER projects. As a part of the prioritisation strategy for the NBP, a network of 275 BCPs will provide free high speed broadband in rural locations such as community centres and national schools. It is expected they will be connected within the first 12 months of NBP rollout. Local Broadband Officers have details of BCP locations.



“BCPs provide an opportunity to develop digital initiatives around training and digital skills in these communities. LEADER is well placed to support this, such as through funding training and/or equipment, for example.” **Dr StJohn O'Connor, DRCD**

Local Digital Strategies are in development and each local authority area will have a strategy. Strategies are structured around seven key pillars of digital maturity and informed by a digital readiness assessment. Some counties have already launched their strategies, such as Clare and Limerick. Digital strategies can help inform LEADER Programme funding under the broadband theme and LEADER has a role to play in the longer term delivery of digital strategies.

“The NBP is fundamentally an infrastructure plan. What we do with it when it arrives is the fundamental thing. Locally, we need clear digital strategies for what we are going to do with it comes. LEADER funding can feed into this.” **Dr StJohn O'Connor, DRCD**



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Role of the Local Authority Broadband Officer, Christine Collins, Longford Broadband Officer



The Broadband Officer is part of a multidisciplinary team in Longford County Council working to support implementation of the NBP and remove barriers to rollout.

Key messages

Broadband Officers are a dedicated point of contact on broadband in each local authority. Officers work together sharing good practice and exploring collaboration opportunities. They have direct engagement with both DRCD and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA).

Broadband Officers play a diverse role such as supporting the development of local digital strategies, community engagement plans, improving public awareness around the NBP and the benefits of high speed broadband.

In Longford projects have developed engaging schools and developing public WiFi access through the European WiFi initiative. WiFi4EU funding supports free, open-access WiFi hot-spots. More broadly, work is ongoing to promote transformation towards a digital society where digital technology and high speed broadband is used to create smarter communities and improve people's lives.

"We need to adapt to the digital society. Broadband is becoming like the third utility - electricity, water and broadband. Our priorities and our world is changing. It is seen as a necessity." **Christine Collins, Longford Broadband Officer**



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CoderDojo, David Hodge, CoderDojo Ireland and Cork Institute of Technology

CoderDojo is a worldwide movement of free, community-based programming clubs for young people where they learn to code, build websites, create apps or games, and explore technology in an informal and creative environment. The network of CoderDojo groups in Ireland is weaker in rural areas, representing an opportunity for LEADER funding.

Key messages

Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education in Ireland needs improvement. In the future, STEM and digital skills will be needed in a growing number of industries. We have issues with uptake of subjects such as physics and chemistry and women need to be better represented in STEM. CoderDojo can play a role in building interest in STEM subjects helping remove barriers to young people's STEM engagement.



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David Hodge
04/12/15

CoderDojo groups are free, volunteer-led, and community based. Group leaders don't need to be tech experts to run a 'dojo'. The ethos is self-led learning where children teach themselves using CoderDojo resources and teaching tools.

CoderDojo Ireland aims to grow its mentor network and support new champions to create new dojos. It also aims to build its network where most needed and dojos in rural areas are a major part of achieving this.



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Breakout discussion: Developing rural broadband and LEADER funding possibilities

The breakout discussion focused on how LEADER can support digital initiatives in communities, as well as overcoming challenges to increase LEADER project applications under the broadband sub-theme.



Key messages

Project examples are very useful to help communities and IPs envision project ideas that harness the potential of rural broadband and support greater rural digitisation. Information on good practice digital initiatives helps to conceptualise projects and stakeholders to reach out to. Project ideas discussed were vast and varied. All may not be eligible for LEADER funding and this would need to be clarified locally on a case by case basis. Below are some examples discussed:

- Supporting **training, education and public awareness** to enhance application of what digital offers, including targeted training (e.g. elderly and farming community); STEM focused education projects in schools (e.g. CoderDojo); and digital champions, such as business leaders training local people about the advantages and applications of digital technology.
- **Hubs** such as Fab Labs and enhancing the value of BCPs such as through funding development of hot desk facilities.

- **Increased use of smart technology** in the rural economy such as in farming, heritage and health.
- Make more **public WiFi** available, such on Local Link services, as well as wider projects harnessing public WiFi where it is available, such as through Wifi4EU.
- Local **baseline analysis studies** assessing existing digital facilities and how to future-proof them. Assessment from different user perspectives e.g. suitability for remote working, personal internet use.

Showcasing projects can also feed into local animation events where successful promoters discuss their projects.

Ultimately however projects must come from the bottom up, driven by community needs. This will also provide motivation to make an application, effectively go through the LEADER process and raise match funding needed.

A number of **challenges** were discussed, suggestions for how they can be **overcome**, including **future action points**:

- **Raising adequate finance** for projects is an issue for broadband theme projects. The limit of €10,000 for small scale infrastructure is a barrier. Cooperation between LAGs could help to overcome this.
- Important to start to **get information out to communities on where BCPs are**. A number of players should be engaged e.g. PPNs, Broadband Officers and Community Groups.
- Currently, rural communities are faced with a **'chicken and egg' like scenario**. Without high speed broadband, community groups are inhibited from developing digital initiatives. BCPs are not a total solution, for example they will be more suited to personal use rather than remote working.

