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Economy

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The background image shows the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, featuring a large, flat, circular stone path leading up a steep, green, rocky mountain under a blue sky with white clouds. A purple banner is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

Collaborative Innovation Plan for Northern Ireland



Contents

Forewords	4
Introduction	8
Principles	10
UK Innovation	12
Northern Ireland's Perspective	14
Our Innovation Ecosystem	18
Strategic Priorities	20
Agri-Tech	22
Life & Health Sciences	24
Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering	26
Fintech and Financial Services	28
Software and Cyber	30
Screen Industries	32
Low Carbon/Net Zero	34
Innovate UK in Northern Ireland	36
Funding	39
Infrastructure Investment	42
City and Region Growth Deals	42
Digital Catapult	46
Working Together	48
Delivery and Impact	55

Foreword by By Tom Adeyoola

Innovate UK Executive Chair



The sparks of an idea only truly ignite when the conditions are right. This Innovation Plan, co-produced by Innovate UK, Department for the Economy and Invest Northern Ireland, commits to underpinning the conditions of innovation, so that the region's abundant ideas flourish.

When you read this plan, you will be struck, as I have been, by the strength of Northern Ireland's innovation ecosystem and the headway the region is making in its strategic priorities – from life sciences to a net zero economy. It has key sectoral advantages too, as recognised in the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy, as a major cyber security hub and with enviable advanced manufacturing infrastructure.

This is a region with an innovation ecosystem drawing its strength from this powerful combination of a strong policy framework, infrastructure investment, and an unwavering commitment to backing businesses at the cutting-edge.

But even with a fair wind, the path from 'breakthrough idea' to commercial scale is far from smooth. Take a university research team, for example, that crosses the precipice from lab to market. A small

team that must now navigate a new world of cash-flow, regulation and the ups and downs of business: trying to show market viability, whilst profitability is still out of reach. For many, this would be make or break.

Success in bridging the gap requires an ecosystem approach. One that accelerates the innovation journey at every stage. It's the coming together of partners that allows brilliant teams to navigate from early-stage startup to scaling business and into industry leadership. Shaping markets. Creating jobs in high value sectors. Driving productivity.

This Innovation Plan is not the starting block: it builds on strong relationships, success stories and a shared commitment to creating the conditions for innovation in Northern Ireland. It makes pledges to further collaborate, strengthen connectivity and put weight behind Northern Ireland's and the UK's priorities. This is how the partners will, together, create the conditions so that the ideas with the highest potential to succeed do find success.

Tom Adeyoola
Innovate UK Executive Chair

Foreword by Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA

Economy Minister



My economic vision for the North of Ireland centres on four key priorities: creating good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity, and decarbonising our economy. Innovation will be key to delivering these and creating a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for all.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of our economy – driving innovation, sustaining local communities and creating most private sector jobs. As Economy Minister, I am committed to supporting them in providing new opportunities to grow, building on existing strengths and ensuring that support is accessible, fit for purpose and inclusive. The North of Ireland is home to many locally owned success stories, and I want to see this momentum continue. This Plan is a step forward in that direction.

Developed in partnership between my Department, Innovate UK, and Invest NI, this Plan sets out a coordinated approach to unlocking the North's full innovation potential and securing a proportionate share of Innovate UK funding.

Our region has clear advantages; world class research capability, a connected innovation ecosystem and dual-market access to Britain and the EU. Innovate UK backed programmes such as the Smart Manufacturing Data

Hub and the UK Digital Twin Centre help businesses adopt data-driven processes and implement deep tech. City and Growth Deal investments including the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre and Momentum One Zero are creating platforms to encourage more innovation.

Whilst innovation is not without its challenges, the benefits are clear as it provides more resilient and competitive businesses and better opportunities for our people through job creation, skills development, higher wages, and thriving communities across the region. This plan lays the foundation to build on our existing successes and deliver new ones. It strengthens the vital connections between business, academia, and government, and supports innovation across our key sectors.

My Department will continue to work in close partnership with Innovate UK, Invest NI, and local stakeholders across the innovation ecosystem to co-design and implement practical, locally driven actions. Together, we will deliver on the commitments outlined in this Plan and drive long-term economic prosperity across the North.

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA
Economy Minister

Foreword by Kieran Donoghue

Invest NI Chief Executive Officer



Invest NI is the regional economic development agency for Northern Ireland (NI). Our mission is to work with businesses to support them to invest and innovate, create high-quality jobs, upskill their staff and increase external sales, exports, and profitability. We are also responsible for attracting inward investment.

From the portable defibrillator to the pneumatic tyre, Northern Ireland has a celebrated history of inventors and invention. To ensure Northern Ireland produces a new generation of inventors, we must place innovation at the heart of our economy. Investing in Research and Development (R&D), innovation, and skills are critical to competing in global markets and addressing social and environmental challenges.

Accelerating innovation and skills is a strategic priority for Invest NI. In 2024, we launched our new Business Strategy, Our Future in Focus, which sets out clear objectives and targets for the further development of business enterprises across NI over the next three years. Increased investment in R&D and innovation is a key priority in this strategy, and we are using our range of support programmes and practical advice to help companies become more innovation-active. We have already built a strong foundation in the first year of the strategy by supporting 726 innovation and R&D projects representing £245m of investment.

A healthy innovation ecosystem relies on strong collaboration across government, academia, and the private sector. Therefore, I warmly welcome the publication of this Collaborative Innovation Plan, which is a direct outcome of many partnerships and an example of what we can achieve when we work together. Our partnership with Innovate UK is a key relationship for Invest NI and continues to support innovation across key sectors to create breakthrough technologies, products and services that will help deliver a regionally balanced economy that benefits all parts of Northern Ireland.

I would like to congratulate Innovate UK, the Department for the Economy (DfE) and all the stakeholders involved in the preparation of the Collaborative Innovation Plan. Together, we can capitalise on Northern Ireland's globally recognised universities, colleges of further education, and dynamic businesses to encourage and support increased levels of innovation. In turn, this will contribute to future economic growth and social progress. As with any plan, implementation is critical and Invest NI looks forward to working with Innovate UK, our client companies, and other key stakeholders to achieve the priorities and joint commitments that will deliver tangible and long-lasting benefits.

Kieran Donoghue

Chief Executive Officer, Invest NI



Introduction

Innovation is vital in tackling today's economic, societal and environmental challenges, from the climate crisis and ageing population to poverty and inequality. Now more than ever, investment in business innovation is critical to advancing societal goals, creating new opportunities and driving sustainable growth.

Peace Bridge. Credit: Tourism Ireland
Photographer: Gardiner Mitchell

To fully realise the benefits of innovation Northern Ireland must harness the unique strengths and assets spread across the region. By encouraging collaboration between regional stakeholders, industry and academia we can accelerate the spread and adoption of innovation and technology across our business base.

The region attracts substantial investment and draws in both local start-ups and global companies due to its skilled, highly educated workforce with a strong emphasis on STEM education, international recognition for its dynamic R&D and innovation ecosystem and anchored by world-class universities. Investors and businesses benefit from access to specialist centres of excellence conducting cutting-edge research in

high-growth sectors such as artificial intelligence and data science.

The budget agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive in April 2025, alongside the publication of the **NI Programme for Government**, the **UK's Modern Industrial Strategy**, and the Comprehensive Spending Review, provides a strategic foundation. This alignment of regional

and UK ambitions will unlock collaborative growth, address shared challenges, and maximise the economic impact of our innovation ecosystem.

This Collaborative Innovation Plan represents a coordinated commitment by Innovate UK, the Department for the Economy and Invest Northern Ireland to accelerate inclusive and sustainable innovation across the region.



Ulster University. Source: Ulster University.

Principles

Working in partnership this Collaborative Innovation Plan supports the **Economy Minister's Economic Vision**, and the **Department for the Economy Business Plan 2025-2026**. It will advance the strategic priorities including:

1. Good jobs – Positive economic, environmental and societal outcomes require innovation that is inclusive. Diversity and inclusion are vital drivers of innovation.

2. Productivity – Innovation, investment in physical capital (e.g. new equipment and machinery), and improving human capital (the health, skills and experience of people) are considered key drivers of long-term productivity growth.

3. Regional balance – Place-based innovation is central to reducing inter-regional disparities in productivity and business growth.

4. Decarbonising the Economy – Addressing the historic challenge and opportunity to limit greenhouse gas emissions and achieve Net Zero. Success will require innovation at scale.



UK Innovation

Innovation has the power to drive both incremental and exponential change. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's UK **Science and Technology Framework** recognises a rich, strong, influential future where citizens enjoy prosperity and security and fulfilled, healthy and sustainable lives. Achieving this depends on harnessing the ability to build on existing strengths in science, technology, finance and innovation.

Aligning with **The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy** the approach will:

- Build upon the UK's unique strengths and untapped potential.
- Enable the UK's world-leading sectors to adapt and grow.
- Seize opportunities to lead in new sectors, with high quality, well-paid jobs.

The UK Government is investing in R&D at record levels to position the UK as a global scientific and technology leader and drive innovations that change lives and sustain economic growth.

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency working to create a better future by inspiring, involving and investing in businesses developing life-changing innovations.

Innovate UK is dedicated to working with local and UK wide partners to align economic plans with local growth strategies and to support the UK Government's new Industrial Strategy.

As a council of UKRI, Innovate UK works across the whole R&I ecosystem, bringing the collective reach of UKRI to drive greater innovation, resilience, productivity, and economic growth, from idea to commercialisation.

Working together with partners, including the **British Business Bank** and others in the local ecosystem, to create improved pathways for innovative businesses to scale and grow and to access the right support as they need and in a more agile way. The British Business Bank is the UK government's economic development bank, dedicated to increasing access to finance for smaller businesses and driving sustainable growth across the UK.

This Collaborative Innovation Plan sets out a shared ambition for Northern Ireland and a systematic place-based approach through local to UK wide co-creation, to drive greater innovation, resilience, productivity and growth.



Delivered by Digital Catapult

Operating from the heart of Northern Ireland, the UK Digital Twin Centre delivered by the Digital Catapult, accelerates the adoption of digital twins to drive global competitive advantage for UK businesses. By creating the conditions for digital twins to be better understood, more easily developed and more meaningfully applied, the centre gives businesses real-time capabilities to make smarter decisions and achieve better outcomes, enabling the potential of digital twins to be realised, not theorised.

Programmes delivered by the UK Digital Twin Centre will help businesses nationwide to demystify, demonstrate, and deploy digital twins. With expert support, test environments and tools to experiment and validate, combined with shared learnings from industry use cases, it offers a practical route to adoption. The Centre has convened capabilities across digital twins six enabling technology areas – intelligence, data services, immersive and UX, cyber-physical systems, integration, and security – to make this emerging technology more accessible and interoperable across sectors and suppliers.

Endorsed by industry, the £37.6 million programme launched with core investment from the Belfast Region City Deal and UKRI along with co-investment from three major industry partners: Thales UK, Spirit AeroSystems and Artemis Technologies to deliver an initial six use cases to demonstrate the potential of digital twins in transforming the maritime and, aerospace sectors.

Northern Ireland's Perspective

Northern Ireland has a strong reputation for innovation. From young and promising start-ups to scale-up companies through to world-leading innovation driven enterprises, companies display strengths at all stages of the innovation journey.

With a population of 1.92 million people, around 81,000 businesses, two world-class universities, an Open University, pioneering FE colleges, a competitive investment environment, a growing reputation of world-class innovation infrastructure and a connected and cohesive ecosystem, Northern Ireland is well positioned to be a globally competitive innovation region.

Despite its relatively small size, Northern Ireland's businesses and citizens are at the forefront of UK innovation. Across the rich industrial heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries the north of Ireland was known as the 'Linen Capital of the World'

and 'Shipbuilders to the World'. The region also produced world-changing inventions such as the ejector seat, developed by Sir James Martin and made significant contributions to aerospace, textiles, and precision engineering.

Over the past decades, Northern Ireland has undergone a remarkable transformation, from a region reliant on heavy industry to a modern, knowledge-based economy with thriving sectors including cybersecurity, fintech, life and health sciences and advanced manufacturing. Northern Ireland now produces around 50% of the UK's aircraft interiors output with one in three aircraft seats globally made in the region and as referenced in **Invest NI's Business Strategy** over 40% of the world's tracked mobile crushing and screening equipment is manufactured here, particularly in the Mid-Ulster region.



Northern Ireland's unique geographical location also provides opportunities for innovation, investment and trade on a north-south and east-west basis. It is in a highly advantageous position of trading goods freely to both Great Britain and the European Union whilst also benefiting from strong linkages with North America resulting in significant levels of investment, making it a strategic location for global innovation driven enterprises.

A skilled workforce is the backbone of innovation and Northern Ireland boasts a pipeline of talent and a commitment to providing continuous education, upskilling and talent attraction, which matches future demand and is agile to emerging needs. This combined with competitive costs and a strong R&D ecosystem, has attracted major international firms and helped foster a vibrant start-up scheme.

Northern Ireland is a great place to grow a business thanks to its highly skilled talent, leading research institutions, excellent infrastructure, competitive costs, and supportive, business-friendly environment.

Businesses continue to go from strength to strength with significant increases in business R&D seen over the last decade. Leading companies in Northern Ireland continue to develop new, innovative products, services and processes and have achieved success either individually, or in conjunction with other businesses and/or academics.

Despite the increases in business R&D, broader innovation activity continues to show potential for improvement. The UK Innovation Survey 2023 found that 32% of Northern Ireland businesses are engaging in innovation activity, below the UK average of 36%. **The Micro Business Innovation Survey for Northern Ireland 2024** found that 47% of local micro-businesses were innovation active in 2023.

As a key driver of productivity, the desire to increase innovation levels reflects the ambition set out in the Programme for Government to develop a globally competitive and sustainable economy and the objectives set out in the Economy Minister's economic vision to raise productivity along with delivering good jobs, supporting decarbonisation and promoting regional balance.

DfE's innovation ambitions focus on three key areas, all of which will be strengthened through delivery of this Collaborative Innovation Plan:

- Accelerating Research and Development
- Supporting more and better Innovation Driven Enterprises
- Encouraging innovation across the wider business base.

In delivering these strategic goals, there is a focus on ensuring support is inclusive and accessible to all and balanced across the region.

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) is the regional economic development agency for Northern Ireland. Invest NI's ambition is to create wealth for the whole community and to drive a regionally balanced, productive, sustainable, and prosperous economy by unlocking the potential of businesses across the region. Accelerating innovation and skills is a strategic priority for Invest NI. Invest NI's 2024-2027 Business Strategy sets out clear objectives for support to business in Northern Ireland over the next three years.

Invest NI is working closely with stakeholders to maximise the benefits of major investments such as the City and Growth Deals, Enhanced Investment Zone and Strength in Places projects and partners with Innovate UK across various programmes and business areas. Dedicated staff work with businesses to accelerate their growth by increasing external sales and innovation, creating good quality jobs, boosting productivity and skills and reducing carbon emissions. Invest NI attracts high-quality inward investment and support sectors that offer high returns for the local economy. Building on existing relationships with Innovate UK and DfE will help Invest NI further advance the ambitions set out in its Business Strategy and government's overarching strategic priorities.



Innovate NI is reshaping Northern Ireland's innovation ecosystem by breaking down barriers, fostering partnerships, promoting collaboration, and providing a clear pathway to support for businesses across all sectors. Innovate NI is a Department for the Economy initiative, delivered by Invest Northern Ireland. Innovate NI has a dual focus on building innovation knowledge and providing signposting to funding. Diversity and inclusion is a core element of the Innovate NI's strategy. Increased referrals from initiatives like the Innovators Grant Competition for Ethnic Minorities and Women in Business are encouraging and highlight the growing accessibility of innovation opportunities, reinforcing Innovate NI's commitment to ensuring that all innovators, regardless of background, can benefit from its support.





Our Innovation Ecosystem

Innovate UK, DfE and Invest NI are deeply embedded in the local innovation ecosystem. To further accelerate innovation led growth it is essential to broaden collaborations and partnerships to deliver shared commitments and impactful interventions aligned with strategic government priorities, benefiting communities and businesses across the region.

Northern Ireland's innovation ecosystem is underpinned by a triple helix of government, industry and academia. This foundation is further strengthened by a dynamic entrepreneurial community, a competitive

funding and investment landscape, a strong third sector and supported by cutting edge physical and digital infrastructure.

A rich and capable support infrastructure exists which includes, but is not limited to:

- **Queen's University Belfast** and **Ulster University** – home to globally recognised research centres and innovation programmes providing commercialisation arms through QUBIS and Innovation Ulster Ltd.
- **Further education colleges** – play a vital role in helping businesses adopt new technologies and embed innovation.



- **InterTradeIreland** – facilitates cross-border collaboration, innovation, and export growth across the Island of Ireland.
- **Local councils** – instrumental in delivering City and Growth Deals and other strategic interventions across the region.
- **Catalyst** – an independent science and technology hub that provides a dynamic environment for entrepreneurs, researchers, and startups to collaborate, grow, and scale.

- **Local Enterprise Agencies** --Enterprise NI provides vital support for entrepreneurs and small businesses at every stage of their journey.

Northern Ireland's innovation offering is further enhanced by a robust support infrastructure, including City and Growth Deal projects, Ormeau Labs, the AMP Incubator, alongside sector-specific enablers like Digital Catapult. Together, these organisations form a cohesive ecosystem, well-positioned to deliver inclusive, sustainable, and innovation-driven growth across Northern Ireland.

Strategic Priorities

Exploiting Northern Ireland’s local strengths is key to supporting prosperity in the wider UK economy and to grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy contributing to shared innovation ambitions.

The Department for the Economy’s (DfE) **Delivering the Economic Vision – A three year Forward Look and 2024/2025 Action Plan** and the **Department for the Economy Business Plan – 2025-26** provide a forward look setting out DfE’s challenge actions to deliver growth for the economy in Northern Ireland, with innovation being identified as a key enabler.

Recognising the importance of government supporting sectors of potential and growth in a strategic, tailored manner, DfE, in partnership with industry, identified seven of the most innovative, productive and internationally-orientated sectors:



Agri-Tech



Life and Health Sciences



Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering



Fintech and Financial Services



Software (including Cyber)



Screen Industries



Low Carbon/Net Zero

Northern Ireland is predominantly an SME economy therefore it is important to ensure that businesses of all sizes are supported to understand, adopt and benefit from emerging technologies.

The commitment to ensuring Northern Ireland’s key strengths in science, technology and innovation are maximised is reflected in the appointment of the Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser and the Office of Science and Technology, which further demonstrates the shared focus on positioning Northern Ireland as a world-class innovation region.

Supported in the right way, through continued collaboration and co-design, the seven high potential sectors can grow further. Working alongside partners to unlock potential and reinforce established strengths will help develop emerging technologies.

These key sector and technology strengths have clear overlaps with the priority sectors outlined in the new UK Industrial Strategy and those in the Republic of Ireland including pharma and medtech, ICT and digital, financial services and the agri-food sector.

Horizon scanning is an important undertaking to respond to emerging and advancements in technologies. **Matrix**, Northern Ireland’s Science Industry Panel is central to this horizon scanning work.

It undertakes a programme of market and technology foresight to identify emerging opportunities for Northern Ireland’s technology sectors. Recent work includes a study on AI and the future of work in Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland’s growing space industry.



Food fraud and food adulteration is a growing concern. It is estimated that food fraud costs the UK food and drink industry up to £12 billion a year. Foods such as grains, spices, coffee, wine, honey and fish are among the categories most commonly subjected to fraud.

To address this challenge Bia Analytical have developed a fast and reliable testing process utilising spectroscopy combined with chemometric modelling and integrating cutting-edge techniques from statistics, machine learning, and computer science. These innovative methods deliver rapid and precise identification of whether products are authentic or adulterated, empowering food producers and their suppliers to make decisions and retain consumer confidence in their products.





The **Agri-Food and drink manufacturing sector** makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. **The 2022 Northern Ireland Food and Drink Processing Report** shows that the industry generated £6.5 billion in sales, the equivalent to 36% of total manufacturing sales and supported 25,500 FTE employees.

Northern Ireland has a diverse and vibrant cluster of innovative businesses producing goods and services within the Agri-Food supply chain.

The region boasts a global reputation for supporting industry on food safety, with experts at Queen's University Belfast's **Institute for Global Food Security** being

world leaders in food safety, authenticity and traceability. Ulster University has several hubs, such as **The Food and Drink Business Research Centre**, that contribute to research and development within the Agri-Tech sector. Technology adoption is further supported by the **College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise** (CAFRE) and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

Local expertise on cybersecurity, AI, and data analytics, is critical cross-sector input that helps shape this exciting sector. Innovative companies such as **Cattle Eye** develop software that monitors livestock and assesses animal health.

Through the £1.3 billion City and Growth Deals funding package to Northern Ireland, UK Government has committed to supporting several projects to further develop the Agri-Tech sector and drive innovation in the Agri-Food system. These investments include the £70 million Momentum One Zero global innovation centre at Queen's University, a £12.8 million Robotics, Automation and Packaging Innovation Centre (RAPIC) at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), a £22 million Centre for Food and Drug Discovery, led by Ulster University and a £24.5 million Agri-Bio Innovation Centre (ABiC) in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area.



Headquartered in Northern Ireland, Dunbia is one of Europe's leading food companies, servicing national and international retail and food service markets through 13 UK facilities.

Commencing in 2019, Dunbia's successful Conception to Consumption project was an Innovate UK three-year funded project, working with collaborative partners Breedr and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). Its objective, to produce better beef by understanding and improving the efficiency, quality and productivity growth of the beef sector and supply chain. They collaborated with and received support from over thirty beef farmers, who provided livestock and shared information for the project. These farmers included both integrated beef producers and independent commercial producers.



Life and Health Sciences

Life and Health Sciences is the fastest growing sector in Northern Ireland's economy, boasting a vibrant academic community with over 250 globally renowned companies including **Randox**, **Almac**, **Norbrook**, and **Kainos**, and a uniquely integrated health and social care system. The sector is worth £1.9 billion to the local economy and employs close to 20,000 people, exporting to over 145 countries globally.

The research base is integral to the Life and Health Sciences ecosystem in the region, with Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University being international leaders, producing highly qualified graduates and developing innovative spin-outs such as **ProAxis Ltd** and **Klas Therapeutics Ltd**. Combined, the universities have the research impact of the University of Oxford and are individually ranked in the UK top 10 for life science related activity.

The sector boasts 17 research centres and over 1,000 researchers which integrates academic research, clinical practice and technological expertise. Enabling scientific research to be linked to clinical outcomes and supporting Northern Ireland companies to accelerate their development efforts and achieve success ahead of competitors.



City Quay. Source: Invest NI.

Initiatives and funding from Innovate UK and wider government including the Northern Ireland Life and Health Sciences Launchpad and Northern Ireland's City and Growth Deals, have significantly supported the sector. These deals shape the future of innovation and collaboration and are key drivers in the Minister for the Economy's Economic Vision.

25% of the £800 million City and Growth Deal's funding for DfE projects within Northern Ireland is oriented towards further developing the sector, totalling

over £200 million invested. The Growth Deals aim to revolutionise the healthcare industry, create new business opportunities and pave the way for cutting-edge technologies, products and services.

Enhanced Investment Zone (EIZ) prioritises emerging technologies in Biotechnology and Photonics, key enablers of progress in Life & Health Sciences. By supporting scalable projects and fostering collaboration, EIZ strengthens the region's innovation ecosystem.



Re-Vana spun out of Queen's University Belfast in 2016 and are developing highly innovative drug-delivery platforms. Their primary focus is the treatment of sight-threatening diseases of the eye, although the technology has the potential for broader utility.

Their drug-delivery platforms cater a broad range of therapeutics i.e. from simple chemical drugs to cutting-edge, complex biologics. Once injected, the implant slowly degrades, releasing the drug at controlled rates for extended periods of time (6+ months). This should improve patient outcomes as it reduces the need for multiple injections into the eye.

Re-Vana employ a highly experienced management team and have secured significant investment from VCs. They have received grant funding from both Innovate UK and Invest NI including Proof of Concept and ICURe which supports Innovation to Commercialisation of university projects. More recently, ReVana received sequential Innovate UK and Invest NI R&D grants for the nonclinical development of their products. Their technology is attracting attention from several global pharmaceutical companies.



Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering

The **Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering (AMME)** sector is a significant provider of highly productive, quality jobs across the region. Northern Ireland has key strengths in aerospace materials handling (40% of the world's tracked crushing and screening equipment comes from the region), composites, photonics, construction and precision engineering, as well as a maritime cluster.

Northern Ireland has a strong cohort of around 4,665 AMME companies, employing around 56,000 people and is worth approximately £3.2 billion to the local economy. The sector is one of Northern

Ireland's biggest exporters and is key to growing the local economy. It is home to global companies such as Terex, Spirit Aero systems, Hyster-Yale, GE, Sensata, Glen Dimplex and Andor.

With internationally recognised strengths in nano technology and photonics, Seagate Technology is leading a consortium on a £63 million Smart Nano NI project to develop game-changing advanced prototyping and smart manufacturing methods to deliver new technologies.

The sector benefits from substantial City & Growth Deals investment supporting the

establishment of new innovation centres, including AMIC, a £98 million Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, led by Queen's and CADRIC, a £39million, Cognitive Analytics & Digital Robotics Centre, led by Ulster University.

The region's manufacturing sector also has a key role for Northern Ireland in leading innovation in energy and renewables. Northern Ireland is an important player in the development of low-carbon enabling technologies to assist key industry sectors such as heat, energy and transport.



CCP Gransden evolved from a shipbuilding and repair company in the 19th century into a developer and manufacturer of advanced composites across high-value manufacturing sectors such as aerospace, transportation and, security. Its sophisticated aerospace-grade manufacturing facility delivers one of the UK's widest selections of advanced composite manufacturing processes in-house.

CCP Gransden was one of the advanced composite manufacturing partners in the Project Tucana consortium. Funded by UK Government through Innovate UK and delivered via the Advanced Propulsion Centre UK, Project Tucana brought together world-leading academic and industry partners to develop lightweight structures for Battery Electric Vehicles using advanced, lightweight composites such as carbon fibre.

Project Tucana also involved: Warwick Manufacturing Group, EXPERT Tooling and Automation, Broetje-Automation UK, Toray International UK, and The Centre for Modelling & Simulation (CFMS).

Fintech and Financial Services

Northern Ireland is an established and globally recognised hub for **Fintech and Financial Services** with an international reputation for engineering excellence, providing innovative solutions to the global capital markets, insurance and banking industries. Northern Ireland attracts significant global inward investment into its Financial Services tech sector. Belfast has been identified as one of three leading Fintech locations of the future after London and Singapore and has been ranked one of the top ten European Tech Cities of the future by the Financial Times, fDi Intelligence. Leading banks include BNP Paribas, Citi, Danske and Lloyds.

The region has expertise across cyber, advanced analytics, AI and machine learning which are driving transformation in the financial services industry. Businesses such as Aflac Inc., Allstate and PWC have centres of excellence in Belfast.

Rapid growth into Fintech markets is driven by ongoing technological advancements, changing consumer behaviour and regulatory support. Northern Ireland is well placed to take advantage of this global opportunity with its strong track record in developing Fintech solutions alongside its university research and key industry strengths in Regtech, Capital Markets and Insuretech.



Founded in 2021, Enzai provides software that empowers AI developers to confidently navigate regulatory requirements and deploy AI responsibly. The platform continuously tracks legal developments in AI, helping companies stay compliant and minimise the risks associated with evolving regulations.

Developed by a team of experts in AI and legal compliance, Enzai offers tools for organisations to assess, monitor, and manage risks linked to AI systems, ensuring they stay ahead in a rapidly changing regulatory landscape.



Software and Cyber

Known for its innovation and global reach, **the software and cyber sector** in Northern Ireland is a dynamic and rapidly growing part of its economy. The sector encompasses a wide range of activities, including software development, IT services, cybersecurity, fintech and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The sector is one of the leading contributors to Northern Ireland's economy, generating significant employment and attracting substantial investment. It includes Analytics Engines Ltd, BT, Angoka Ltd and Pytilia Ltd.

The Northern Ireland City and Growth Deals are supporting the research, development and application of AI and data analytics. These investments, including the £70 million Momentum One Zero global innovation centre at Queen's University, and a £39 million Cognitive Analytics and Digital Robotics Innovation Centre (CADRIC) at Ulster University. They aim to provide

opportunities for businesses, both in and outside Northern Ireland, to tap into the world-leading expertise of regional universities and develop breakthrough technologies, products, and services.

A recognised global leader in cyber security research, the Centre for Secure Information Technologies (CSIT) is the UK's Innovation and Knowledge Centre (IKC) for cybersecurity. It was initially established in 2009 as one of seven EPSRC-sponsored IKCs with co-funding from Innovate UK and Invest NI. It has become one of the world's largest centres in cybersecurity and works with a range of industrial partners from UK-based SMEs to multinational corporations.

The Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC) is a £16.3 million initiative by Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast, promoting AI awareness and

adoption among businesses in Northern Ireland, with a strong emphasis on ethical and responsible innovation. The AICC aims to connect industry, academia, and government, to foster collaboration in co-developing AI solutions with fully funded hands-on support, education and upskilling opportunities.

Funded by the Science and Technology Facilities Council and based in Ulster University, the Hartree Centre, Northern Ireland Hub (HartreeNI) forms part of the Hartree National Centre for Digital Innovation (HNCDI) programme. Aiming to support SMEs in their drive to invest in digital technology, data analytics, AI, gaining intelligence from their data, through providing impartial advice, consultation and training supporting them to become more innovative, competitive and productive.

movetru.®

Movetru is a wearable SportsTech device for real-time, on-field movement quality analysis providing data-driven insights on key performance metrics. Movetru is on a mission to reduce injury risk and improve player performance through biomechanics.

Founder and CEO, Naomi McGregor developed Movetru during her masters dissertation in Product Design Engineering. Movetru has had a successful relationship with Innovate UK through the 2021 Women in Innovation Award and a £500k Smart Grant awarded in 2022, which enabled the opportunity for integral research and development. In 2024, Movetru was awarded the Launchpad: Life and Health Sciences, Collaborative Research & Development Grant, which unlocked the invaluable opportunity for product validation in collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University, a key research centre for biomechanics and human performance.

In addition to grant support, working alongside Innovate UK's Business Growth Innovation and Growth Specialists has allowed Naomi to grow her team and continue developing her innovation and business, in order to revolutionise movement quality analysis for athletes everywhere.

In 2025 Movetru secured £1.2 million pre-seed investment.



Screen Industries

Northern Ireland's **screen industries sector** has emerged as a vibrant and internationally recognised part of the economy, encompassing film, television, animation and digital content production. Over the past decade the region has developed into a major hub for high quality screen productions attracting both domestic and international projects.

The sector gained significant global recognition due to the success of major productions such as Game of Thrones, Dungeons and Dragons and How to Train

Your Dragon that were largely filmed in the region. The success of such projects showcased Northern Ireland's ability to host large-scale, high-budget productions.

The region boasts world-class production facilities, including Studio Ulster, Belfast Harbour Studios, and Titanic Studios. Combining the growing pool of skilled professionals in the screen industries and appetite to innovate means this sector is making a significant contribution to the local economy.

During the 2025 Cannes Film Festival Belfast was named City of Film at the Global Production Awards and Northern Ireland Screen was presented with the Special Recognition Award for its outstanding overall contribution to sustainable global production.

As part of the Belfast Region City Deal, Studio Ulster is a 'Tier 1' centre of excellence in R&D and innovation in Virtual Production. Driving the next generation of visual effects technologies revolutionising the UK's film, TV and performing arts industries and giving Northern Ireland a competitive edge.

Leading businesses in this sector include Poli Productions, which is positioning itself at the forefront of Northern Ireland's growing virtual production ecosystem, and animation company Paper Owl Films that is recognised for its creativity, international reach and innovation in storytelling, education and inclusivity.

HUMAIN

Humain is leading innovation in the creation of highly expressive 3D avatars for immersive gaming experiences, using AI to develop realistic face and body rigs that blend psychology, anatomy, and art. Humain is a core partner with Belfast Harbour Studios, BBC Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen, in the CoStar Screen Lab facility at Studio Ulster, led by Ulster University.

CoSTAR is a £75.6 million national research and development network of laboratories that are developing new technology to maintain the UK's world-leading position in gaming, TV, film, performance, and digital entertainment sectors. It is delivered by the **UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Arts and Humanities Research Council**.

Focused on worldbuilding, interactivity, automation, and democratisation of virtual production, the CoSTAR Screen Lab operates with principles of place, sustainability, and open innovation. It will work closely with the CoSTAR National Lab and other labs in the network to share expertise and advance virtual production. Additionally, the lab will offer local companies development support through challenge calls co-funded by Ulster University and industry partners.



Source: Wrightbus



Low Carbon/Net Zero

The global transition to Net Zero is crucial to protect and restore the environment and presents huge opportunities for innovative Northern Ireland businesses with unique access to both EU and UK Net Zero markets.

DfE's Low Carbon / Net Zero Sectoral Action Plan.

Northern Ireland companies and supply chains have strengths and capabilities across multiple green technology areas. Northern Ireland has one of the highest concentrations of Net Zero economy businesses as a proportion of the total businesses in the UK.

Innovate UK and EPSRC support has enabled Wrightbus to develop next generation bus technology. Their recently launched Streetdeck Electroliner is claimed to be the world's most efficient double-deck battery-electric bus.

Ionic Technologies, a spin-out from Queen's University Belfast, is actively contributing to the UK's net-zero ambitions through its innovative magnet recycling technology, supporting a circular economy by recycling end-of-life wind turbines, used electric vehicle components, and MRI equipment. Their work is crucial for developing resilient and secure supply chains of rare earth elements, vital for clean energy technologies and achieving decarbonisation targets.

Six local authority councils in Northern Ireland have received Innovate UK's Net Zero Living programme awards to take forward local initiatives that accelerate their transition to Net Zero.

The Northern Ireland Energy Strategy sets out the pathway to Net Zero carbon and affordable energy by 2050. This includes a

substantial opportunity to reduce carbon emissions and grow the green economy through hydrogen production, carbon capture, blending of the gas network, and world leading research and development.

Future sector benefit from City & Growth Deals investment, includes plans to support the establishment of a Green Energy District and a new Green Energy industrial Park, two of the innovation projects proposed under the Mid-South West Deal.

There are huge opportunities for the Northern Ireland economy to benefit from the expansion in offshore wind within the region and beyond.

CATAGEN

Belfast-based **CATAGEN** is a world leader in energy-efficient, recirculating gas e-reactors, providing green emissions testing for global automotive manufacturers. Founded by Dr Andrew Woods and Prof Roy Douglas as a spinout from Queen's University Belfast, CATAGEN has unrivalled expertise through its research, software and internationally patented testing technology.

Using its core patented technology, CATAGEN has further developed a suite of technologies (ClimaHtech™) to clean and decarbonise the air and accelerate the transition to net-zero. CATAGEN's ClimaHtech™ technologies offer a comprehensive solution, including green hydrogen (HGEN), bio-hydrogen (BIOHGEN), and e-fuels (EFUELS), with complementary systems for carbon capture and hydrogen compression (COMPRESSOR).

It received two Innovation Loans for late-stage research and development totalling £2.6 million in the Innovation Loans pilot in 2018 and in the Innovation Continuity Loans Programme in 2020.

Innovate UK in Northern Ireland

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency. It is the business focused council of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), supporting the UK Government's drive to increase productivity and boost economic growth by supporting innovators to develop and realise the potential of new ideas, from concept to market. Ensuring that innovative businesses are supported to scale and grow at every stage of that journey.

Innovate UK connects businesses to the partners, customers and investors that can help turn ideas into commercially successful products and services, drive productivity, and support business growth.

Innovate UK has long standing collaboration and excellent working relations with stakeholders and partners in Northern Ireland. This relationship is particularly

strong with Northern Ireland's Department for the Economy (DfE), Invest NI, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University, InterTradelreland and Catalyst. Innovate UK is committed to continue growing these partnerships to strengthen the region's innovation ecosystem and to work with local leadership to co-create economic impact. Highlights of this collaborative relationship

includes the recent Northern Ireland Life & Health Sciences Launchpad.

Innovate UK offers a spectrum of business support to businesses at all stages of their innovation journey.

Innovate UK Business Growth service offers expert growth and scaling support to innovation-driven SMEs. This tailored,



Terumo BCT is a billion-dollar business headquartered in Colorado, USA. It is a leader in healthcare products for blood management, blood safety, therapeutic apheresis, cell therapy and cell collections. Terumo BCT have over 7,000 employees in eight factories across the globe, including one in Larne, Northern Ireland.

Terumo BCT partnered with Queen's University Belfast on a Knowledge Transfer Partnership to develop a product that maintains or extends the shelf life of intravenous pharmaceutical products without using secondary packaging, such as a foil overwrap.

The project proved the feasibility of the new packaging and developed a business case for the production of the new polymer film bags that support the removal of foil overwraps. There will be cost savings from removing the foil overwraps, becoming a more sustainable and environmentally friendly product.

expert advice helps companies realise the maximum value from their intellectual property, raise game-changing investment and take their business onto the global stage. The service accelerates ambitious clients on their growth journeys with one-to-one support from innovation and growth specialists embedded in every UK region and nation.

Innovate UK Business Growth Innovation and Growth Specialists have well-established relationships and ways of working with the business support agencies in Northern Ireland that assist businesses in fulfilling their growth and scaling potential. Over the last two years, they have worked with over 285 businesses across Northern Ireland to help them grow and scale. The Innovate UK Business Growth team in Northern Ireland led a successful MedTech and Diagnostics Global Business Innovation Programme (GBIP) in December 2023 to Dublin and Galway. Thirteen Health and Life science companies from across the UK attended with over 50% of attendees establishing further opportunities for peer to peer learning and collaborative development.

Innovate UK Business Connect Knowledge Transfer Advisers based in Northern Ireland support businesses who apply to the Innovate UK **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships** (KTP) scheme. KTP boosts innovation and solves real-world challenges by connecting businesses with academic expertise. Innovate UK and Invest NI have a long-standing KTP funding partnership.

Northern Ireland is and has been one of the UK's strongest performing regions for the KTP scheme with close to 40 live projects (2024) and approximately 450 projects successfully completed since 2003. The regional portfolio is largely SME centred and is one of the few regions of the UK to have an actively engaged Further Education sector supporting the scheme.

In addition, Innovate UK Business Connect advisors provide a range of sector teams and specialists that actively support Northern

Ireland companies in developing partnerships and new opportunities, helping them accelerate ambitious innovation ideas into real-world solutions.

Catapults provide a unique combination of world-leading facilities, expertise, and equipment to support business innovation and growth. The Digital Catapult operates a hub based in Belfast that connects local innovators into the wider Catapult support available across the UK.



Based in Mid-Ulster Beespace Technologies Ltd (formerly known as SmartWorkPlus) provide innovative sensor technology to transform traditional workspaces into intelligent, productivity-driven environments.

Following their participation in the Innovate UK Scaling the Edge programme (co-funded by the Department for the Economy) Beespace engaged with Innovate UK's Business Growth team based in Northern Ireland.

Business Growth provided support to allow Beespace to refine their financial requirements to fully develop their platform and business.



Funding

Over the last six years (2019/20 to 2024/25), Innovate UK has invested £164 million in innovation projects in Northern Ireland. £103 million (63% of the total) was awarded to businesses and of that, £77 million (47% of the total) was awarded to SMEs.

£42 million (26% of the total) has been invested through academic, research and public sector organisations, including Catapult Centres, supporting business innovation and strengthening the relationship between industry and academia. This is particularly important for SMEs who are less likely to have the research capability in-house and need external research organisations to help progress new ideas to commercialisation.

Northern Ireland benefits from major investments made through Innovate UK and UKRI. These include:

- The UK Digital Twin Centre (£37.6 million)
- The UKRI Strength in Places Fund; Belfast Maritime (£33 million) and Smart Nano (£43 million)
- The Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund which delivered the Smart Manufacturing Data Innovation Hub (£20 million)
- The UKRI-led Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF) will empower local innovation leadership through 'triple helix' partnerships between civic institutions, business and universities, delivering impact at scale.



UK Research and Innovation's Strength in Places Fund led and delivered by Research England and Innovate UK is investing £33 million in Northern Ireland's shipbuilding resurgence in the heart of Belfast Harbour. **Belfast Maritime Consortium** is led by Artemis Technologies and brings together 14 partners from across industry, academia and local government. Partners including Ards and North Down Borough Council,

Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Belfast Metropolitan College, Catalyst, Condor Ferries, Creative Composites, Invest Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Advanced Composites Engineering (NIACE), Power NI, Queen's University Belfast, Spirit AeroSystems, and Ulster University.

This project aims to launch the world's most advanced high-speed zero-emission

passenger ferry and develop the technical and operational requirements for a maritime transport system of the future. This project will re-invigorate a strategically important maritime cluster in Belfast through the research and development of transformative technologies that have the potential to change maritime transportation forever.

Source: Artemis

From 2020/21 the Department for the Economy (DfE) has partnered with Innovate UK to bring an additional £6.5 million co-funding alongside Innovate UK's programmes for projects supporting the Department's sector priorities. To date, this has enabled an additional 109 projects to be supported.

ICURe is a pre-accelerator programme for researchers. This programme is designed to help explore the commercial application and potential of UK research.

North by North West is a consortium of Universities in the northern United Kingdom. The consortium is led by Queen's University of Belfast and supported by funding from Innovate UK. Start-ups and Innovation Driven Enterprises (IDEs) continue to be important in Northern Ireland, as there remains an 'entrepreneurial deficit', despite record levels of start-up activity in the UK in recent years. 77% of the most funded early IDEs in Northern Ireland originate from ICURe.

Infrastructure Investment

Newry. Source: Invest NI.

City and Region Growth Deals

The four Northern Ireland City and Growth Deals together with the associated Complementary Fund, are drivers of innovation and growth across the region.

The combined funding, from the Northern Ireland Executive and UK government totals £1.3 billion, of which approximately £700 million is for innovation and digital projects.

These investments are multi-faceted as they link industrial, societal, and regional challenges in a comprehensive and inclusive way. These significant investments create global centres of innovation excellence in key growth sectors such as Advanced

Manufacturing, Life & Health Sciences, Technology & Professional Services, Green Economy and Agri-Tech. Providing opportunities for businesses, located both in and outside Northern Ireland, to collaborate and tap into the world-leading expertise of its universities to create breakthrough technologies, products and services. Developing the infrastructure and facilities to support the next generation of products to be trialled and tested.

Scheduled to open in 2026, the £98 million Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) will be a

10,500m² state-of-the-art factory of the future at Global Point Business Park in Newtownabbey. Designed for industry, it will provide a specialised environment for advanced manufacturing, materials, and engineering sectors to access the latest digital, automation and robotics technology supported by experienced engineers and underpinned by academic excellence.

The Centre for Digital Health Technology (CDHT) is being developed to provide a world-class space for academia, industry and clinicians to come together to innovate and boost the productivity of the

Life and Health Sciences sector, as well as medical device and related sector activity in Northern Ireland. This project, led by Ulster University, is a close partnership between healthcare professionals, researchers and industry professionals.

The Agri-Bio Innovation Centre's (ABiC) vision is to create a regional centre bridging innovation across the agri-supply chain supporting agri-tech, food and climate innovators with space, knowledge and connections. Bringing forward technological developments in the industry to support sustainable development from farm to fork.

Investment in Innovation
and Digital Projects

Derry City & Strabane
District Council City Deal

£53m Funding
6 Projects

Mid South West Growth Deal

£137m Funding
6 Projects

Complementary Fund

£37m Funding
3 Projects



Causeway
Coast & Glens Growth Deal

Funding: **£41m**
Projects: **3**

Belfast Region City Deal

Funding: **£467m**
Projects: **15**

Total Investment **£795m**
33 NI projects

Digital Catapult

Collaboration between DfE and **Digital Catapult** helped establish the first Catapult presence in Northern Ireland, focused on accelerating the early adoption of advanced digital technology, driving growth and opportunity across the economy. Catapults work with local businesses to break down barriers and de-risk innovation to understand and apply the right technology for the right challenge at the right time through their specialist support and experimental environments.

Digital Catapult leads the Smart Nano Accelerator Programme and has established a 5G Testbed in Derry as a partner in the local photonics consortium. Smart Nano NI,

funded by UKRI's Strength in Places Fund, is developing game-changing advanced prototyping and smart manufacturing methods to deliver new technologies.

Digital Catapult has also established the UK Digital Twin Centre in Belfast working with consortium partners Artemis, Thales and Spirit Aerospace. With the rapid adoption of Digital Twins across business and industry its aim is to help drive adoption more broadly and help derive efficiency and effectiveness for not only organisations but also the UK in a competitive global market.



Digital Catapult. Source: Invest NI



Digital Catapult. Source: Invest NI

CATAPULT Digital

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), as part of the implementation of its **Innovation Strategy 2021-25**, collaborated with Digital Catapult on the delivery of their Tenfold Net Zero Accelerator Programme to accelerate the practical application of deep tech. Commencing in 2023, this one year pilot funded by DAERA, sought to assist local industry in tackling specific challenges that they were facing in the drive towards Net Zero, whilst providing valuable insight into how such collaborative approaches can best encourage or support wider industry adoption of innovative processes and products.

Following extensive engagement with over 100 businesses and membership organisations across DAERA's remit, Digital Catapult secured the commitment of three

challenge owners and helped them refine their challenges. Digital Catapult and the challenge owners then opened a call to innovation and technology SMEs (solution providers) within the UK to develop potential innovative solutions to these challenges. The challenge owners then provided funding to their chosen solution provider to undertake research and develop Proof of Concepts for potential deep-tech solutions to the specific challenges.

The collaboration between DAERA and Digital Catapult to deliver the Tenfold NetZero Programme demonstrates that Northern Ireland's public and private sector can work together to develop solutions that benefit industry, drive innovation, and support green growth with the aim of creating sustainable business models that can be emulated across DAERA's sectors.

Working Together

Innovate UK, Department for the Economy (DfE) and Invest NI are committed to working in collaboration with each other, and with partners across the innovation ecosystem, to increase Research and Development and Innovation activity in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has significant strengths and a long history of innovation. This Collaborative Innovation Plan will build on this record of success and support greater opportunities for all who live, work and invest in the region.

Working collaboratively will provide a platform to build on existing strengths and expertise and collectively deliver our shared strategic ambitions through to delivery.

This Collaborative Innovation Plan sets out three core areas where efforts will initially be focused, creating the conditions through which collective priorities and shared ambitions will be delivered. Within each of these, there are a number of commitments which will collectively be delivered.

1. Enhancing Collaboration

Objective:

Enhancing collaboration between Innovate UK, DfE and Invest NI to ensure innovation stakeholders have a clear, timely and inclusive route to access research and development and innovation support. Ensuring support is promoted widely and tailored to business and sectoral needs through a joined-up approach.

Ambition:

Innovation support provided by Innovate UK, Invest NI, DfE and the wider innovation ecosystem is collaborative, accessible, inclusive and delivering against business and public sector innovators needs.

Joint Commitments:

- 1.1** Support timely information sharing on respective priorities and ambitions when scoping future investments to enable exploration of co-design and co-funding opportunities.
- 1.2** Use joint convening powers to develop annual programmes of engagements to increase awareness and capability of companies and researchers across the region to improve access to Innovate UK funding. Aligning our business support and improving referrals to guide Northern Ireland innovators to the right support package at the right stage of their business growth journey.
- 1.3** Share data and market intelligence to better understand the demographics and challenges of applicants for innovation support in order to provide more impactful areas of strategic alignment to businesses and address inequalities.
- 1.4** Collaborate proactively with Northern Ireland Executive Departments to identify and capitalise on opportunities that align with shared objectives. This includes identifying innovative projects to leverage publicly owned utilities and assets for maximum impact



2. Strengthening Connectivity

Objective:

Strengthening connectivity between innovation partners on a local, UK, international and all-island basis to ensure that there is an increase in the breadth and level of funding and investment coming into the region, and that opportunities are informed by the expertise within the Northern Ireland innovation ecosystem.

Ambition:

Stakeholders from across the ecosystem engage effectively, develop proposals that build on existing and emerging strengths and successfully compete for funding opportunities, enhancing the region's growing reputation as an innovation hub.

Joint Commitments:

- 2.1 Connect partners across the innovation ecosystem to identify areas of strategic alignment for investments to build collective and complementary impact.
- 2.2 Work within innovation networks to engage a diverse coalition of stakeholders to determine gaps in provision and activity to foster a culture of inclusive innovation.
- 2.3 Work in partnership with investor and stakeholder networks to raise awareness and support demand for investment finance to increase productivity and growth in the region.
- 2.4 Enhance linkages to local, UK, international and all-island innovation infrastructure to increase business engagement to unleash the potential of local businesses.



3. Collectively Supporting Strategic Priorities

Objective:

Working collectively with partners across the ecosystem to deliver more good jobs, raise productivity, promote regional balance and reduce carbon emissions in support of the Executive's Programme for Government, the DfE Economic Vision and the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy.

Ambition:

The innovation ecosystem works collectively to shape strategic interventions to support strategic priorities through making the most of opportunities presented by innovation, research & development and entrepreneurship.

Joint Commitments

- 3.1** Cultivate dynamic, competitive clusters in key areas of strength through strategic policy development and by providing targeted, tailored support.
- 3.2** Seek opportunities to partner with institutions in the development and ongoing operation of City and Growth Deal projects.

- 3.3** Strengthen support for business innovation and skills development through partnerships with the Further Education and Higher Education sectors.
- 3.4** Maximise the outreach potential of public sector bodies and the Further Education and Higher Education institutions across the region to increase technology diffusion opportunities and increase awareness of and signposting to Innovate UK capabilities and funding.
- 3.5** Identify and progress strategic collaborations with stakeholders to advance industrial decarbonisation and support the Northern Ireland Executive's Net Zero goals through research, innovation, and low-carbon life cycle design.

Through working collaboratively to enhance communications and engagement we will support and maximise the impact of these commitments.



EPIC Futures NI is dedicated to building a prosperous and sustainable future for Northern Ireland. Through collaborative partnerships with academia, policymakers, and the community and voluntary sectors, to co-design policies and programmes that address the barriers to fair and meaningful employment, creating evidence-based solutions that make a real impact.

Delivered by ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK, and lead by Ulster University the three year £4.8 million Epic Futures NI project brings together three government departments (Department for the Economy, Department for Communities and Department of Finance) to work in an

open forum with stakeholders in research, education, industry and community organisations, EPIC Futures NI will fill data and knowledge gaps on the hidden unemployed (mainly women, the over 50's, and individuals with disabilities) to develop an evidence base and inform policies and programmes that support these groups to secure fair and meaningful work.

A key deliverable of the three-year project is the establishment of a Labour Market Observatory, an online, freely available resource filling labour market data gaps in Northern Ireland and improving knowledge and intelligence about Northern Ireland's current and future skills needs.

Communication and Engagement

Awareness of innovation support will be strengthened through timely and coordinated outreach, maximising respective communication channels between Innovate UK, DfE and Invest NI.

Joint communications

In areas that supports joint ambitions, Innovate UK, DfE and Invest NI:

- Ensure activities and programmes are promoted throughout the region and are accessible to under-represented communities.
- Celebrate a diverse range of innovation leaders across Northern Ireland through impact stories and events.
- Improve visibility of opportunities across the ecosystem.



Delivery and Impact

The Collaborative Innovation Plan is intended to be delivered in collaboration with the wider region's innovation ecosystem. The next stage will be to develop a delivery plan to meet and implement the joint commitments set out in this Collaborative Innovation Plan. Innovate UK and DfE and Invest NI have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of this plan.

A steering panel will be established to ensure focus and progress and create a delivery plan.

An Oversight Group will be established to monitor and review the delivery plan. We will evolve existing commitments, and develop actions as appropriate to deliver against the core areas outlined above and respond to emerging opportunities and economic priorities.



Innovate
UK



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An Roinn
Geilleagair
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

Invest
**Northern
Ireland**



The Peace Bridge. Source: Invest NI.

ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk

03003 214357 • support@iuk.ukri.org • [@innovateuk](https://twitter.com/innovateuk)

Innovate UK, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1FL