

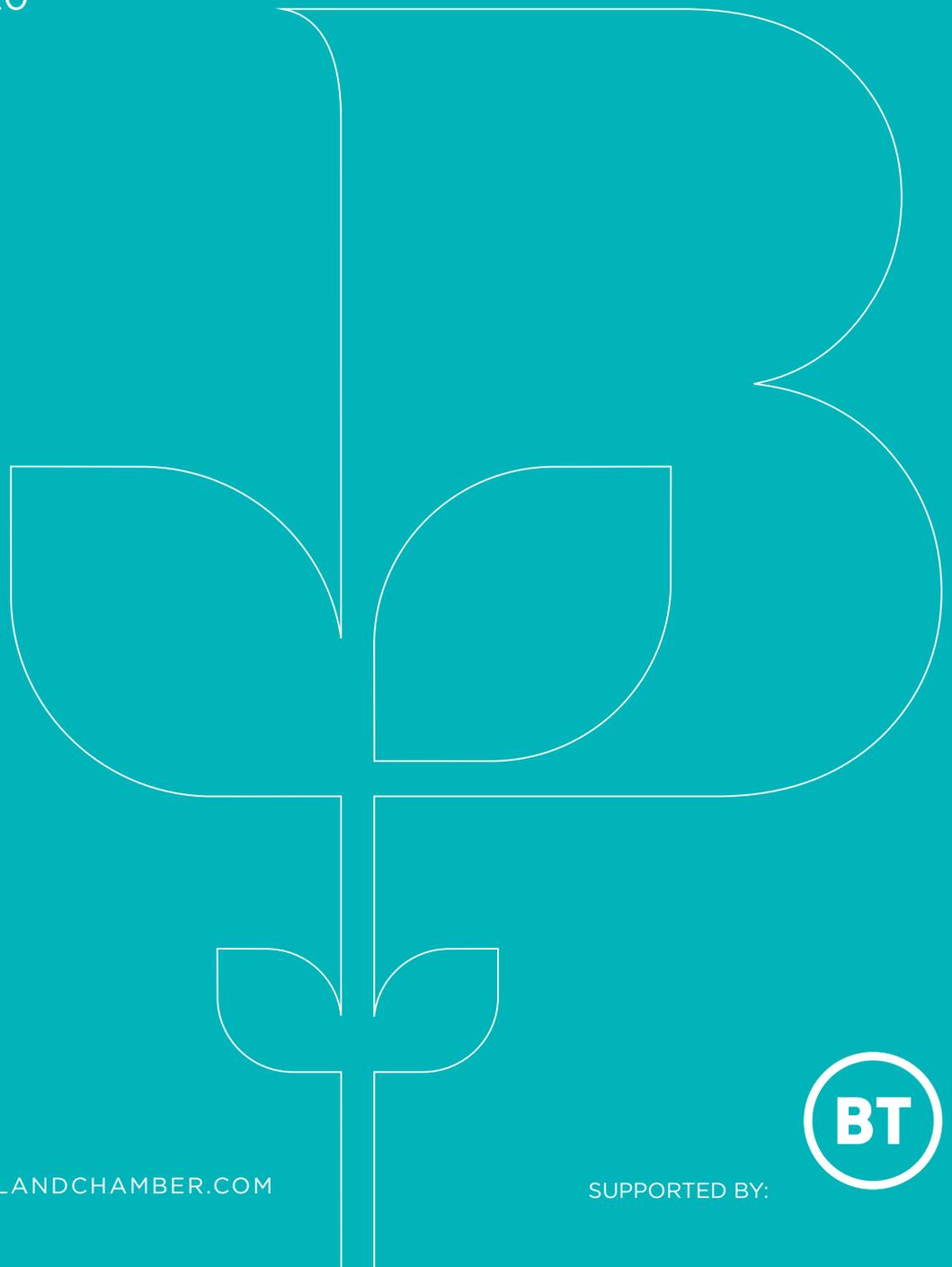


Northern Ireland  
Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry

# THRIVE!

Recovering and building a better and  
greener future for Northern Ireland

**AN ACTION PLAN FOR  
ECONOMIC RECOVERY**  
NOVEMBER 2020



# ABOUT US

## Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry

**Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NI Chamber) is a customer-focused, quality assured, business support organisation which enables members to grow both locally and internationally and drive the development of the economy.**

Formed in 1783, we have represented the interests of local business and commerce across Northern Ireland for over 230 years. We now have a large and active membership of over 1,000 businesses from sole traders to the largest multinationals (across every area of business) totalling more than 100,000 employees.

NI Chamber supports businesses through a series of growth initiatives and export support; events and training. We also articulate the views of business to Government and provide members with a wide-range of promotional opportunities via the NI Chamber website, directory and Ambition magazine.

As the only Northern Ireland accredited member of the British Chambers of Commerce, we are part of a wider network representing the interests of 104,000 business members which collectively employ almost five million people. This network also links us into the worldwide Chamber network in support of our export development activity. NI Chamber also works on an all island basis as a member of Chambers Ireland to develop all island trade.

### Quality Assured and Globally Connected



### President

Mr Ian Henry, Henry Group

### Vice-President

Mr Paul Murnaghan, BT

### Board

Mr John Healy OBE, Allstate NI  
Mr Paul Murnaghan, BT  
Ms Vicky Davies, Danske Bank  
Mr Owen Brennan, Devenish Group  
Ms Ellvena Graham OBE, ESB Group  
Mr Michael Kidd, EY Belfast  
Mr Brendan Gribben, Greenfields Ireland  
Mr Cathal Geoghegan, Henderson Foodservice  
Mr Ian Henry, Henry Group  
Ms Ann McGregor MBE, NI Chamber  
Ms Andrea McIlroy-Rose, Pinsent Masons  
Ms Orla Corr, The McAvoy Group  
Mr Nick Coburn CBE, Ulster Carpets Group

### Chief Executive

Ms Ann McGregor MBE

### Our Vision

**Champion a prosperous Northern Ireland where all businesses can thrive.**

### Our Purpose

To inspire and support local businesses to thrive and grow through business-to-business support and connections and by listening to and representing our members.

### Council

Ms Claire Reid, 4c  
Mr Gareth Walls, A&L Goodbody  
Mr John Healy OBE, Allstate NI  
Mr Killian O'Rawe, Allstate NI  
Ms Shauna Burns, Beyond Business Travel  
Mr Andrew Robinson, Boomer  
Mr Paul Murnaghan, BT  
Mr Jonny O'Brien, Capita  
Mr Gerard Armstrong, Carson McDowell  
Mr Andrew Coggins, CBRE  
Ms Hilary Griffith, Cleaver Fulton Rankin  
Ms Vicky Davies, Danske Bank  
Mr Owen Brennan, Devenish Group  
Ms Mary Rose Burke, Dublin Chamber of Commerce  
Ms Ellvena Graham OBE, ESB Group  
Mr Gerry Carlile, Evolve CPA  
Mr Michael Kidd, EY  
Mr Brendan Gribben, Greenfields Ireland  
Mr Cathal Geoghegan, Henderson Foodservice  
Mr Ian Henry, Henry Group  
Mr Donal Durkan, Invest NI  
Mr John Poole, KPMG  
Mr Jonathan Ireland, Lanyon Group  
Mr Alan Stewart, Marcon Fit Out  
Ms Nuala Jackson, Mercer Ltd  
Ms Anne Donaghy, Mid East Antrim Council  
Mr Gary Annett, MJM Group  
Ms Ann McGregor MBE, NI Chamber  
Mr Roger Henderson, NIE Networks  
Mr Jonathan Martindale, Phoenix Natural Gas  
Ms Andrea McIlroy-Rose, Pinsent Masons  
Mr Eddie McGoldrick, PowerOn Technologies Ltd  
Ms Cara Haffey, PwC  
Mr Neil Collins, RM Dungannon  
Mr David Watson, Ryobi  
Mr Gerry Kindlon, Seagate  
Mr Colin Jess, Social Enterprise NI  
Ms Natasha Sayee, SONI  
Ms Orla Corr, The McAvoy Group  
Mr Patrick Anderson, Translink  
Mr Nigel Walsh, Ulster Bank  
Mr Nick Coburn CBE, Ulster Carpets Group  
Professor Gillian Armstrong, Ulster University Business School  
Mr Michael Woods, Woodside Global

# THRIVE!

## An action plan for economic recovery

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world is unparalleled, resulting in a global recession during 2020. However as we look forward there is both hope and opportunity - all recessions end. Our action plan focuses on how we can support the economic recovery in Northern Ireland and ensure that enterprises are well placed to grasp new opportunities when they arise.

Prior to the recession, Northern Ireland set a number of economic records. GVA, employment, R&D and wages were at record highs, unemployment at a record low and wellbeing was the highest of the UK regions. We have proven that we are a resilient society that can respond rapidly. By working together, we will be able to set new records in the future. The collaboration between the public, private, academic and voluntary sectors was heartening as we faced into the tribulations of 2020.

The business community are keen to build upon that collaboration and work with all sectors to overcome these challenges and build back a thriving economy for all. Our priority in the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry is a safe and managed economic recovery. One that supports enterprises and employees to work in the new environment - alongside COVID-19 and Brexit - as we begin to take the first steps on the path to recovery.

There are a range of challenges that NI must also face. These are not new, and include an aging population, protecting our environment, digitisation, improving outputs from our education system, infrastructure deficit and low levels of innovation. When combined, these factors result in lower levels of competitiveness, economic growth and standards of living.

The decisions taken by the UK and Irish Governments, the EU and the NI Executive will have direct and long-term impacts on society in NI and

the ability of enterprises to thrive. We need a new, long-term and future focussed Programme for Government that is underpinned by delivery plans for competitiveness, skills, infrastructure, research & development & innovation and trade. We will support the Government in creating a supportive environment in which businesses can thrive, export across the world and achieve their ambitions. In return, high quality and well-funded public services should be deliverable from a strong and vibrant private sector.

Our Thrive action plan is practical, pragmatic and achievable. It was developed by Richard Johnston from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre who worked with our Council and wider membership, alongside Neil Gibson, Chief Economist at EY Ireland and Ashleen Feeney, Partner at KPMG. Its goals are therefore shared by companies in every county of Northern Ireland, focussing on how we can build a world of opportunity, inspiring businesses through;

- o **Trade - accessing a world of new opportunities;**
- o **Succeeding safely - protecting lives and livelihoods;**
- o **Skills - preparing for the future of work;**
- o **Environment - protecting the world in which we live; and**
- o **Resilience and reliability - building on solid foundations;**

We call on the UK & Irish governments, the EU, the Northern Ireland Executive and local authorities, academia and the voluntary sector, regardless of location or political colour, to work together - and with us - to make a better future for NI a reality.



**IAN HENRY,**  
**PRESIDENT**  
Northern Ireland Chamber  
of Commerce and Industry



**ANN MCGREGOR,**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**  
Northern Ireland Chamber  
of Commerce and Industry

# FOREWORD

## from our Partner

As the UK works together to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, it's sobering to take a moment to reflect on just how big an impact the crisis has had on our working lives.

The onset of coronavirus has fundamentally changed the way we all use technology and how we do business, highlighting the importance of digital transformation for economic survival and accelerating the pace towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The long-term impact of the virus means that many people across Northern Ireland are having to work from home for an extended period. Many successful businesses now find themselves facing immense challenges in order to stay trading.

At BT, we have been a proud member of Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the last 14 years and we commend their visionary approach and strong leadership for businesses trying to navigate this current economic uncertainty.

As a critical enabler and investor in Northern Ireland, that has generated £592 million total GVA impact locally, BT Group is also working hard to help keep Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK up and running during this difficult time.

As working from home continues to become our 'new normal,' and businesses need to become digital in order to succeed - they also need support to build their digital skills. While digitally agile firms are adapting to the ongoing crisis, this is not the case for many local businesses. Even before the crisis, as many as 11.3m UK adults and 10% of the UK workforce lacked basic digital skills. It is therefore vital that government continues to deliver policies to support digital transformation and skills to SMEs to avoid placing businesses at a disadvantage and further widening socio-economic inequality.

At BT, we are working hard to support this digital transition for businesses through our BT Skills for Tomorrow programme, which offers free sessions as part of a major new programme, temporarily being moved online, designed to empower 10 million people across the UK by giving them the skills they need to flourish for the digital future [www.bt.com/skillsfortomorrow](http://www.bt.com/skillsfortomorrow)

With many SMEs and larger businesses working remotely, this can also pose security considerations in response to the ever growing threat from profit-orientated and highly organised cybercriminal enterprises. Last year, we invested £632m in innovation and we have around 3,000 cyber experts based around the world, focussed on protecting BT's networks and those of our customers in Northern Ireland.

In addition to this, we are also committed to reducing the carbon emissions intensity of our business and aiding the transition to a low carbon economy. Over the last decade, BT Group's energy efficiency programmes have saved almost £300m, allowing us to re-invest those savings elsewhere. However, to facilitate a truly green recovery in the current pandemic, will require a joint effort from government, business and society.

Through our initiatives and by working with others, we are committed to helping the country navigate through this uncertain time. It is important that we build a better digital and sustainable future for the economic survival of local businesses.



**PAUL MURNAGHAN,**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
BT's Enterprise Division  
in Northern Ireland

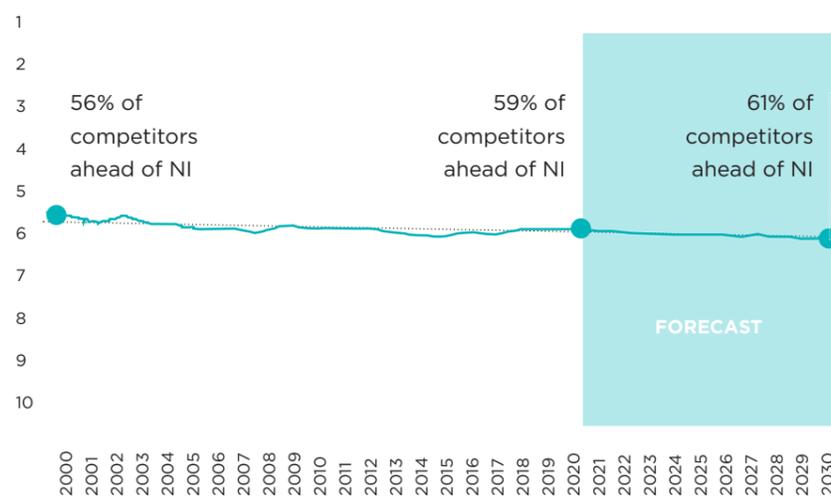
# ECONOMIC CONTEXT

## Northern Ireland

**The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unparalleled impact on society across the world. Communities, enterprises and individuals have all been affected, some more than others, either personally, financially or both.**

Prior to the pandemic, Northern Ireland enjoyed a sustained period of economic growth and set new records in terms of employment, earnings, GVA and unemployment. Citizens also reported high levels of wellbeing relative to their counterparts across the UK<sup>1</sup>. NI had cause to celebrate these successes. Alongside those records however, challenges did exist and still remain. Like many other parts of the developed world, Northern Ireland has an aging population, is working through the fourth industrial revolution and has witnessed an erosion of competitiveness - which drives incomes and standards of living in the longer term - as other nations move ahead of NI<sup>2</sup>.

### NI's relative competitiveness, 2000 - 2030



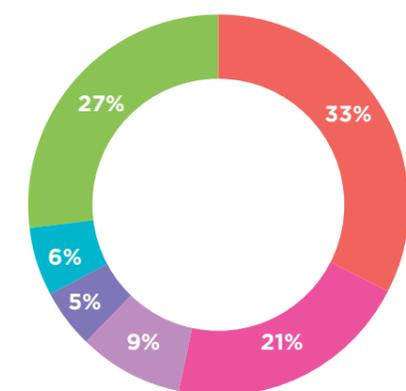
COVID-19 compounded many of the existing challenges and resulted in the most rapid and deepest recession in Northern Ireland's history, estimates of the depth of the recession range from -6.7%<sup>3</sup> to -12.7%<sup>4</sup>. The Governments policy response is unprecedented and so far, these measures have been able to mitigate many of the potential impacts.

As an illustration, public spending in NI increased from £24bn in 2019-20 to an estimated £27.5bn<sup>5</sup> this year in order to alleviate the worst of the impacts. At the peak of the lockdown, more than a quarter of the working age population were in receipt of Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme or Self Employment Income Scheme support and more than a fifth work for the public sector in healthcare, education or public administration. The Government also provides direct support to those in unemployment and many of the economically inactive. As society works through the next phase of the pandemic and looks towards the rebuilding phase, part of that conversation will naturally begin to focus on repairing the public finances.

All crises bring opportunities and COVID-19 is no different. Air quality improved markedly, collaboration increased across society, community bonds became stronger and appreciation for workers at all levels became evident.

It is evident that returning to work, whether on or off-site will be required as NI looks towards building a better future in which enterprises and individuals can thrive.

### Estimate of the composition of NI's working age population, August 2020



- Working as normal in the private sector
- Working in the public sector
- In receipt of Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- In receipt of Self Employment Income Scheme
- Unemployed
- Economically inactive

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing>  
<sup>2</sup> UUEPC competitiveness scorecard, 2020  
<sup>3</sup> EY upper scenario  
<sup>4</sup> UUEPC  
<sup>5</sup> Sources include Department of Finance, HMRC for CJRS & SIESS, Bank of England, UUEPC estimates for AME / benefits spending in 2020/21 and NI shares in BBL, CBIL, LCBIL, & FF

# TRADE

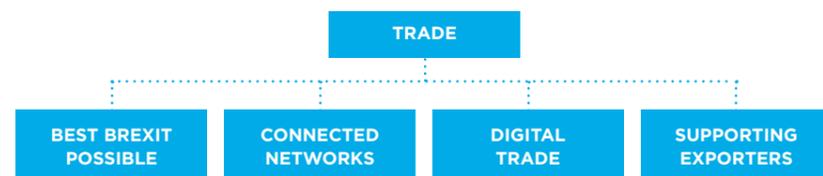
## a world of new opportunities

### Frictionless access to markets and labour, digital capability, personal connections and developing exports skills will enable enterprises to compete effectively in the global marketplace.

A vibrant and externally focussed private sector is vital in order to grow the economy, generating income from abroad, supporting sustainable employment and earnings. Exports generate more than £11bn<sup>7</sup> of income annually for the NI economy. These exporters are highly productive and competitive, create many jobs and pay high wages<sup>8</sup>. However, there are only 9,400 exporters in NI and the half of all exports are from just 1% of firms<sup>9</sup>, presenting a longer-term risk. Exporters in NI are from a broad range of sectors and geographies across Northern Ireland, helping to create employment at a range of skills levels supporting inclusive growth.

COVID-19 and Brexit are significant disruptors, creating both opportunities and challenges for enterprises that export or plan to. As a result, enterprises will require support to navigate markets, build confidence and social networks in order to trade effectively.

Global trade has been shifting eastwards in recent decades<sup>10</sup> and whilst there is evidence of firms shortening supply chains and reshoring in some instances, it is expected that consumption growth in Asian economies will be more rapid than in developed economies in the medium to longer term. This will provide opportunities for externally focussed enterprises as the gravity of trade shifts eastward.



## Our asks are for:

### The Best Brexit Possible

The UK and Irish Governments must collaborate with the EU to secure a trade deal that minimises frictions and costs, provides clarity on state aid and access to export markets and Great Britain. A no-deal scenario and the disruption that comes with it must be avoided at all costs.

### Digital Trade

Consumers moved online very rapidly during the pandemic, with research suggesting that existing trends have moved forward by a decade<sup>11</sup> in many sectors. Support is required for;

- o The creation and operation of digital sales platforms, linking into global networks and developing sales;
- o Developing marketing skills and knowledge that are attuned to specific global markets; and
- o Making digital connections and meeting overseas buyers in online formats.

### Connected Networks

The Executive and Councils to continue to act as international trade ambassadors for NI, connecting businesses to buyers and securing Free Trade agreements around the world. Invest NI and the Department for the Economy should provide additional support to rebuild networks that have been disrupted by Brexit and COVID-19, and to create new networks to replace those that are lost.

Air connectivity to key business hubs in Europe, the US and Asia should be an Executive priority and the UK Government should support regional accessibility in order to help level-up NI's economic performance.

### Supporting Exporters

Invest NI and the Department for the Economy already support enterprises to access market information and intelligence. These organisations can help to boost exporter and pre-exporter confidence in these turbulent times by identifying opportunities as they arise from changing global consumption patterns, exchange rate movements and supporting exporters to trade in Asian economies. They should encourage new exporters to broaden the base and reduce reliance on a small number of large exporters. They should also develop their international offices to directly sell/promote NI businesses and products as international travel has been curbed. Finally they should continue to work in partnership with other international links such as the Department for International Trade, the Ambassadorial network and the British Chamber Network which is represented in Northern Ireland by NI Chamber.

<sup>7</sup> Latest data are for 2018, when NI enterprises generated £11.2bn of export sales. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/news/broad-economy-sales-and-exports-statistics-2018-goods-and-services-results>

<sup>8</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011), International trade and investment: the economic rationale for government intervention

<sup>9</sup> NISRA, Broad Sales and Exports Survey

<sup>10</sup> OECD

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-great-acceleration>

# SUCCESSING SAFELY

protecting lives and livelihoods

**As a society, we will be living and working with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. We must protect both lives and livelihoods. We must behave in ways that allow us to return to work safely, whatever the location and method.**

Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how much change is possible in a short time when the situation is critical. Individuals, enterprises, the public and voluntary sectors were incredibly agile and innovative. They responded to the challenges of keeping people safe, working from alternative locations, accessing markets and serving customers in novel ways.

It is clear that we can respond rapidly when the need is great enough. The region is relatively small, with fewer than two million people. We should be nimble and agile, celebrate what has been achieved so far and work together to speed the delivery of a recovery. For that to happen, decisions must be made rapidly, based on robust evidence, communicated clearly and implemented swiftly.

As COVID-19 transmission rates increase throughout the population and localised restrictions are announced, it is essential that society focuses on safe behaviours. Our enterprises and entrepreneurs will play their part. All of our citizens must understand that how they behave can impact the whole of society, and that we really are all in this together.



## Our asks are for:

### Strategic Foresight

There are many issues that will impact upon NI for decades to come. These include an aging population, the fourth industrial revolution, net zero carbon targets, funding public services, living with COVID-19, mitigating the challenges of Brexit and taking the opportunities. Northern Ireland needs a new Programme for Government, focusing on the next two decades, rather than a short-term plan.

### Progressive Procurement

Public sector procurement must be part of the recovery strategy for Northern Ireland. Transparency, efficiency and speed of service are all required to reduce barriers to business. The process for taking Judicial Reviews should also be reconsidered, as there are many in Northern Ireland, which use precious resources that could be deployed elsewhere to support the recovery.

### Leading at Pace

There are a range of strategically and economically significant projects that are in the development phase or are not yet implemented. These include City Deals, the York Street Interchange and North South interconnector which has only recently received planning permission from the Infrastructure Minister, amongst others. These projects are critical to Northern Ireland's future competitiveness and ability to trade globally, as well as its international image. Approval decisions should be accelerated, planning should be streamlined, and risks managed where possible. These projects must be deployed without delay.

### Better Behaviours

Everyone should lead by example. Government should employ behavioural insights to ensure that people are able to adhere to policy guidelines. Policies should be clear, minimalistic and framed in terms that are accessible to citizens in order to avoid overload and confusion.

### Supporting Enterprises

Enterprises in NI are keen to play their part in the economic recovery. Entrepreneurs are innovators, developers and creative thought leaders. They will play a critical role in creating a sustainable and safe employment environment. There will be opportunities for the local tourism and hospitality sectors as holidaying on the island remains more common. These sectors will require bridging support through periods of restriction in order to be able to play their part in the recovery. More broadly, enterprises will need the support of policy makers and government to create an environment that helps them to thrive. This will include safety measures, market engagement and demand enhancing programmes, such as voucher schemes.

# SKILLS

## preparing for the Future of Work

**We must ensure that our education system prepares our young people well for the workplace of the future. Alongside the education system, we must invest in those who are working and those who have lost their jobs to ensure that the skills required to grow a competitive and outward looking economy are readily available.**

Skills are critically important for economic development. Higher levels of formal qualification are associated with increased competitiveness, productivity and earnings benefitting individuals, enterprises and society.

The future of work has arrived earlier than expected as a result of COVID-19. The demand for systems skills, such as programming, STEM, data analytics and robotics increased as consumers moved online during lockdown. Evidence shows that in-store transactions decreased by 20%<sup>12</sup> over the year, while online transactions increased by 54%<sup>13</sup>. These disruptions in how we work, shop and relax are unlikely to return to pre-recession levels, even if a vaccine is found as behaviours have changed. Alongside increased demands for STEM and ICT, Northern Ireland continues to lose some of the brightest and best students in tertiary education. We have not yet reformed our education system to produce fewer qualifications in subjects that are in excess supply and reallocate those resources to areas of excess demand.

Alongside the demand for digital skills, there is a clear evidence that those who are in the occupations that require the lowest levels of formal qualification are amongst the most vulnerable in society<sup>14</sup>. As the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme come to an end, those who are most likely to become unemployed or economically inactive are likely to possess lower levels of formal qualification and will require the most support in order to be able to return to work.



## Our asks are for:

### Skill Up for the Future of Work

COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of technological change by up to a decade in some industries. Those who possess in-demand skills have benefitted as firms compete for their expertise and knowledge, however at the other end of the spectrum, those who were already disadvantaged face additional challenges. Those who have low or no formal qualifications are most at risk of becoming unemployed or economically inactive and will struggle to compete with others who are more qualified as jobs become available. Therefore, support will be required to help those with low or no qualifications and those who are not digitally enabled to enhance their capabilities and qualifications base.

Amend the curriculum for subjects at all levels to include both “systems skills” such as ICT, robotics, data analytics and coding and “human skills” such as empathy and strategy. These skills are required for work in a more digitised and decentralised future as people work in more flexible ways. We must ensure that the number of places allocated to STEM and ICT subjects are increased at Universities and Colleges in order to meet the current and future demand.

Invest in languages in order to support international trade, focussing most on those used in growing economies, especially in Asia.

Educators must also continue to train young people for work in disrupted industries, such as tourism and hospitality. As they recover, Northern Ireland must have the required skills available to support enterprises in these sectors in their growth and recovery plans.

### Supporting crossover skills

The provision of DfE’s rapid roll-out of free upskilling and reskilling courses for those impacted by COVID-19 should be extended into the future. Additional crossover programmes should be considered to support greater numbers of individuals to retrain and reskill, focussing on the demands of growing sectors. This will enable individuals to move to new sectors and occupations.

### Helping Young People

It is evident that the young are one of the most vulnerable groups in society during this recession. Recent announcements on apprenticeship support from the Department for the Economy are welcome. However, apprenticeship numbers should be increased further to ensure that as many young people as possible have employment opportunities. Enterprises that create posts and employ under 25’s (especially those who have been unemployed or economically inactive) should receive support for employing and maintaining employment.

### Dealing with Disadvantage

Wraparound support should be developed for those who have no, or very low qualifications, in order to help them into employment. Those who have the lowest levels of formal qualification are likely to find it most difficult to get into work. Workplace mentors could be identified and funded to help these individuals into employment and to gain the required qualifications.

### Digital Government

COVID-19 has accelerated the growth of digitally enabled sectors and changed consumer, enterprise and leisure activities massively. Our competitor nations are investing in digital technologies and NI cannot afford to be left behind. We are a small region and we should be nimble and agile. Government should aim to be a leader in digitally enabled public service provision, support enterprises to create and implement technologies to boost competitiveness and global trade and ensure that citizens can use smart technologies to enhance their quality of life.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.barclays.co.uk/content/dam/documents/business/manage-your-business/UK%20Consumer%20Spending%20Report%20July%202020.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/datasets/retailsalesindexinternetsales>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/603074/COVID-19-and-the-NI-Economy\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/603074/COVID-19-and-the-NI-Economy_Report.pdf)

# ENVIRONMENT

protecting the world in which we live

**The world is facing a climate emergency. NI must play its part in moving towards an environmentally sustainable future as a “net zero carbon” economy by 2050. A competitive, sustainable, reliable and future focussed energy infrastructure is required in order to meet the current and future needs of society.**

The UK government passed legislation in 2019<sup>15</sup> requiring greenhouse gas emissions to return to 1990 levels in 2050, making the UK a “net zero” emitter. Competitor nations are pressing ahead with legislation and projects that move towards net zero and Northern Ireland cannot afford to be left behind. If society is to meet this target, it will require the use of new and existing technologies and processes at a society-wide rather than project level.

Excellent progress has been made on electricity generated from renewable sources in NI, with 47.7% of consumption generated from renewable sources over the year to June 2020<sup>16</sup>. NI is ahead of almost all European nations on this measure and is to be applauded. However, energy use is much broader than just electricity. We rely heavily on imported oils for almost two-thirds of energy requirements<sup>17</sup> – mainly for transport and heat generation and therefore investment in environmentally friendly technologies, systems and transportation are critical to meeting the net zero goal.

Energy use and waste disposal represent significant costs for businesses and have a direct impact on both competitiveness and the environment. They also present significant opportunities for other enterprises in terms of re-use, recycling and turning waste into energy, helping to build a circular economy in Northern Ireland.



## Our asks are for:

### Support the Transition to Net Zero by 2050

This is a long-term goal for the next three decades. Northern Ireland must begin to work towards that target now in order to be able to deliver by 2050.

Infrastructure strategy, planning, the rating system, enhanced capital allowances and enterprise supports are key. Policies should prioritise environmentally friendly projects that support the longer-term goal of decarbonisation. Strategic energy projects such as the North South interconnector must be prioritised and delivered quickly. Decentralised working presents real opportunities to reduce our environmental impact, but also requires investment in high quality digital infrastructure and local public services.

### Energy Generation, Use and Storage

Enterprise support should be enhanced, focussing on fuel switching, on-site generation, use and storage into cost-effective solutions for enterprise. Waste management is part of the solution in terms of fuel for energy generation and circularity of investment. Electric vehicles and the charging infrastructure will be critical to change how we travel and move goods. Northern Ireland must deploy programmes that are available in GB, and more, in order to make the most of the opportunities available.

### A Supportive Rating System

The rating system should support those enterprises that are investing in our environmental future, providing discounts for carbon zero or neutral buildings. Those that have the largest negative environmental impacts should also be rated more heavily in order to incentivise better environmental outcomes.

### Green Spaces

Invest in green spaces in city, town and village centres, to provide carbon sinks that absorb CO2 and to create safe spaces that supports the mental wellbeing of citizens.

Support the agricultural sector to deliver local, sustainable and high-quality food and ingredients, minimising food miles and emissions.

### Excellent Public Transport in a Decentralised Future

Support a high quality, cost-effective public transport system that uses alternatives to heavy oils as fuel and reduces the negative impact of congestion and greenhouse gases on productivity and health.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/net-zero-target>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/electricity-consumption-and-renewable-generation-statistics>

<sup>17</sup> Sources: Eurostat, NISRA and NI Utility Regulator

# RESILIENCE AND RELIABILITY

## building on solid foundations

**Our infrastructure, attitudes and enterprises have proven to be resilient and reliable under the most challenging economic conditions Northern Ireland has ever faced.**

In Northern Ireland 41% of employees<sup>18</sup> were working at home during the lockdown period. 250,000 individuals<sup>19</sup> were supported through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and 78,000<sup>20</sup> through the Self Employment Income Support Scheme. In addition, online retail sales increased by 54%<sup>21</sup> over the year and education was taking place at home.

These changes increased demand significantly on Northern Ireland's digital infrastructure. Fortunately - thanks to public and private sector investment and long-term planning - it has proven to be fit-for-purpose and resilient enough to facilitate a large proportion of the population working and being educated at home as well as relaxing and shopping online. Now, as we look towards recovery, we must plan for the longer term in a more digital future, but also for increased demand on physical infrastructure as people return to work.

As we look forward, our resilience will face further tests. There is a credible risk that unemployment could exceed 100,000 in Northern Ireland<sup>22</sup> as support schemes come to an end. Enterprises are key to generating employment opportunities across the region, providing income and stability for people at all skill levels and from all backgrounds. Supporting businesses in creating these employment opportunities, especially in the most disadvantaged areas will help to alleviate poverty and increase social inclusion.



<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020#homeworking-by-region>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-august-2020>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-august-2020/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-august-2020#seiss-claims-by-geography>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/datasets/retailsalesindexinternetsales>

<sup>22</sup> There are currently 68,200 individual unemployment claimants in NI (August 2020, NISRA)

## Our asks are for:

### Infrastructure Investment

Northern Ireland has fallen behind its competitors on infrastructure investment. An all-island investment strategy that aligns with the Shared Island Fund announced by the Irish Government is required and should include roads, rail, air, sea, waste, digital and energy connectivity. As a society, we should focus on digitisation to support infrastructure development and prioritise major projects that deliver the greatest competitiveness enhancements for society, such as the York Street Interchange and high-speed rail link to Dublin.

### Supporting Enterprises

Enterprises in NI are keen to play their part in the economic recovery. Entrepreneurs are innovators, developers and creative thought leaders. They will play a critical role in creating sustainable employment and seek the support of policy makers and government to create an environment that helps them to thrive.

### Engagement and Accountability

Enterprises and academia have engaged to develop courses, modules and qualifications that are in demand. More broadly, enterprises can build resilience by engaging more broadly with academia, carrying out research and development and creating new products and processes that are competitive in a more digitised world.

### Working Collaboratively

The public and private sectors collaborated like never before to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Greater levels of collaboration and support enabled many enterprises to navigate some of the most difficult decision and likewise, many businesses and third sector organisations supported the public sector to deliver necessary services. Working together benefitted society, and our ask is that the public, private and third sector continue to work closely as we work through the implications of life and work with COVID-19 and Brexit.

### World Class Public Services

The business community is ready and willing to play our part in building back better by supporting the development of world class public services. Our members create innovative products and services that generate income - often from outside NI, creating jobs and wages for families and funding Public Services through taxes, rates and national insurance payments. Our members already work collaboratively with Government to articulate the aspirations of the business community, support the development of long-term strategy & policy, provide evidence and deliver projects and programmes. As society works through the recovery and growth phases, it will be essential that Public Services are outcome focussed, that delivery is timely and every line of Public Expenditure is examined, with a view to continuing, amending or reallocating to ensure that Value for Money is delivered at all levels.

Communications  
Partner



Patrons

