

From the Office of the Minister



Department of
**Enterprise, Trade
and Investment**

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Dolores Kelly MLA
NI Assembly
Room 386
Parliament Buildings
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24 November 2014

Dear Dolores

During Assembly Questions on 10th November, you asked me about any specific measures or targets within Invest NI's Regional Start Initiative (RSI) to encourage more women and people from an ethnic minority background to participate in the programme.

The Regional Start Initiative recognises the need for equality of access and reflects the Government's vision that anybody with the talent, potential and drive to succeed in business should have the opportunity and necessary support to do so, regardless of their background or where they live. Whilst there are no specific targets under RSI to encourage more women and people from an ethnic minority background, support for enterprise and the development of an entrepreneurial culture at a local level has the potential to positively embrace the Lifetime Opportunities policy imperatives, around poverty and social inclusion.

Invest NI identified unique challenges faced by people from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, people living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) and young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs). The RSI has specific targets both for participation individuals living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, 735 per annum and young people Not in Employment, Education and Training, 100 per annum.

In respect of female entrepreneurship, women remain the largest under-represented group when it comes to enterprise in Northern Ireland and represent a huge pool of untapped potential.

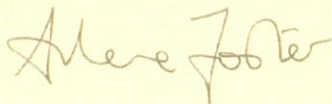
Invest Northern Ireland currently supports female entrepreneurship through a variety of targeted marketing initiatives, including sponsorship of business networks and business awards in organisations, such as Women in Business NI Ltd (WIB) and Women on the Move. This sponsorship reflects the delivery of networking events and activities targeting business women throughout Northern Ireland. Outcomes include:

- More women will set up and run their own business successfully; and
- Promoting opportunities for business growth in export markets.

In the 2013/14 period the number of females who had business plans approved within the RSI was 1,338, which represents 38% of the total 3,560 plans approved under the programme.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter to be sent to the Speaker's Office and a copy will also be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Arlene Foster". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

ARLENE FOSTER MLA

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment