



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

'High Street Stimulus' Voucher Scheme and '10X Economy' Micro Inquiry Special Report

This report is the property of the Committee for the Economy. Neither the report nor its contents should be disclosed to any person unless such disclosure is authorised by the Committee.

Ordered by the Committee for the Economy to be printed on 10th September 2021.

Report: NIA 117/17-22 Committee for the Economy.

Contents

Powers and Membership	3
Introduction	5
Aim	6
Context	7
Overview of Themes	9
Annex A	24

Powers and Membership

Powers

The Committee for the Economy is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One, of the Belfast Agreement, and under Assembly Standing Order No 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department for the Economy, and has a role in the initiation of legislation. The Committee has nine members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for the Economy.

Membership

The Committee has nine members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Dr Caoímhe Archibald MLA (Chairperson)
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Keith Buchanan
- Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
- Mr Gary Middleton MLA

- Mr Michael Nesbitt MLA
- Mr John O'Dowd MLA
- Ms Claire Sugden MLA
- Mr Peter Weir MLA

Introduction

Under Standing Order 46(7), the Committee has the power to make a special report on any “**matters which the committee may think fit to bring to the notice of the Assembly**”.

1. The Committee for the Economy recently carried out a Micro Inquiry to seek views from sectoral representative bodies and stakeholders as to what should be put in place to ensure the success of the tactical economic measure, the High Street Stimulus voucher scheme (HSS), intended to encourage footfall and sustain sales through the Autumn period after an initial post lockdown boost. Also, looking to the future, what will be required to realise the ambition of the 10X Economic vision to rebuild and re-imagine the economy in the longer-term.
2. The Committee asked three questions as the basis for stakeholder discussion at its Micro Inquiry event on 10 June 2021:

- 1) What needs to be in place to ensure that the High Street Stimulus voucher scheme is successful?
- 2) Setting aside the lack of an action plan at present for the 10X Economy, can you identify any significant gaps in the plan that you would want to be addressed?
- 3) Can you suggest elements that you would like to see in the 10X Economy action plan?

At the virtual roundtable discussion event, these questions were discussed at four separate ‘tables’, with Committee members joining a feedback session where they heard a summation of viewpoints presented by a rapporteur from each ‘table’. **A list of attendees is included at Annex A.**

Aim

3. The Committee's aim in engaging with stakeholders in this Micro Inquiry was to seek insight from those best placed in terms of local knowledge and expertise on the specifics that will need to be taken forward in the on-going development, communication, implementation, and monitoring of the HSS voucher. Crucially, if local businesses are to reap the benefits, equally if the scheme is to be fully inclusive and reach all potential consumers.
4. Furthermore, given the significant financial investment of £149m in the HSS, it was of particular interest for Members' to hear an assessment of the additional positive impact on the local economy that the HSS may deliver, such as supplementary spend over and above the voucher value; and spreading benefits through local supply chains.
5. Acknowledging that many of the committee's stakeholders have endorsed the '10X Economy' the Committee wished to seek from amongst a range of stakeholders their views on developing interventions required to take the vision forward. Such as, how should sectors' priorities be managed whilst delivering a 'step change' to reimagine our economy and in practical terms as an action plan is developed. Also, to take cognisance of alignment with related DfE strategic development for Skills, Energy, and wider strategic responses to address education, social inequalities and environmental sustainability.
6. The following Special Report is a summary of the themes which emerged in response to the three questions asked. It is structured in two parts; firstly, views expressed on the HSS, secondly on the '10X Economy'.

Context

High Street Stimulus Voucher Scheme

7. The Economic Recovery Action Plan, or ERAP, which the Department for the Economy (DfE) published at the end of February 2021, subsumed the DfE's previous Covid-19 recovery plan, published in summer 2020. Approximately half of the almost £290m funding required for the ERAP will go towards the High Street Stimulus voucher scheme (HSS). The scale of the HSS spend means that it needs to be successful and play a significant role in our economic recovery. It will need to support the overall objectives of ERAP, which itself must align with the Programme for Government and commitments in 'New Decade, New Approach'.
8. The HSS proposes that every person in NI aged 18 and over will be eligible to apply for a pre-paid card worth £100 to spend in their local high street. This will not be useable for online purchases. Approximately 1.4m of NI's population would be eligible, at a nominal cost of £140m.
9. The timescale is late August/early September 2021 as the HSS aims to avoid displacing 'pent-up spending' over the summer, and in the run-up to the normal pre-Christmas spend.

'10X Economy': An Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation

10. The Department for the Economy (DfE) published its 10X Economy plan on 11th May 2021. The document sets out the DfE's plans for the economy stretching into the recovery and rebuilding phase. It expresses the desire to deliver a better economy through a decade of innovation, bringing benefits to all communities through "...generational changes required to boost economic growth and to tackle generational challenges we face today".

11. The plan aims to act as a framework to deliver growth in a way that is more equitably distributed across communities here - the first steps in the long-term goal of economic transformation. The plan will operate across Executive Departments, and in co-operation with the business and academic communities. The hope is to embed innovation within the economy, which will then continue to support the development of jobs in new sectors and, in turn, support sustainable prosperity.

Three pillars sum up the desired outcome of the plan:

- Innovation-led Economic Growth
- Inclusive Growth
- Green Growth

12. There will be an annual monitoring report, and co-design groups should produce a delivery plan as part of the DfE's Business Plan for 2022-23. Delivery will be supported by a new Economic Policy Group within the DfE that will also have responsibility for aligning this delivery with that of DfE's other strategic priorities and plans.

Overview of Themes - High Street Stimulus voucher scheme

13. This report sets out the key themes stakeholders feel are necessary in order to plan for a successful outcome. There are four arising from the stakeholder discussion event presented here 'at a glance.'

Ease of use, Marketing communications, and 'Trouble-Shooting' support

Simplicity of the scheme is vital; clear and consistent messaging in the 'call to action' to consumers; widely promoted marketing collateral; guidance and support for businesses readily available throughout the campaign.

Focused, Inclusive, and Flexible

Deliver spend across all urban and rural locations; respect consumer choices and differing needs; consider the representation of all businesses on basis that they contribute to the local supply chain.

'Real time' data, analysis and maximising spend

Data recorded daily and reported weekly to deliver analysis of usage and support targeted interventions as required; initiatives to run alongside scheme to add value and increase spend overall. Benchmark with similar shopping cards to gain insight.

Context, Outcome focused and Economic Impact

The Scheme accounting for £149 million is a significant proportion of the overall recovery plan, necessitating thorough assessment of metrics for success, including benefits to supply chains. Management and contingency planning a must to mitigate against potential under-spend.

Ease of use, Marketing communications, and 'Trouble-shooting' support

14. Stakeholders consistently stressed the need for the HSS voucher scheme to be designed in such a way that it is made easy for consumers and businesses alike, stating that the success of the scheme will ultimately be dependent on the extent of its take-up by consumers and participating businesses. Guidance for applying for the voucher should be straightforward and not needlessly complex. Any website presence or portal should be welcoming and designed with consumers in mind. It was asked whether the voucher could be used as cash or be scanned. In essence, as many vouchers as possible need to be issued and out to people.
15. It was highlighted that businesses should not incur any costs as a result of participation, with redemption of vouchers specifically mentioned. The process needs to be as smooth as possible for businesses to be reimbursed, especially as many will not have extra resources to put into processes or marketing.
16. Views were expressed consistently that businesses will require access to substantive and readily available support should they have queries or need assistance. This was expressed succinctly as 'trouble-shooting.' This type of help and support will be especially relevant for those smaller and independent businesses.
17. Discussion centred on how a joined-up marketing approach will be key to motivating consumers to shop locally and to return in person to our city centres, towns and villages. In anticipation of a launch and promotional campaign centrally, any follow-up by councils or the private sector should all be aligned as it is important to have key messages communicated consistently throughout. Messaging will require consumers to be reassured that measures are in place to shop safely.
18. In the sense of the general perception of the scheme there was a feeling that the working title of 'High Street' may hold too much of a connotation of larger

urban shopping areas. It was suggested perhaps the name might be changed to ensure there was awareness that small towns, villages and rural locations are all part of this. It was asked that a list of participating businesses be made available for consumers, and to help profile the range of business sectors.

19. Practical ideas put forward were the use of marketing collateral such as logos, signs, posters etc. to be on show locally to reinforce awareness of the purpose of the scheme to deliver benefits throughout local supply chains. The campaign should have a clear 'Brand', should create a 'hashtag' campaign on social media with the intention of engaging the public and businesses and getting them involved straight away. This was pertinent especially given the short timescale in which the scheme will run and the need to create a sense of urgency to spend.

Focused, Inclusive, and Flexible

20. There was recognition of the purpose of the HSS scheme as an economic stimulus. Its intention to boost smaller, independent stores in shopping districts, who have not benefitted during lockdown in the way that perhaps large food supermarkets and those offering essential services may have, was broadly welcomed by stakeholders. Some felt that usage in social enterprises should not be over-looked in that regard.
21. There was a wide spectrum of views expressed within the concept of keeping it local, with some noting that the scheme should not be designed to result in creating a hierarchy between retailers, making the point that there is not a distinction in supporting jobs. Some considered that the roll-out of the vouchers must be well-targeted to ensure small and micro-businesses will benefit. Others considered that keeping it local should not necessarily exclude larger retailers as they will still be contributing to local supply chains. Some expressed the risk that the voucher be focused on more luxury items, that this might limit the scope of spend.
22. There was buy-in to the rationale for a restriction on online spend to avoid leakage out of NI, and to help spread the wider benefits of encouraging

people back into our shopping areas. There was a suggestion that the scheme should be closely linked with wider high street regeneration, including the work of the High Street Task Force.

23. A common theme underpinning stakeholders' responses was the need to recognise consumer choice and allow a degree of flexibility - in other words for the scheme not to be overly prescriptive - nor may it be appropriate either to tell people what they can and cannot spend their voucher on. This could possibly impact on people's willingness or propensity to take up the voucher, and in turn reduce overall spend.
24. A suggestion was that it may be a better option to encourage consumers to spend locally through messaging and marketing, rather than attempt to limit choice through the design or scope of the voucher.
25. There was consideration of how the voucher might be permitted to be used in light of the pandemic's impact and recovery planning. It was discussed that there will be consumers who may well value the use of the voucher to buy necessities, including food shopping, given the hardship they may have experienced through furlough and job losses, especially in lower income sectors. In that context it was stressed that anyone in receipt of support and/or benefits should not be impacted or disadvantaged financially due to receiving a voucher.
26. Equally, there may be those who wish to donate their voucher to help others, for instance by giving it to a food bank or a charity. A suggestion was made that the 'big' retailers should, if they are included in the scheme, provide some kind of 'matched funding' for vouchers donated to the likes of food banks. An example was given that if a voucher is spent in a supermarket, the business considers making a donation to a food bank.
27. There was consensus that accessibility by Section 75 groups must be built into mechanisms for applying and redeeming the voucher to ensure the scheme is inclusive of those whom, for many valid reasons, may find it more challenging to access information on-line. Also, formats in different languages should be

made available. It was suggested that DfE might utilise organisations that can help and provide assistance with this. It was queried if the voucher could be downloaded to make access easier.

28. A potential issue was raised that it should be clearly communicated if a voucher can be spent on a recipient's behalf, an example given where a recipient may have constraints or concerns and may not be able to, or yet wish to, shop in person - with the required check and balances in place to ensure security of the voucher.

29. Stakeholders questioned the rationale for limiting the voucher to those aged 18 and over. It was said that 16-17 year olds represent a distinctive target market and, in order to widen opportunities for generating increased spend, it may be worth considering whether they should be included.

'Real time' feedback, analysis and assessment

30. Stakeholders strongly emphasised the need for up to the minute data to be available on spend. This is not intended to replace key performance indicators assigned to measure the success of the scheme or its return on investment, rather to supply 'dashboard data' for spend, time, value, location etc. during the life of the voucher scheme.

31. Specifically, the scheme should be monitored in live time with weekly updates so that a 'push' can be applied if spending is not on target. Analysis is required of sectoral and geographical spend in the event of a follow up to the scheme so learnings can be applied.

32. Several of the stakeholders representing Business Improvement Districts - Enniskillen, Belfast city centre amongst them - have shopping cards in place or are planning such initiatives. Enniskillen's card is directed at local, independent retailers and the hospitality sector; Belfast highlighted that for its

participants' access to data will be 'priceless.' Usage of those cards can be tracked in real-time.

33. The offer was made that these initiatives would be a very useful benchmark for the scheme and it might be helpful for DfE to seek their experiences of the challenges met and lessons learned.

34. In terms of utilising the scheme as leverage for additional spend, it was suggested that businesses be encouraged to develop special offers alongside the voucher to be used in conjunction with it.

35. It was discussed that a clear risk with voucher schemes is the potential for underspend. A percentage of 13% underspend was shared by a stakeholder, lending further weight to consideration of the scope and flexibility of the vouchers. This reinforced the need for data to be made available rapidly after the vouchers are valid for use, so as to take mitigating actions rapidly.

36. A related point was the need for vouchers to have a reasonable expiry date, otherwise too short a turnaround time will further contribute to the risk of a higher rate of underspend. It was recognised that this may present a challenge given the intent of the scheme to take place within a short window of Autumn.

Context, Outcomes and Economic Impact

37. Whilst there was recognition of the scheme as a tactical recovery measure and acknowledgement of its purpose to support local businesses hardest hit, especially amongst the retail sector, there were concerns voiced about its effectiveness.

38. Attention was drawn to the scheme being a cornerstone of The Executive's recovery plan, with some concern that its cost of around £149 million will account for a highly significant proportion of available funding. Some perceived it as being risky to put 'all eggs in one basket'. It was voiced that the scheme may not be sufficiently targeted, nor might the impact be as hoped.

39. Consequently, this adds an impetus to effective pre-planning, available advice and marketing to enable the scheme to be delivered within the optimum time. Crucially, so as not to displace spend in the run-up to Christmas, which is its given intention, also to sequence with the furlough period coming to an end.
40. Given the requirement for measures to minimise non-spend and mitigate against associated risks, this led to questions about how any residual underspend could be allocated. This is a significant sum potentially, in the ballpark region of up to £20m, when applying the 13% underspend cited from a stakeholder's experience. Would, for instance, a follow-up scheme at a later date be considered?
41. Questions were asked about putting contingency planning in place; how too, have similar schemes in other places addressed this. Jersey was cited as an example. It was felt that lessons should be learned too from last summer's 'Eat out to help out' scheme.
42. It was recommended that more detail and information is required from DfE on how it will estimate the 'multiplier effect' that the scheme might generate to benefit the wider NI supply chain. In this context it was queried to what extent products that are locally produced, as opposed to sourced elsewhere, may benefit. However, it was acknowledged that this is not an easy aspect to control.
43. There was the opinion that the scheme should be part of a wider stimulus package with long-standing issues around business rates addressed, cited as a key barrier to achieving a sustained recovery and re-build.

Overview of Themes - '10X Economy'

44. This report sets out key themes emerging from stakeholder discussions, gaps they identified currently in 10X, along with elements that they would like to see included in subsequent action plans to support its delivery.

Entrepreneurial led, Balanced and inclusive, Reflective of business scale

Identify entrepreneurs and innovators firstly ahead of sectors; apply sense check that NI businesses are predominantly small and medium sized; address regional spread alongside regeneration measures; be proactive in targeting social inclusivity throughout an action plan.

Strategic Context, 'Whole of government' approach, Longevity

Contextualise enablers and disruptors within both global and local operating environments; sustainability must not be an 'add-on' rather underpin; account for green economy opportunities. Seek commitment across The Executive and beyond current mandate; fit with New Deal, New Approach. and

A Measurable action plan, sector analysis, priorities identified

Calls for an action plan to be developed urgently with precision applied to sector analysis. Outcome led with reporting and monitoring based on real 'dashboard' data, and that will reflect the strategy's evolution over time. Enabling of private sector to innovate with streamlined processes in place.

Consultation, engagement and wide-reaching buy-in

Call for a wide-reaching, all of society conversation on the ambition the strategy aims to achieve, especially to engage with our young people. Need 'champions' to help drive a mind-set to embracing innovation.

Entrepreneurial led, Regional balance, Reflective of business scale

45. There was general acknowledgement of the ambition and vision of 10X if perceived as high level and rather 'loose' in terms of strategic targets, and what form these will take, for instance in terms of jobs. Key potential gaps identified by stakeholders in the approach that will need to be embedded appropriately if the hoped for ambition is to be realised are:

- Positioning of Entrepreneurism and Innovation
- Extent of Inclusivity - regional, social
- Relevance to NI's predominantly small business sector

46. It was strongly advocated that any innovation plan needs to build on the work of existing innovators and entrepreneurs. This is the only way to change the culture within the economy. Sectors can be promoted and pursued but that on its own isn't enough. Innovators and entrepreneurs need to be placed foremost, to be then followed by a focus on sectors in the sense of where they might best fit together.

47. Entrepreneurs and innovators should be able to access programmes and initiatives for support, especially those who may not fit within a defined sector but are nevertheless demonstrating flair and commercial success. How some businesses have been able to respond given the impact of Covid-19 was cited, often such operators do not necessarily think of themselves as innovators.

48. Vitally, innovation and entrepreneurship has to be reflected in the education curriculum from an early age. A future skills strategy with a cross-cut into Education is needed, especially for the 14-19 age group. Practically, there are a lack of links between businesses and schools and there is a pressing requirement for better career advice aligned to business needs. A reason given for undertaking more work with schools is to create the pipeline of digital skills which is essential to the strategy.

49. Achieving regional balance is key, notably in the context of the expansive City and Region deals; also how will the strategy align with regional hubs. Conversely, there was concern that 10X may be too 'Belfast centric' and will ultimately benefit it too much. There was discussion around ensuring geographical spread and working with council-led strategies to capture hubs or 'hotspots', e.g. the manufacturing focus in mid-Ulster.
50. Also, 'levelling up' is required to support regional accessibility, including improving infrastructure, through physical links (roads) or digitally (broadband access). In turn, this drew attention to the importance of rural proofing of the strategy.
51. Furthermore, there was a suggestion that those whose focus is on regeneration need to be brought together with those who innovate, to widen out such activity across the economy; by way of example utilising entrepreneurs to drive town centre revival through new ideas for the use of buildings. This would require joined up thinking and support by landlords, and review of measures such as business rates.
52. It was stressed that growth and ambition need to be inclusive, citing the role of citizens and workers, and recognises all Section 75 groups. It was raised that the strategy does not take account of the connotations of an ageing population, with a stakeholder commenting that by 2028 there will be older people than those aged under 15 years. It was said that older workers should not be over-looked.
53. Also, it was emphasised across the groups that a coherent and realistic childcare strategy needs to be in place to allow more people to engage in work and to begin to address issues around our high level of economically inactive people.
54. In terms of business scale there was particular concern around the strategy achieving balance across sectors and size, expressed as acknowledging the 'reality on the ground.' Put succinctly the strategy needs to be inclusive of all

sectors, it being described as leaning towards 'fintech heavy.' However, caution was sounded in that if you 'prioritise everything you prioritise nothing.'

55. The question was posed as to what consideration has been given to intermediate sized businesses, also the small business sector which predominates locally. Some representatives of small businesses noted they will not wish or necessarily need to participate in digital transformation to remain profitable. Others said that there is a need to stimulate innovation amongst small and medium sized enterprises as this is not always seen as relevant currently. The absence of consideration of the social economy in the strategy was highlighted as concerning.

Strategic Context, Longevity, a 'Whole of government' approach

56. It was felt that while it is rightly a longer term outlook, the strategy should be contextualised in 'today's world.' Especially given the significant implications of enablers and disruptors, notably loss of EU funding, which in turn exposes NI's reliance on Westminster funding. That the economy locally is given access to the UK Challenge Fund was seen as an imperative. Also, in relation to the longer term implications of leaving the EU, what consideration is being given to both the challenges and opportunities presented by the NI Protocol. This was summed up as the strategy needs to have a 'sense of place.'

57. Within the scope of the global operating environment it was said that sustainability and the opportunities represented by the green economy must run through and under-pin the strategy, and not be treated as an 'add-on'. The green economy presents robust opportunities to unlock innovation. This was equally said of inclusivity. That if these are key themes they should underpin the strategy; the worst case scenario would be if they are tagged on as one or two targets.

58. It was regarded as encouraging that 10X is a longer term strategy; that economic policy should be sitting within the timeline of the next mandate.

However, some stakeholders would seek assurance from the newly appointed Economy Minister of his sustained commitment to the strategy, all were conscious of this late stage in the mandate and with an election due in 2022.

59. A point was made that the plan is very high level and motivational but much is not within the gift of DfE. The understanding is that 10X is currently a DfE owned and led strategy. As such, its level of ambition requires support across The Executive for it to be delivered. In terms of The Executive's focus how might it align with the Programme for Government, also The New Decade, New Approach Deal, as collectively these all need to be cross-cutting.

60. It was highlighted that a number of other Government Departments have an enabling role in supporting and facilitating economic growth, notably the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA); and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). Furthermore, a planning system is needed that is fit for purpose.

61. It was said that lessons should be learnt from a lack of joined up government across departments having happened in the past, that fundamentally 'mind-sets' need to align across departments and sectors.

62. A common thread running throughout the discussion was how the 10X vision would tie-in with DfE's own strategies and plans and that a 'silo' approach must be avoided. It was questioned how the strategy aligned with DfE plans for Skills, and for Energy in particular. How too will it follow seamlessly from the Economic Recovery Action Plan (ERAP) and consideration of the impact of Covid-19 on investment and finances.

63. Equally, a joined-up approach must cascade through to local Council-led strategies, and be inclusive of the private sector to avoid public sector dominance.

64. Stakeholders expressed caution about a strategy not evolving and being kept 'live' as continuity for the long-term is important. Consequently, an action plan should not be static but must evolve too. Both must exist in real-time.

A Measurable action plan, sector analysis, priorities identified

65. There was a call to develop an action quickly in order to take the strategy forward. Stakeholders were conscious that an action plan was not available at this stage and recognised that by its nature a 10-year visionary plan would not be positioned to delve into that level of detail. However, the availability of a plan alongside would have been helpful to identify gaps more fully and to make an assessment of how it is intended to deliver the strategy - indeed, whether too much is trying to be done. Significantly, some felt an action plan was needed from the outset so as to consolidate commitment and the ability to deliver. Stakeholders moved to share their expertise as to the approach and direction for action plans that they would wish to see going forward.

66. There was a suggestion that DfE should make more of the good research it has undertaken to provide more detailed analysis to determine the type of economy to be realised in 10-years; and to work back from that point. There was support for the requirement for multi-year plans instead of being developed year on year.

67. It was raised that as the strategy is not primarily sectoral led it might be perceived as less inclusive or representative. It was felt by some that the manufacturing sector should be reflected more; that the tourism sector's innovative approach was not realised; that on practical issues an action plan should be aligned with the work of the High Street Taskforce.

68. It was acknowledged that it is difficult to make a call on what should or should not be included. There was some discussion that a matrix approach may be helpful to analyse priorities within sectors, informed by the vision and overall direction of the strategy, and to map out what each sector needs, rather than

‘pick winners.’ This would require precision about setting measures for individual sectors.

69. Determining outputs and outcomes was strongly recommended to take forward the ‘how’ and in order to realise targets that the strategy is aiming for. This was cited as an issue that is commonly lacking in government strategies. It is important that action plans are detailed and time-led with key performance indicators set across Government departments. There was an idea that what is needed is a common ‘dashboard’ to monitor and report on what the plan is contributing, rather than actions completed. Clarity is required as to what data will inform whether success has been achieved.

70. There was concern that despite wishing to drive innovation the approach to delivery will be too heavily dominated by public sector processes with complex scheme designs that may cause businesses to disengage. The point was made again that there must be an outcome and not a process led focus.

Consultation, engagement and wide-reaching buy-in

71. There was a feeling expressed that 10X has been somewhat ‘rushed’, that consequently more voices locally have not been heard, that a wider reach to business networks was needed that would generate ideas.

72. It was suggested that regional hubs could be used to facilitate and support an innovation action plan. That level of direct engagement on a localised basis would be very useful. Practically, a wider consultation group should be established; going forward the establishment of a steering group would input into the development of policy and metrics. Stakeholders voiced their commitment and willingness to be involved.

73. This led to further discussion and generated ideas for creating a wider partnership with all in civic society, to expand beyond political parties at the Executive and the usual stakeholders. It was said that the action plan should be a ‘big’ talking point, a societal conversation with lively debate, that reaches beyond a business review. It was pointed out that it will ultimately need to be

adopted across society if it is to be implemented successfully. Messages need to be filtered down too through local government, to school level and embedded amongst young people.

74. Leadership was seen as the most important element, in terms of Ministerial lead and accountability, but importantly the strategy and action plan would require champions to lead in their field and to act as mentors, furthermore to be reflective of business scale here.

75. It was re-iterated that there must be buy-in by The Executive and across government departments. In particular support and advocacy from Finance will be critical for investment; from Education to drive belief in the opportunities offered by innovation and entrepreneurship and to develop the skills to access them. It was recommended that Further Education Colleges and Higher Education would be integral to an action plan.

76. Finally, it was reflected on that there are often too many strategies and policies but not enough ownership or follow through. The strategy will only be meaningful if there is an effective action plan, with the necessary investment, and monitored appropriately. Ultimately it is the action plan that will be 'translatable' for most.

Stakeholder Organisations

Age NI

Antrim and Newtownabbey Council

Ballymena Business Improvement District (BID)

Belfast One (BID)

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Disability Action

Enniskillen BID

Enterprise NI

Ernst & Young

Federation of Small Businesses

Mid-Ulster Council

Nevin Economic Research Institute

Newry BID

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

NI Retail Consortium

NIC-ICTU

Open University

Pivotal

Retail NI

Social Enterprise NI

Ulster University Economic Policy Centre