



COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY AT INVEST NI

[Invest NI](#) hosted the [Committee for the Economy](#) at its Belfast headquarters on 12th February 2020, for the Committee's first external meeting of this session. Invest NI briefed the committee, and faced robust questioning by Members, on its priorities for Northern Ireland businesses in the upcoming period of transition post the UK leaving the European Union. The Committee also received a briefing from [Tourism NI](#) on its priority spending needs to counteract effects that Brexit uncertainty has had on Northern Ireland's tourism industry.

Members gained an understanding of the crucial role Invest NI is playing in ensuring Northern Ireland businesses are best placed to take advantage of future global free trade deals negotiated by the UK Government and to prepare Northern Ireland businesses on the Northern Ireland Protocol. **Committee Chairperson, Caoimhe Archibald MLA, rounded off the session by informing Invest NI that: "The Committee intends to engage in great detail with Invest NI over the coming months."**



Kevin Holland (CEO, Invest NI), John McGrillen (CEO, Tourism NI), Committee Chairperson Caoimhe Archibald MLA, Gordon Dunne MLA, John O'Dowd MLA, Gary Middleton MLA, John Stewart MLA

Newly appointed Chief Executive of Invest NI, Kevin Holland, told the Committee that Invest NI, whilst providing support and assistance to Northern Ireland businesses of all sizes, has a key priority of driving Northern Ireland businesses to succeed overseas and plans to achieve this with innovation, commercialising of innovation

and driving regional ecosystems to their full potential through Government working side by side with stakeholders such as hospitals, universities, regulators etc.

Strategically placed globally to reap benefits of future trade agreements

The Committee heard that Invest NI works intensely with those businesses that sell outside Northern Ireland and, with the UK leaving the EU, Invest NI sees championing the innovation and export potential of these businesses as an important focus. [As the UK Government aims to secure free trade agreements with countries covering 80% of UK trade within the next three years](#), Invest NI will play a major role supporting Northern Ireland businesses to take advantage of those trade agreements. Invest NI stated to Members that it has now secured a strong presence globally in, not only Invest NI offices, but also British Embassies, offices of the [Foreign & Commonwealth Office](#) and [Department of International Trade](#) offices and it is confident this means NI businesses will be able to take immediate advantage of future free trade agreements negotiated by the UK Government.

The Committee was briefed on the key performance indicators captured by Invest NI on Northern Ireland businesses on an annual basis. In 2018, for those businesses intensely supported by Invest NI, from a total sales of £20b, £4b is sold within NI and £16b are external sales, with £8b going to the GB market. This highlights the significant implications of the NI Protocol for business trading into the GB market as well as imports coming from the GB market into NI. Of the £8b that goes into export markets, the RoI and EU are currently the biggest export markets with £4b, and £4b into rest of world. This underscores, in terms of destination of sales, the importance of the Protocol negotiations and the UK Government's ambitions for free trade agreements with an emphasis on US, Canada, Japan, and Anzac countries.

The Committee heard of plans by Invest NI to run a number of trade missions to countries right across the world over next number of years, with the aim of getting companies to export more effectively.

On standby for Northern Ireland businesses on Northern Ireland Protocol

Invest NI stated that it is confident it knows where each business it works intensely with sells to and its level of sales and upon clarification of the Northern Ireland Protocol it will, in conjunction with [DfE](#), be able to identify and react to any issues very quickly and provide bespoke solutions as needed. Work to achieve this readiness includes having undertaken research into customs capacity within NI.

Members heard how Invest NI has been working in partnership with bodies like [IoD](#), [Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce](#), [InterTradeIreland](#), [Federation of Small Businesses](#) and [District Councils](#), running engagement and support events for businesses across Northern Ireland and carrying out one to one clinics for businesses of all sizes on issues such as customs tariffs, immigration, transport and logistics.

Business strategy

Currently coming to the end of the third year of a four year strategy, Invest NI reported it has already seen 20,000 jobs created against its four year strategy of between 30,000 and 40,000 jobs. The Committee was told 'ambitious' targets in

relation to external sales were achieved in the first two years and the body is now looking to ensure funding for continuity of activities to make sure NI businesses succeed in 2021 and 2022.

Transition from EU funding to UK Prosperity Fund

Members heard that key for Invest NI in the upcoming financial year is that it explore and understand how that the transition will happen for the move from EU funding such as ERDF towards UK funding with the UK Prosperity Fund.

Why Invest NI support matters?

Invest NI stated to the Committee that every £1 of Invest NI support results in an investment of £6 in Northern Ireland. Companies that Invest NI works with have increased employment numbers over the last five years by 21%. Those businesses Invest NI works intensely with account for 25% of the private sector jobs in NI but account for 75% of all sales outside of NI. Over the last five years sales are up by 47.6% into GB and 29% into export markets.

Foreign Direct Investment

Officials addressed robust questioning from Members on Invest NI FDI policy, in particular its approach to regional investment. Officials briefed the Committee on its policy to promote Northern Ireland as a whole, rather than by region, how the type of sector, for example whether IT or manufacturing, influences geographical location and briefed the Committee on how it believes it has seen regional FDI success.

Click on [Listen Again](#) to hear the Committee scrutiny of Invest NI. Keep abreast of the Committee's future scrutiny of the Northern Ireland Protocol, free trade negotiations, UK Prosperity Fun and FDI on [Twitter](#).



Committee for the Economy

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