

From the Office of the Minister



Department of

**Enterprise, Trade
and Investment**

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Our Ref: DETI SUB 474/2014

Mr Sean Lynch MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 334
Parliament Buildings
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29th September 2014

Dear Mr Lynch,

During Topical Question time on 16 September 2014, in relation to AQT 1454/11-15, you asked 'for details on strategies to address underemployment, given that a report from the TUC has shown that locally we have experienced the sharpest increase in underemployment: an increase of 37% since 2010'.

At this time my Department has not been able to verify the accuracy of the figures quoted by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in its report.

However, these figures, alongside employment figures for the UK regions obtained from the Office for National Statistics, would suggest that despite the increase in underemployment in Northern Ireland over the past four years, we still fare better than elsewhere in the UK.

In the first quarter of 2014, the figures would suggest that an estimated 9.0% of those employed locally were underemployed, the lowest of any UK region and below the UK average of 11.2%.


More widely, the Executive, through its Economic Strategy, has recognised the need to take action to support economic growth and employment creation. The focus of this Strategy is the improvement in the economic competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. This will be achieved by increasing employment and wealth through rebalancing the economy and building a larger and more export-driven private sector. Commitments in the Strategy, which cut across all Departments, are expected to deliver job creation and growing employment levels in Northern Ireland.

The Economic Strategy and the complementary Economy and Jobs Initiative and Building a Prosperous and United Community, will support the delivery of the Executive's economic priorities and lead to increased job opportunities and reduced levels of unemployment across Northern Ireland in 2014 and beyond.

Contributing to the rising number of employment opportunities, Invest NI has delivered its most successful year in 2013/14 in terms of job promotion. Over the course of the year, Invest NI promoted 10,800 jobs and secured investment totalling £775m in the Northern Ireland economy.

The Executive has also recognised in the Programme for Government and NI Economic Strategy, that Economic Inactivity is one of the most persistent problems facing the local economy. I have been working with Minister Farry, supported by Ministers McCausland and Poots, to develop a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills, training, incentives and job creation.

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

Yours sincerely,


ARLENE FOSTER MLA

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment