



iEER Boost Growth Action plan for Northern Ireland

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1.0 General Information

Partner organization	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Other partner organisation involved (if relevant)	
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NUTS2 region	Northern Ireland
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2.0 Background and Summary of Findings

As a peripheral region in both the UK and Europe, Northern Ireland has faced ongoing challenges. The region has suffered lower rates of entrepreneurship and levels of FDI than the rest of the UK. The region also struggles with relatively high levels of economic inactivity and a difficulty to retain highly educated people.

Northern Ireland’s profile is characterised by a strong knowledge economy, with one in eleven people directly or indirectly employed, and is responsible for 85% of all sales outside of Northern Ireland. Wages within the sector are almost one and a half times above the NI average. In addition, it is export intensive and generates income from outside NI. With 70% of it coming from outside the EU, it is less exposed to Brexit fallout.

Northern Ireland received the label European Entrepreneurial Region in 2015, and a subsequent evaluation highlighted that the region demonstrated a clear EER vision, with the mobilisation of a wide range of actors. A positive from the evaluation was the ambition and commitment from stakeholders to implementing the regional EER vision. The evaluation team also noted the commitment and activities undertaken by stakeholders on entrepreneurial education was amongst the most impressive results of the EER activities. Entrepreneurial education is also being supported through the local Councils Community Plans, eight of the eleven plans clearly identify entrepreneurial education as a key area within their economic development activities.

Research collated through the iEER project highlighted twenty examples of European wide outstanding best practice that could be relevant to Northern Ireland. It is

recommended that once the region stabilises, these are reviewed for potential implementation. See annex I for details.

The current key challenge for Northern Ireland is the current political situation, as the region has been without a Government for 14 months. In addition to this, the region faces extreme uncertainty with the UK due to exit the EU in March 2019. As a result of these challenges, the action plan developed is reflective of this, and the limited activities that government departments can commit to in the current impasse.

Consultations with key stakeholders, desk research and analysis of the iEER evaluation of the region highlighted that there is an established eco-system in the region. However, within the eco-system there is evidence of duplication of resources and in some cases a lack of communication between some delivery agents. A key weakness was noted on a number of occasions during consultations that there is a need to establish a specific enterprise framework to guide and support future development of the sector.

Consultations did highlight a range of best practice within the enterprise support network, for example;

- The creation of Ambassadors through the Ulster University's Succession Planning Programme;
- Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council's monitoring of entrepreneurs' progress on implementation of plans and provision of additional support when sufficient progress has been made with action plans.;
- Derry City & Strabane District Council's ongoing linkages and communication with regional stakeholders to develop bespoke support packages for entrepreneurs;
- Belfast City Council has developed a support package that offers the flexibility to meet the needs of the entrepreneur, whatever stage they are at. The support offered generally can be accessed at any time. Support programmes offered by Council do not have a start or end date for intakes and involve a mix of mentoring for example a business advisor and opportunities to access coaching from real entrepreneurs;
- Mid Ulster Council's Economic Development Strategy; and
- Derry & Strabane District Council's consultative approach to skills and enterprise development within the region.

3.0 Action Plan Development

As previously highlighted the current political vacuum is creating barriers to long term planning for enterprise support. The situation is also creating uncertainty regarding the availability of access to funds for boosting the enterprise ecosystem. The Action Plan

aims to be low cost and as a result, the Action Plan was formulated together with the stakeholders.

The approach adopted has included:

- The action plan has been developed as a result of extensive desk research and consultations with key stakeholders.
- Based on initial research and feedback from consultations an Action Planning workshop was undertaken. During the workshop a number of working group sessions were held with key stakeholders to identify key themes and actions to be included within the plan.
- Following on from the initial workshop session the draft action plan was circulated amongst stakeholders for comment and input to the final document.

4.0 List of Priority Actions

The following actions were selected for implementation:

4.1 Establish a High Level Entrepreneurship Steering Group

PA1: Influence the strategic direction of enterprise policy;

PA2: Influence development of NI Enterprise Framework;

PA3: Influence development of an integrated model and funding of this model;

PA4: Influence the Councils' community plans to include action plans with entrepreneurial focus;

PA5: Encourage interdepartmental & cross-council working to develop an early entrepreneurship support programme;

PA6: Assess the feasibility of a centralised management information system for delivery of enterprise support initiatives; and

PA7: Provide opportunities for main players/stakeholders to attend the Train the Trainer programme in Valencia and then provide training in embedding entrepreneurship in all aspects of work.

Through establishment of a High Level Entrepreneurship Steering group, entrepreneurship will be integral to the work of government departments, councils, schools & colleges and relevant stakeholders. An Enterprise Framework will be established, and the entrepreneurial eco-system will be nurtured.

4.2 Establishment of an Entrepreneurship Forum

PA1: Appoint an Enterprise Champion to promote enterprise awareness & encourage partnership working.

- PA 2: Explore the potential for local Councils to appoint a range of SME ambassadors.
- PA3: Encourage a consistent enterprise support pipeline across the region through development of online resources and disseminate analytics on demand for services.
- PA4: Encourage the establishment of an independent enterprise support signposting service.

The establishment of an entrepreneurship forum, with an enterprise champion, who is not from public sector, will stimulate an interest in entrepreneurship, and help guide the support available, to ensure there is a continuum of support, available at all stages of business development. The aim of the forum will be to share ongoing learning regarding the design and delivery of enterprise support initiatives, and to ensure there is signposting to appropriate support. It will assess the feasibility of quality assurance, and also the feasibility of a shared database of support provided. This will ensure there is a consistent and appropriate support framework for businesses.

4.3 Skills Development for SMEs

- PA1: Skills Gap Analysis
- PA2: Provision of skills training to meet gaps

This skills gap analysis would be carried out to ensure there is awareness of skills gaps. There would be strong links established with indigenous employers and FDI companies, to assess the future skills needs. These would be matched to training provision through colleges and universities.

This will link with the policy context Investment for Growth and Job Programmes, through linking training directly with job opportunities.

4.4 Development of a Shared Management Information System of the Enterprise Eco-System and its users

- PA1: Influence development of an integrated model of business support and funding of this model.
- PA2: Support Local Councils to get the buy in from delivery agents across the region to maintain and add value to the MIS by the quality of information captured.
- PA3: Facilitate interdepartmental & cross-council working to manage the enterprise support eco-system.
- PA4: Evaluation of outputs from the pilot will be undertaken with a review of the potential to extend it to the whole region completed.

4.5 Detailed Actions

Priority Action 1	Establish a High Level Entrepreneurship Steering Group
Policy Context	Nurturing Enterprise
Background	<p>European research has identified benefits in developing an entrepreneurial culture. This is needed throughout government, and public sector, as well as private sector and the third sector.</p> <p>Good practice has been identified in Valencia where they offer a Train the Trainers programme to encourage university lecturers to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking among students.</p> <p>Northern Ireland has identified the need for strategic leadership, which will be provided by government, to embed entrepreneurship in all aspects of public life. At present, it is segmented and only applicable to departments working directly with businesses.</p> <p>NILGA will work at a strategic level to develop a High-Level Entrepreneurship Steering group, which will influence the promotion of enterprise throughout public sector and will provide leadership.</p> <p>The Train the Trainers programme which is delivered in Valencia would be of real benefit to the region. This best practice training is also backed up by the best practice learning from Denmark, with the Factory of the Future. NILGA will work to ensure that the region is represented at future Train the Trainer programmes and the learning from this further disseminated by NILGA and by other participants.</p> <p>Consultation identified the need for the members of this steering group to include political representatives, officials from councils and government departments and business organisations, and to be committed to the development of policies and practices which promote enterprise effectively.</p>
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a High-Level Entrepreneurship Steering Group to influence the strategic direction of enterprise policy • Influence development of an NI Enterprise Framework • Influence development of an integrated model of business support and funding of this model • Influence the Councils' community plans to include action plans with entrepreneurial focus • Encourage interdepartmental & cross-council working to develop an early entrepreneurship support programme • Assess the feasibility of a centralised management information system for delivery of enterprise support initiatives • Provide opportunities for stakeholders to attend the pilot Train

	the Trainer programme in Valencia and then transfer the learning to other stakeholders in NI
Player involved & their roles	NILGA will co-ordinate the setting up of a High Level Entrepreneurship Steering Group. Once established, it will be facilitated by NILGA, and will include representatives from political parties, councils, Department for Agriculture and Rural Enterprise, Department for the Economy, Department for Education, Department for Communities, Invest NI, Enterprise NI and business organisations
Timeframe	2018
Cost	In kind funding
Funding Source	Department resources
Expected impacts - KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a Steering Group • Development of an enterprise framework for Northern Ireland • No of agencies/departments represented on Steering Group • Number of actions introduced by group • Feasibility of centralised management information system examined • Feasibility of introducing a quality assurance scheme for enterprise trainers examined • Number of stakeholders attending Valencia Train the Trainers pilot programme • Number of people trained through the cascaded entrepreneurial thinking training

Priority Action 2	Establishment of an Entrepreneurship Forum
Policy Context	Regional development policy instrument
Background	<p>One of the recurring themes from the consultations was the need for improved communication at an operational level amongst delivery agents and key stakeholders in the enterprise support sector.</p> <p>The consultations brought to light a number of areas of duplication in enterprise support, primarily due to a lack of communication across delivery agents. To avoid duplication and facilitate the design of flexible innovative support it was recognised that an entrepreneurship forum, that includes entrepreneurial input, would be of real benefit to the enterprise eco-system.</p> <p>Consultations have highlighted that Invest NI is considering establishing an Entrepreneurship Forum as part of their Entrepreneurship Action Plan. This forum would comprise of stakeholders and entrepreneurs. This approach would enable increased private sector involvement in strategic development of the sector and improve joined-up thinking in the region. The establishment of the forum will be encouraged and supported through NILGA’s implementation of the action plan.</p> <p>The need for increased use of Enterprise Champions was identified through the best practice research. Within the region Ulster University’s Succession Planning Programme has been identified as an example of best practice of creating ambassadors.</p> <p>The consultations also established that Invest NI is considering appointing an Enterprise Champion who would act as an ambassador for enterprise. The action plan will aim to influence and support Invest NI to recruit an Enterprise Champion.</p> <p>Best practice learning also highlighted the use and development of Enterprise Champions in early enterprise.</p>
Action	<p>The key objective is to establish an Entrepreneurship Forum to encourage collaboration & information sharing that is representative of stakeholders and delivery agents.</p> <p>The aim of the forum will be to share ongoing learning regarding the design and delivery of enterprise support initiatives.</p> <p>In addition to this, as a result of NILGA’s ongoing involvement in the Forum, a key activity will be the ongoing dissemination of European Good Practice.</p>

	<p>Other key actions that need to be undertaken as part of the Entrepreneurship Forum are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint an Enterprise Champion to promote enterprise awareness & encourage partnership working. • Explore the potential for local Councils to appoint a range of SME ambassadors. • Encourage a consistent enterprise support pipeline across the region through development of online resources and disseminate analytics on demand for services. • Encourage the establishment of an independent enterprise support signposting service considering best practice learning from StartUp Europe.
<p>Player involved & their roles</p>	<p>Invest NI will lead the development of the Entrepreneurship Forum and will be responsible for logistics Representatives from Economic Development in Local Councils. NILGA Key Delivery Stakeholders, e.g., Young Enterprise, Enterprise Northern Ireland, Federation of Small Businesses, NI Chamber of Commerce Enterprise Champion</p>
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>2018 - 2022</p>
<p>Cost</p>	<p>£150,000</p>
<p>Funding Source</p>	<p>Invest NI - time in kind</p>
<p>Expected impacts - KPIs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in barriers to entry for potential entrepreneurs, through improved information flow and a joined up approach to delivery of support. • Improved communication within the enterprise development sector. • Effective and co-ordinated planning and delivery of flexible enterprise support. • Number of unique visits to the signposting service. • Number of unique enquiries made to the signposting service. • Clients' ratings of signposting service. • Increased awareness of enterprise support and enterprise as a career option.

Priority Action 3	Skills Development for SMEs
Policy Context	Investment for Growth and Job Programmes
Background	<p>Derry City & Strabane Council, Ards and North Down Council, and Belfast MET reported best practice in matching skills development to identified shortages. This is linked to existing businesses. A skills gap analysis is carried out with existing businesses and with potential FDI businesses, and skills gaps are identified.</p> <p>Through training existing employees or local people and upskilling them with skills that are needed by business, this allows the enterprise to grow and also achieves employment. The link between employers and training providers is key to making this approach successful.</p> <p>Best practice learning from consultations with Derry City and Strabane District Council & Belfast Met highlighted this approach resulted in improved business performance. This was attributed to their close linkages with the 3rd level education providers and employers to develop staff and grow businesses. The support aims to make staff more enterprising in their approach.</p>
Action	<p>The Department for the Economy would lead on this action, and work with Invest NI and the Colleges of FHE to conduct a NI wide Skills Gap Analysis.</p> <p>They would then influence the development of a subsequent programme of support involving third level education providers. The programme will aim to improve skills development support for businesses. Ensuring a key link and involvement with employers is crucial. If the model was implemented in each Council area, the skills training could meet the skills gap.</p>
Player involved & their roles	Skills gaps could be identified through liaison with employers and FDI companies. This could be completed by Invest NI, Councils, and Colleges of Higher Education. Colleges would be the delivery mechanism. Department for the Economy would be the key influencer of this.
Timeframe	Skills Gap Analysis 2018 - 19, followed by delivery of skills training from Summer 2019
Cost	£100,000
Funding Source	Lead partner and delivery agent resources
Expected impacts - KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of skilled jobs created per Council area • Employment growth – measured by jobs created • More efficient companies and greater growth in the economy • FDI companies attracted by skilled workforce • Number of companies engaging with Colleges and Invest NI to secure appropriate skilled workforce

Priority Action 4	Development of a Shared Management Information System of the Enterprise Eco-System and its users
Policy Context	Other Regional Development Policy Instrument
Background	Best practice learning from research from the Hauts de France region highlighted the economic impacts through the development of a shared Management Information System that captures and maps data from an entrepreneur’s journey through the eco-system. The system in Haut de France, which was compliant with GDPR, avoided duplication in support provided to entrepreneurs and highlighted economic impacts.
Action	<p>Local Councils will explore the potential to develop a pilot for a shared MIS. An initial regional MIS has been developed for the Business Start – “Go For It” programme. Following on from this initial regional MIS, the Councils will review the potential to extend this to all enterprise support programmes across the region. This will incorporate the learnings from the Hauts de France region and piloted initially in across a number of Councils for a period of 12 – 18 months. Priority actions will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence development of an integrated model of business support and funding of this model. • Support Local Councils to get the buy in from delivery agents across the region to maintain and add value to the MIS by the quality of information captured. • Facilitate interdepartmental & cross-council working to manage the enterprise support eco-system. • Evaluation of outputs from the pilot will be undertaken with a review of the potential to extend it to the whole region completed.
Player involved & their roles	<p>Representatives from Economic Development in Local Councils will take the lead on the development of the pilot MIS, supported by NILGA and Invest NI.</p> <p>Key Delivery Stakeholders, e.g., Young Enterprise, Enterprise Northern Ireland</p>
Timeframe	Summer 2019
Cost	£50,000
Funding Source	Lead partner and other Councils
Expected impacts - KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient and timely provision of support to companies resulting in greater growth in the economy; • Increased number of companies engaging with Councils and Invest NI to avail of ongoing enterprise support; and • Improved communication and efficient use of funding within the enterprise development sector.

5.0 SWOT Analysis

Strengths of the region

- Real commitment to EER approach;
- Big commitment to entrepreneurial education and to integrating entrepreneurship modules in university degree courses;
- Strong commitment to cross border collaboration;
- Ongoing promotion of upgrading skills in SMEs;
- Improving rates of entrepreneurship;
- Low unemployment rates in the region;
- Growth of the knowledge economy is the second fastest in the UK, employing one in eleven people directly or indirectly in the region. Wages in the sector are also one and a half times higher than the NI average;
- Eight of the local Council's Community Plans include specific focus on the early enterprise activities;
- The region has an established Smart Specialisation Strategy, which has resulted in a clear prioritisation of key sectors;
- Invest NI has established a unit specifically targeting high growth entrepreneurship;
- Increasing levels of co-operation in regional delivery of enterprise and entrepreneurship support at local Government level (local Councils);
- Wide network of agencies and information channels to entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs;
- Mechanisms are in place to foster innovation, e.g., start-up workspace available through Catalyst Inc;
- Progress made by Invest NI in establishing an Entrepreneurship Forum to promote high growth start ups.
- NI has been successful in catching up to UK average levels of R&D in recent years.

Weaknesses in the region

- Current political situation within the region;
- Lack of enterprise framework to guide the development of the eco-system and stimulate start-ups;
- Northern Ireland suffers from entrepreneurial deficit, with a Total Early Stage entrepreneurship rate of 6.3%, compared to the average of 8.8% in the whole of the UK;
- The region suffers from higher than average levels of economic inactivity and lower employment rate performance;
- Fragmented approach to support, with duplication of services;
- Navigating the funding landscape in Northern Ireland;

- Provision of adequate financing possibilities for SMEs and micro-enterprises;
- There are a large number of support mechanisms within the Northern Ireland Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, which can lead to duplication;
- Entrepreneurial culture needs to be further developed in order to encourage the ambition for more wide-spread business expansion beyond the £5million level and that scale up and growth need to be prioritised;
- Stronger involvement of SME organisations in EER actions could be helpful in strengthening partnership within the region.

Opportunities for the region

- Further development of support services to cover each stage of the growth cycle;
- Potential for implementation of outstanding best practices;
- Allocation of resources for scale-up and growth activities; and
- Further expansion of activities aimed at bridging the gap between business and education and at promoting an entrepreneurial culture, especially throughout the education system.

Threats for the region

- Brexit and the uncertainties and challenges it will present for the region;
- Levels of funding available for support of enterprise is unclear after Brexit.

6.0 Monitoring and Impacts of the Action Plan

Establish an Inter-departmental Entrepreneurial Steering Group			
PA	Details	Players	Resources
1	Influence the strategic direction of enterprise policy	NILGA Department for the Economy Department for Communities Invest NI	In-kind
2	Influence development of NI Enterprise Framework	NILGA Department for the Economy Department for Communities Invest NI	In-kind
3	Influence development of an integrated model of business support and funding of this model	NILGA	In-kind
4	Influence the Councils' community plans to include action plans with entrepreneurial focus	Invest NI Councils NILGA	In-kind
5	Encourage interdepartmental & cross-council working to develop an early entrepreneurship support programme	Invest NI Department for the Economy	In-kind
6	Assess the feasibility of a centralised management information system for delivery of enterprise support initiatives	Councils Invest NI	Council resources
7	Provide opportunities for main players/stakeholders to attend the Train the Trainer programme in Valencia and then provide training in embedding entrepreneurship in all aspects of work.	NILGA UU Govt Departments	NILGA via iEER project funding

Establishment of an Entrepreneurship Forum			
PA	Details	Players	Resources
1	Appoint an Enterprise Champion to promote enterprise awareness & encourage partnership working.	Invest NI	In-kind
2	Explore the potential for local Councils to appoint a range of SME ambassadors.	Councils NILGA Department for the Economy Invest NI	In-kind

3	Encourage a consistent enterprise support pipeline across the region through development of online resources and disseminate analytics on demand for services.	NILGA LCCC Council Invest NI	Council resources Invest NI resources
4	Encourage the establishment of an independent enterprise support signposting service.	Invest NI Councils	In-kind

Skills Development for SMEs			
PA	Details	Players	Resources
1	Skills Gap Analysis	Councils Colleges Invest NI Department for the Economy	Department for the Economy
2	Provision of skills training to meet gaps	Colleges	Employers and Central Government

Skills Development for SMEs			
PA	Details	Players	Resources
1	Skills Gap Analysis	Councils Colleges Invest NI Department for the Economy	Department for the Economy
2	Provision of skills training to meet gaps	Colleges	Employers and Central Government

Monitoring Principles

Showing results and learning from experience is a vital function for developing a healthy Start-up Ecosystem in Northern Ireland. For this reason, we established the following principles:

- We will monitor both the quality and the quantity of the results of the work done in each of the Priority Actions.
- Each Priority Action has a lead partner and contributing partners. The lead partner of a Priority Action organises suitable monitoring methods and makes practical arrangements (like funding and logistics)
- Each lead partner makes sure that the monitoring results are updated and shared within the teams, while lessons are drawn regularly.
- The lead partners meet at least every 3 months to exchange progress and update plans.
- We will use the Monitoring Grid to keep track of the indicators of the Action Plan

Establish an Inter-departmental Entrepreneurial Steering Group			
PA	Indicator	How	Who
PA1	Influence the strategic direction of enterprise policy	Steering Meetings	NILGA
PA2	Influence development of NI Enterprise Framework	Monitor Framework	NILGA
PA3	Influence development of an integrated model of business support and funding of this model	Evaluate model	NILGA
PA4	Influence the Councils' community plans to include action plans with entrepreneurial focus	Monitor Council plans and report	Councils report at meetings
PA5	Encourage interdepartmental & cross-council working to develop an early entrepreneurship support programme	Meetings	Steering Group minutes
PA6	Assess the feasibility of a centralised management information system for delivery of enterprise support initiatives	Report provided	LCCC
PA7	Provide opportunities for main players/stakeholders to attend the Train the Trainer programme in Valencia and then provide training in embedding entrepreneurship in all aspects of work.	Attendance at TTT programme and roll out	Steering Group report
Establishment of an Entrepreneurship Forum			
PA	Indicator	How	Who
PA1	Appoint an Enterprise Champion to promote enterprise awareness & encourage partnership working.	Report on appointment of champion	Invest NI
PA2	Explore the potential for local Councils to appoint a range of SME ambassadors.	Report of Entrepreneurship Forum	NILGA with Councils
PA3	Encourage a consistent enterprise support pipeline across the region through development of online resources and disseminate analytics on demand for services.	Minutes and report	Invest NI/ENI
PA4	Encourage the establishment of an independent enterprise support signposting service.	External Review	Forum appoint independent

Skills Development for SMEs			
PA	Indicator	How	Who
PA1	Skills Gap Analysis	Skills Gaps Report	Dept for Economy
PA2	Provision of skills training to meet gaps	Colleges report on offering specific courses or skills development	Colleges / NILGA

This action plan will be implemented and monitored by the Northern Ireland.

Patricia DEVINE,
Invest Northern Ireland

Signature: 

Date: 23 / 3 / 18

Stamp of the organisation



Annex I

Outstanding Best Practices

OUTSTANDING BEST PRACTICES

Nice to Have

Should Have

Must have

Very urgent

Somewhat urgent

Not urgent

<p>Young companies – incubators in rural areas to reduce migration</p>	<p>Pepite – 4 actions in a plan to facilitate entrepreneurship of students & graduates</p> <p>New Frontiers – 6mths incubation support & employment support allowance of €2,500 for 6 months</p>	<p>Scale Up Denmark - Scale up activities</p> <p>Aula Emprende - Train researchers & teachers in entrepreneurial skills</p> <p>Student companies – promoting entrepreneurship in schools</p> <p>Valencian Entrepreneurial Council – coordination of stakeholders to drive entrepreneurship strategy</p>
<p>Kerry - Back to work enterprise allowance</p> <p>SLUSH – student driven event to facilitate investor meetings for start ups</p> <p>Factory of the Future – dedicated incubator for (creative) entrepreneurs</p> <p>Contamination Lab – dedicated zones in university to encourage students of all disciplines to become entrepreneurs</p>	<p>Hub houses – working spaces for students and recent graduates to access support pathway</p> <p>Digital health venture forum – pitching sessions, investor meetings</p>	<p>StartupV – mentoring students with technical knowledge to allow creation of high growth firms</p> <p>Success through Succession – family business support</p>
<p>Antrepreneur de Sezon – entrepreneurship competition for students</p>	<p>Entrepreneurship societies – volunteer organisation to inspire & develop entrepreneurs</p>	<p>CEDES - Promotion of employment & enterprise activities – link to regional strategy- training & support services to groups</p>