

# Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index Quarter 4 2016

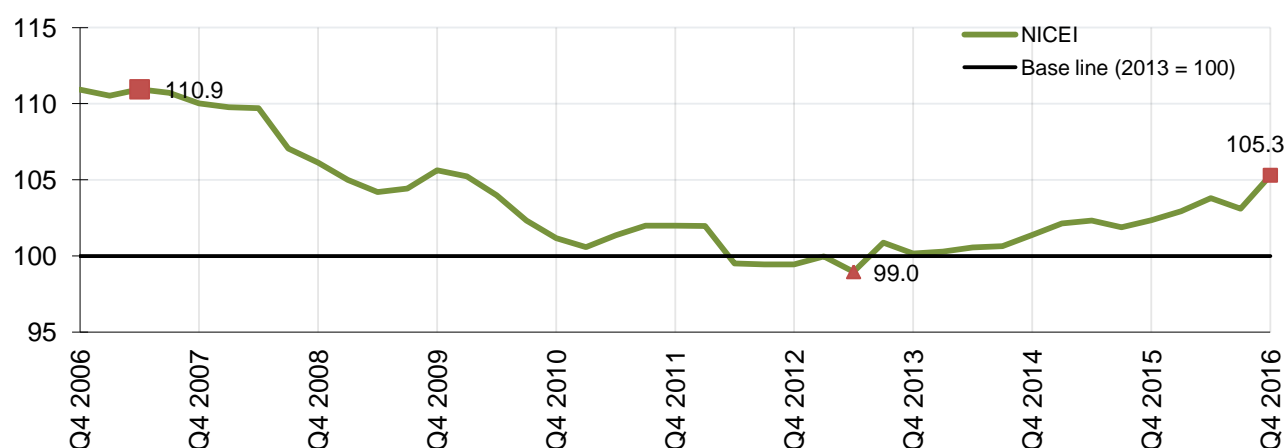


Date: 13 April 2017  
Geographical Area: Northern Ireland  
Theme: Economy Statistics  
Frequency: Quarterly

## Key points

- The Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index (NICEI) results show that NI economic activity was estimated to have grown by 2.1% from Quarter 3 (July – September) 2016 to Quarter 4 (October – December) 2016. The index also increased by 2.9% in real terms between Quarter 4 2015 and Quarter 4 2016.
- Over the last two years annual output (averaged over the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters) increased by 1.6%. Although the measures are not produced on a fully equivalent basis, comparisons with the UK over the same period show that the NICEI grew at a slower rate (1.6%) compared to UK GDP<sup>1</sup> growth (1.8%). In the UK quarterly growth (0.7%) was below that recorded for NI (2.1%).
- The NI private sector index<sup>2</sup> was estimated to have increased by 2.6% over the quarter and by 4.1% over the year to Quarter 4 2016.
- The Public sector jobs index increased by 0.5% over the quarter. This represents the first increase in the quarterly index since Q4 2014. However the index decreased by 1.2% over the year to Quarter 4 2016.
- This is the second quarter of results following the EU referendum on 23rd June 2016. The post-referendum picture is still emerging and will continue to do so over the coming quarters and years. It is not possible to separate out the specific impact of the referendum in this quarter.

Figure 1: NI Composite Economic Index Quarter 4 2016



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<sup>1</sup> [ONS Quarterly National Accounts](#), Quarter 4 (October to December) 2016 (The measure of GDP referred to is the chained volume index of GDP at market prices)

<sup>2</sup> An error was identified for Quarter 4 in the Index of Production (IOP) publication issued on the 15<sup>th</sup> March. A revised IOP publication has been issued alongside this publication and these revised figures have been incorporated into this NICEI publication.

**This Report contains the following chapters:**

1. [Context](#)
2. [NI Composite Economic Index Quarter 4 \(October to December\) 2016](#)
3. [Contribution to change](#)
4. [Comparisons with measures of GDP](#)
5. [Economic commentary](#)
6. [Further information](#)
7. [Annex 1: Index Tables](#)

**Note that the data in this release can be downloaded in excel by clicking the button under the respective tables/charts. In addition, the summary tables and comparisons with the UK, ROI and Scottish GDP can be downloaded in Open Data Format from the [NINIS website](#).**

The next publication for Quarter 1 2017 results will be in July 2017.

The results for the NICEI for Quarter 4 2016 show that economic output in Northern Ireland (NI) increased by 2.1% over the quarter (short-term) and increased by 2.9% over the year to Quarter 4 2016 (medium term). Over the last two years annual output (averaged over the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters) increased by 1.6%.

The most recent results from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) indicated that the unemployment rate remained relatively low at 5.2% for the period December - February 2017. Annual LFS figures continue to reflect a gradual decline in the unemployment rate over recent years (from 7.5% in 2013/14 to 5.6% in 2016/17).

There is also evidence of continued jobs growth over the final quarter of 2016 and over the year, although this was not particularly marked. The most recent [Quarterly Employment Survey](#) (published March 2017) shows that the number of jobs in December 2016 has increased by 0.2% (1,630 jobs) from the December 2016 estimate and grew by 0.3% (2490 jobs) over the year from the December 2015.

The housing market continues to show signs of growth with the most recent [NI House Price Index](#) reporting that in Quarter 4 2016 property prices in NI recorded growth over the year (5.7%) and over the most recent quarter (0.6%). This is set against a backdrop of increased lending for Quarter 4<sup>3</sup> 2016 and a continued fall in the number of repossessions<sup>4</sup>. There were more new dwellings started in 2016 than in 2015, although the number of new dwellings started in NI has decreased over the latest quarter<sup>5</sup>.

The post-referendum picture is still emerging and will continue to do so over the coming quarters and years. However there does appear to have been a strong performance by the production sector in the fourth quarter of 2016, although this has only offset a relatively weak performance earlier in the year with no growth in 2016 compared to 2015, in real terms. The information available so far generally covers short-term indicators with other important annual information not yet available. There has been little impact on unemployment since the EU referendum, and the latest jobs figures suggest a continuation of a more gradual slowdown that had already been evident for some time.

As reported in previous bulletins, the NICEI is designated as an experimental index to reflect its status as a measure under development. Users should take this into account when interpreting results. Ongoing areas of development are highlighted below:

- The Public Sector jobs index of the NICEI is based on public sector jobs. This may be unduly impacted by the fact that the NI Civil Service underwent a period of strategic reorganisation in the form of a Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) which sought to reduce the number of such jobs. For example, a ten percent reduction in public sector jobs may not equate to an equivalent fall in public sector output. NISRA is continuing to investigate how to improve the measure of public sector output as part of planned improvements to the NICEI series. This includes the assessment of various output measures for different public sector functions and analysis of public sector expenditure data and appropriate deflators.
- The Index of Construction component of the NICEI covers the output of construction firms' activity in Northern Ireland only. There is evidence to suggest that since the downturn many NI construction firms have been sending employees to work in projects based outside NI. NISRA is currently investigating the feasibility of including the value of such work in the construction index.

<sup>3</sup> [Council of Mortgage Lenders, February 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NI Courts and Tribunals Service – Mortgages: Actions for Possession bulletin October to December 2016](#)

<sup>5</sup> [New dwellings statistics report, February 2017](#)

## 2

## NI Composite Economic Index Quarter 4 (October to December) 2016

The NICEI is an experimental quarterly measure of the performance of the NI economy based on available official statistics. Existing published quarterly indices (i.e. Index of Services (IOS), Index of Production (IOP), Quarterly Construction Enquiry (QCE), and public sector employee jobs data from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES), plus unpublished agricultural output data from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)) are weighted using ONS Regional Accounts Gross Value Added (GVA) data to provide a proxy measure of total economic output in the NI economy on a quarterly basis.

### Key results (by private and public sector indices)

NI economic activity is estimated to have

- increased by 2.1% in real terms from Quarter 3 to Quarter 4 2016; and
- increased by 2.9% over the year.

Private sector output

- increased by 2.6% in real terms over the quarter; and
- recorded growth of 4.1% compared to the same quarter one year ago.

The Public sector jobs index

- increased by 0.5% compared to Quarter 3 2016; and
- fell by 1.2% over the year.

On a slightly longer timeframe, the NICEI results show that annual output averaged over the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters increased by 1.6% in real terms. For the same period:

- the Private sector index increased by 2.8%; and
- the Public sector jobs index decreased by 2.2%.

Table 1 provides a summary of changes over the quarter, year and rolling four quarters for the NICEI and its private and public sector jobs sub-indices.

**Table 1: Overview of performance of Northern Ireland Economy, Quarter 4 2016**

	Change on quarter	Change on year	Rolling annual average change <sup>6</sup>
NICEI	2.1%	2.9%	1.6%
NI Private Sector	2.6%	4.1%	2.8%
NI Public Sector jobs	0.5%	-1.2%	-2.2%

<sup>6</sup> Most recent four quarters compared to previous four quarters

# 3

## Contribution to change

Those industries that represent a larger proportion of the economy and/or which have large quarterly changes will have the most impact on the overall NICEI results. This is particularly the case when dealing with short term change over the quarter as results in the individual inputs (services, production and construction) can be volatile. The contribution different industries make to the overall change in the NICEI is calculated by multiplying their quarterly change by the proportion of the economy they represent.

### Change over the quarter (short-term)

Latest results show that over the quarter to Quarter 4 (October - December) 2016:

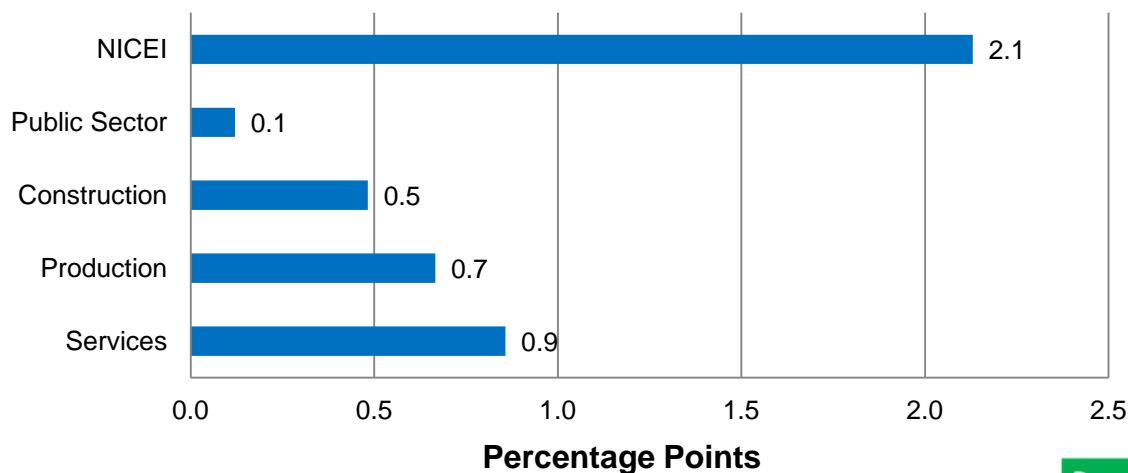
- NI economic activity increased by 2.1%;
- the Private sector index increased by 2.6%; and
- the index for the Public sector jobs increased by 0.5%.

The change (2.1%) in the NICEI over the latest quarter was driven by increases in the:

- Services sector (a contribution of 0.9 percentage points (pps));
- Production sector (a contribution of 0.7 pps);
- Construction sector (a contribution of 0.5 pps) and
- Public sector (a contribution of 0.1 pps);

The changes in each of these individual series can be found in Table 2 at the end of this document.

**Figure 2: Contributions of component indices to quarterly change in the NICEI Q4 2016<sup>7</sup>**



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### Change over the year (medium-term)

The NICEI results show that over the year (Quarter 4 2015 to Quarter 4 2016):

- NI economic activity increased by 2.9%;
- the Private sector index experienced growth of 4.1%; and
- the index for the Public sector jobs decreased by 1.2%.

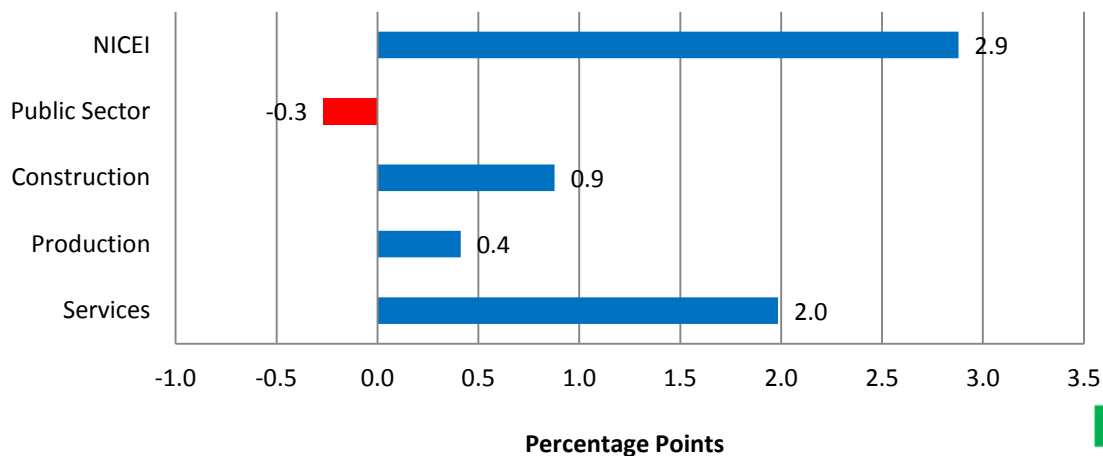
<sup>7</sup> Please note figures may not sum due to rounding

The increase in the NICEI over the year (2.9%) was driven by increases in:

- the Services sector (a contribution of 2.0 pps); and
- the Construction sector (a contribution of 0.9 pps); and
- the Production sector (a contribution of 0.4 pps);

These increases were partially offset by decreases in the Public sector jobs index (a contribution of -0.3 pps).

**Figure 2: Contributions of component indices to annual change in the NICEI Q4 2016<sup>8</sup>**



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### Rolling annual average change

Looking at longer term trends, results for annual output (averaged over the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016) compared to the average of the previous four quarters show:

- NI economic output increased in real terms by 1.6%;
- the Private sector index experienced growth of 2.8%; and
- the Public sector jobs index decreased by 2.2%.

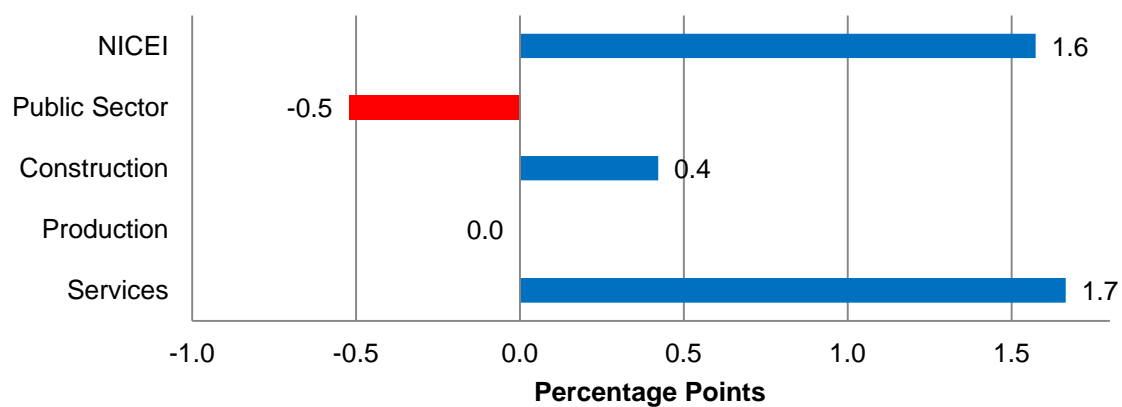
The growth in the NICEI (1.6%) over this period was a combination of increases in:

- the Services sector (contribution of 1.7 pps); and
- the Construction sector (contribution of 0.4 pps).

These increases were partially offset by a decrease in the Public sector jobs index (contribution of -0.5 pps) whilst the production sector showed no growth in 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Please note figures may not sum due to rounding

**Figure 3: Contributions of component indices to rolling annual average change in the NICEI, Q4 2016**



[Download in excel](#)

# 4

## Comparison with measures of GDP

The NICEI is not equivalent to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) quarterly measure of change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the whole UK economy. This is because the ONS measure is based on a broader range of sources including output, income and expenditure estimates of economic activity, whereas the NICEI is based on output and employee jobs data. However, when applied to the equivalent UK data sources, the NICEI methodology has been shown to provide a close short term approximation to the UK GDP series (see [NICEI Methodology Paper](#)).

Although the measures are not produced on a fully equivalent basis, comparisons with the UK show that NI output increased by 2.1% over the quarter, whilst the UK GDP<sup>9</sup> increased by 0.7% from Quarter 3 2016 to Quarter 4 2016. The UK economy grew by 1.9% over the year to Quarter 4 2016 whereas NI output increased by 2.9%.

When the extent of change is considered over the last two years, it can be seen that average GDP growth for the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 for the UK was 1.8% compared to the previous four quarters. The NI growth rate was 1.6% over the same period.

The UK has reported GDP growth in each of the last 16 quarters, whereas the NICEI has reported growth in 12 of the last 16 quarters. The NICEI is currently 5.1% below the maximum value recorded in Quarter 2 2007. In Quarter 4 2016, UK GDP was estimated to have been 8.5% higher than its pre-economic downturn peak of Quarter 1 2008. This suggests that the UK has had a shorter downturn with a faster recovery.

The most recent results for Scotland show that GDP<sup>10</sup> contracted by 0.2% over the most recent quarter and was flat (0.0%) over the year to Quarter 4 2016. The average growth for the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters was 0.7%.

Looking at the Republic of Ireland Quarterly National Accounts<sup>11</sup>, the Irish economy has been growing at a faster pace than the UK over recent years (despite a decline in Quarter 1 2016), and reported growth in GDP of 2.5% over the quarter to Quarter 4 2016. Over the year to Quarter 4 2016 GDP increased by 6.6%, with an average annual growth of 5.2% (latest four quarters compared to the previous four quarters).

Please note that a table showing a comparison of the NI Composite Economic Index and GDP for the UK, Scotland and Republic of Ireland can be found in the downloadable tables on the [NISRA](#) website.

<sup>9</sup> [ONS Quarterly National Accounts](#), Quarter 4 (October to December) 2016 (The measure of GDP referred to is the chained volume index of GDP at market prices)

<sup>10</sup> [Scottish Government Quarterly National Accounts, Quarter 4 2016](#)

<sup>11</sup> [CSO Quarterly National Accounts, Quarter 4 2016](#) (The measure of GDP referred to is the chained volume index at constant market prices, seasonally adjusted)



The results for the NICEI for Quarter 4 2016 show that economic output in Northern Ireland (NI) increased by 2.1% over the quarter (short-term) and increased by 2.9% over the year to Quarter 4 2016 (medium term). Over the last two years annual output (averaged over the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters) increased by 1.6%.

Growth was recorded over the quarter for all the components of the NICEI. The Services sector made the largest contribution to the overall growth of the NICEI in Quarter 4 2016. Quarter 4 2016 also represented the first increase in the public sector jobs index since Quarter 4 2014.

Longer term trends can be analysed by comparing the change in the average for the most recent four quarters (Quarter 1 to Quarter 4 2016) with the average of the four previous quarters (Quarter 1 to Quarter 4 2015). The result is less affected by short-term fluctuations, however it is a less sensitive measure of short term change. When looking at this annualised trend over the last three years there is some evidence that the rate of growth has improved. Annualised average growth over the last four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 compared to the previous four quarters (2015) was 1.6%. This was compared with annual growth over the previous two year period (to Quarter 4 2015), which was 1.4%.

Although the sources are not fully comparable, recent results show that the NI economy was growing at a faster pace than the UK. Growth over the latest quarter in NI was 2.1% (short-term) compared to 0.7% in the UK. Annual growth (comparing Q4 2016 with Q4 2015) was 2.9% in NI compared with 1.9% in the UK (medium-term).

Considering the extent of change over the last two years, average annualised GDP growth for the four quarters to Quarter 4 2016 for the UK was 1.8% compared to the previous four quarters. The NI growth rate in the NICEI was 1.6% over the same period.

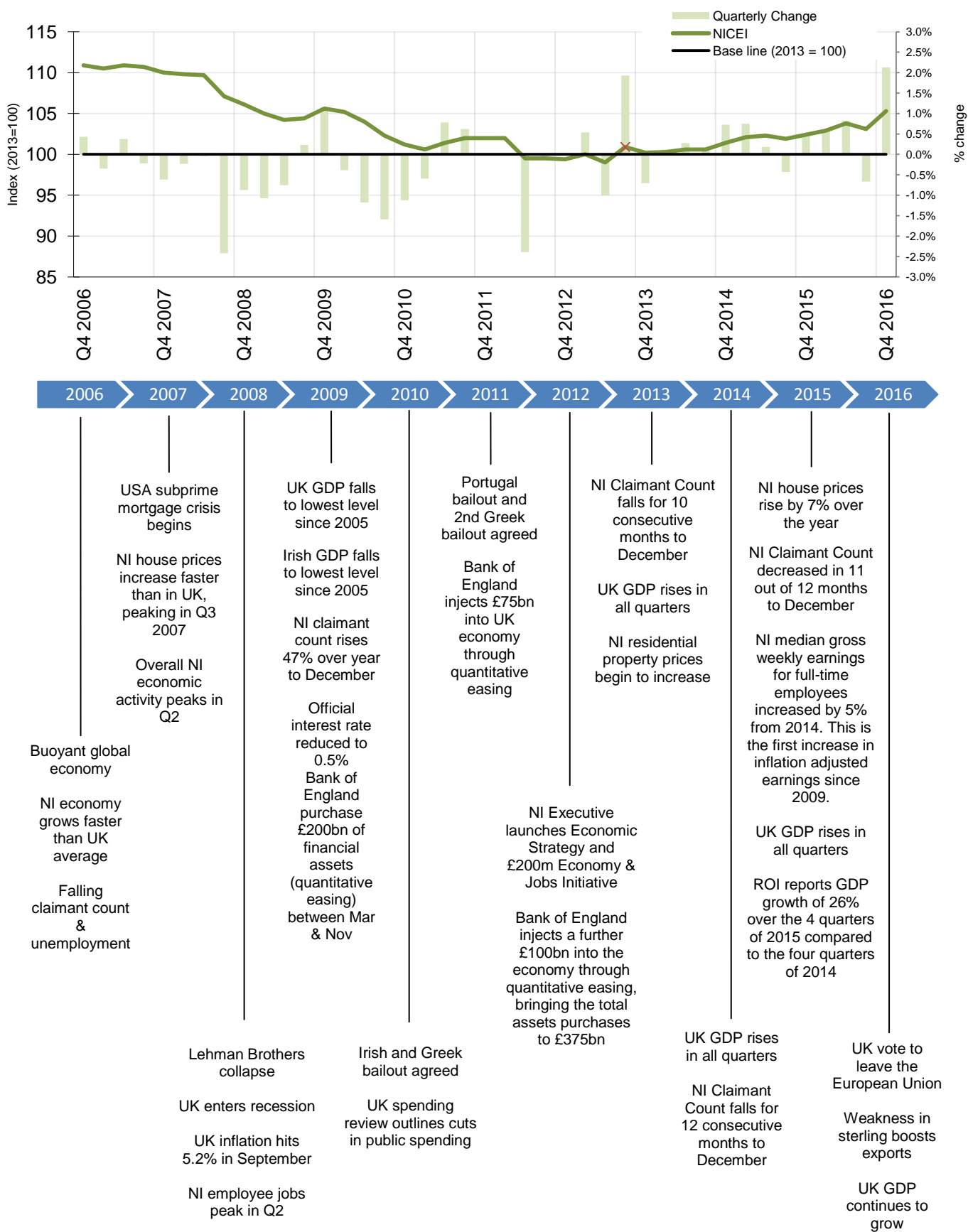
The most recent Labour Force Survey (LFS) results reported that the NI seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the period December - February 2017 was 5.2%, representing a decrease of 0.4 percentage point (pps) from the previous quarter and a decrease of 1.1 pps over the year (from 6.4%).

Annual LFS figures continue to reflect a gradual decline in the unemployment rate over recent years (from 7.5% in 2013/14 to 5.6% in 2016/17).

Total NI employee jobs, as measured by the [Quarterly Employment Survey](#), reached its peak in June 2015. Since this peak there has been a continual slowdown in employee jobs growth with September 2016 figures showing a marginal decrease over the quarter and year. The most recent quarter (Quarter 4 2016) shows a return to growth over the quarter and year, although this is not particularly marked.

An overview of the NICEI time series alongside an economic timeline of key world, European, UK and NI events to help place the performance of the NICEI into context is provided overleaf.

**Figure 5: Overview of the performance of the NICEI alongside a timeline of key economic events, 2006-16**



Further information on the state of the Northern Ireland economy, setting it in context with the UK and Republic of Ireland can be found in the latest Department for the Economy (DfE) [Economic Commentary](#).

## Coverage

Together the existing IOS, IOP and QCE indices cover their respective elements of the private sector economy. Output data currently provided by Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is unpublished and as such we are not able to disclose this data. No appropriate output data for the Public sector is collected in Northern Ireland and as a best available proxy public sector employment from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) was used, as recommended by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Further information on the main input data is presented below:

**IOP:** The quarterly NI Index of Production (IOP) is currently based on a sample of around 1,000 businesses, which covers approximately 93% of the turnover of the population at the time of selection and a response rate of almost 85%. This includes a census of all companies employing 40 or more employees as well as those employing 0 to 39 employees and having a turnover of £10 million or more. The new sample has been designed to have a minimum precision of 10% for each of the production subsectors.

**IOS:** The quarterly NI Index of Services (IOS) is currently based on a sample of around 3,400 businesses out of a population of c. 39,000. The sample consists of a census of dominant companies and a Neyman stratified random sample of the remaining companies and covers approximately 70% of turnover. The census element consists of all companies employing 100 or more employees as well as those employing 0 to 99 employees and having a turnover of £10 million or more.

**QCE:** From a sampling universe of approximately 10,000 firms, a disproportionate sample of 700 construction firms is randomly selected to take part in the NI Quarterly Construction Enquiry (QCE). The sample is disproportionately stratified (into six strata) using Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) turnover as the stratification variable. This includes a census of all companies with a turnover of £5.25m or greater. Further information on the QCE sample coverage and methodology can be found [here](#).

## Weighting and Combining the Data

The output series were produced as weighted aggregates of the above input series, where the weights were based on Gross Value Added (GVA)<sup>12</sup> by industry obtained for Northern Ireland from Regional Accounts produced by ONS.

Please note that the latest available GVA by industry published in December 2016 refers to the year 2015.

## Annual Chain-Linking

Annual chain-linking was used to combine the private Services, Production, Construction and Agriculture sectors to produce an index for the Private sector, which was then combined with the index for the Public sector to give an overall index for the economy. Use of annual chain-linking is standard National Accounts practice.

## Seasonal Adjustment of the Indices

The indirect method of seasonal adjustment was employed. Seasonally adjusted figures were input (where possible) and when the combined output series were tested for seasonality there was no residual seasonality found, therefore no seasonal adjustment was required.

<sup>12</sup> Please note that a glossary of national accounts terms and definitions can be found [here](#).  
NI Composite Economic Index Statistical Bulletin published 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017

**Base and reference year**

As part of the Blue Book process (UK National Accounts), and in line with Eurostat guidance, the base year and reference year for chained volume estimates are moved forward by one year so that the estimates better reflect the industrial structures and prices currently seen within the economy. Re-referencing on its own does not cause revisions to real growth rates, but the rebasing process, taking on as it does new Gross Value Added and product weights from the supply and use balancing process, will cause revisions to the growth rates of chained volume components.

**Public Sector Employees**

The public sector employee jobs figures used in our analysis are sourced from the Office for National Statistics who compile the figures to produce their [Public Sector Employment publications](#). The public sector comprises central government, local government and public corporations as defined for the UK National Accounts.

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Next publication:

July 2017

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# Annex 1: Index Tables

The table below provides an overview of the index tables for the Composite Economic Index and its constituent indices. The arrows in the cells indicate whether the index has increased/decreased/remained constant from the previous quarter.

Key:  Maximum value reached  
 Minimum value reached

**Table 2: Overview of NICEI and component indices**

[Download in excel](#)

	Quarter	Composite Economic Index	Private sector	Public sector	Services	Production	Construction
2007	1	↓ 110.5	↓ 113.6	↓ 102.9	↓ 112.2	↑ 100.4	↓ 181.2
	2	↑ 110.9	↑ 114.1	↑ 103.1	↑ 112.3	↑ 101.0	↑ 187.3
	3	↓ 110.7	↓ 113.9	↓ 102.7	↓ 111.9	↑ 104.0	↓ 179.2
	4	↓ 110.0	↓ 112.9	→ 102.7	↓ 110.4	↑ 105.9	↓ 171.6
2008	1	↓ 109.8	↓ 112.6	→ 102.7	↑ 110.8	↓ 105.3	↓ 164.6
	2	↓ 109.7	↑ 112.8	↓ 102.0	↓ 110.5	↓ 104.9	↑ 171.7
	3	↓ 107.1	↓ 109.4	↓ 101.1	↓ 107.9	↓ 102.7	↓ 158.6
	4	↓ 106.1	↓ 106.7	↑ 104.8	↓ 105.6	↓ 97.5	↓ 156.0
2009	1	↓ 105.0	↓ 105.1	↑ 104.9	↓ 104.7	↓ 93.9	↓ 153.1
	2	↓ 104.2	↓ 103.9	↑ 105.1	↓ 104.0	↓ 91.6	↓ 151.1
	3	↑ 104.4	↑ 104.1	↑ 105.4	↑ 104.8	↓ 90.3	↓ 150.3
	4	↑ 105.6	↑ 105.8	↓ 105.2	↑ 107.1	↑ 91.5	↓ 147.4
2010	1	↓ 105.2	↓ 105.6	↓ 104.4	↓ 106.9	↑ 92.6	↓ 140.0
	2	↓ 104.0	↓ 104.1	↓ 103.6	↓ 105.3	↑ 92.8	↓ 135.3
	3	↓ 102.3	↓ 102.2	↓ 102.7	↓ 102.4	↑ 92.9	↑ 135.9
	4	↓ 101.2	↓ 100.7	↓ 102.6	↓ 99.6	↑ 96.6	↓ 126.9
2011	1	↓ 100.6	↓ 100.1	↓ 101.9	↓ 98.8	↑ 97.6	↓ 122.1
	2	↑ 101.4	↑ 101.4	↓ 101.3	↑ 101.0	↑ 99.5	↓ 112.9
	3	↑ 102.0	↑ 102.5	↓ 100.6	↑ 101.7	↑ 102.0	↑ 115.2
	4	→ 102.0	↑ 102.7	↓ 100.0	↑ 101.8	↑ 102.1	↑ 116.0
2012	1	→ 102.0	↓ 102.6	↑ 100.2	↓ 101.1	↓ 100.9	↑ 123.9
	2	↓ 99.5	↓ 99.4	↓ 99.9	↓ 98.5	↓ 99.7	↓ 109.0
	3	→ 99.5	↓ 99.3	→ 99.9	↑ 99.3	↓ 98.1	↓ 105.9
	4	↓ 99.4	↓ 99.2	↑ 100.2	↓ 99.1	↓ 97.1	↑ 106.8
2013	1	↑ 100.0	↑ 99.8	↑ 100.4	↑ 99.5	↑ 98.8	↓ 105.6
	2	↓ 99.0	↓ 98.4	↑ 100.5	↓ 98.7	↓ 97.7	↓ 98.0
	3	↑ 100.9	↑ 101.0	↑ 100.6	↑ 100.8	↑ 101.7	↑ 101.7
	4	↓ 100.2	↓ 100.8	↓ 98.5	↑ 101.0	↑ 101.8	↓ 94.8
2014	1	↑ 100.3	↑ 101.2	↓ 97.7	↑ 101.0	↓ 101.3	↑ 99.7
	2	↑ 100.6	↑ 101.5	↑ 98.0	↑ 101.1	↑ 102.4	↑ 100.1
	3	→ 100.6	→ 101.5	↑ 98.1	↓ 101.0	↑ 103.0	↑ 101.7
	4	↑ 101.4	↑ 102.5	↑ 98.2	↑ 101.7	↓ 102.9	↑ 107.4
2015	1	↑ 102.1	↑ 103.7	↓ 97.7	↓ 101.6	↑ 104.6	↑ 117.8
	2	↑ 102.3	↑ 104.1	↓ 97.2	↑ 102.1	↓ 104.5	↑ 119.8
	3	↓ 101.9	↓ 103.7	↓ 96.5	↑ 102.6	↓ 103.6	↓ 113.9
	4	↑ 102.4	↑ 104.6	↓ 95.7	↑ 103.2	↑ 104.2	↑ 117.3
2016	1	↑ 102.9	↑ 105.5	↓ 95.4	↑ 104.3	↓ 103.7	↑ 120.6
	2	↑ 103.8	↑ 106.9	↓ 94.7	↑ 105.9	↑ 103.9	↑ 125.7
	3	↓ 103.1	↓ 106.2	↓ 94.1	↓ 105.4	↓ 102.7	↓ 124.4
	4	↑ 105.3	↑ 109.0	↑ 94.6	↑ 107.1	↑ 106.6	↑ 133.2

	NICEI	Private Sector	Public Sector	Services	Production	Construction
Q/Q	2.1%	2.6%	0.5%	1.6%	3.9%	7.1%
Y/Y	2.9%	4.1%	-1.2%	3.8%	2.3%	13.6%
most recent 4 Qs vs previous 4 Qs	1.6%	2.8%	-2.2%	3.2%	0.0%	7.5%