



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
Geilleagair



Delivering the **Economic Vision**

**A three year forward look
& 2024/25 Action Plan**



CONTENTS

MINISTER'S FOREWORD	3
A WORD FROM THE EXPERTS	4
OUR DEPARTMENT	6
OUR PLAN – 2024/25	7 - 13
- TAKING ACTION	7
- FOCUS ON SKILLS	8
- CONSULTING & LEGISLATING	9
- DELIVERING ON EXISTING COMMITMENTS	10
- TAKING AN ALL-ISLAND APPROACH	11
- SHAPING POLICY	12
- CO-DESIGNING	13
THE STATE OF PLAY	14
OUR IMPACT	16
ANNEX A	18
ANNEX B	20

AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE MINISTER

Upon becoming Economy Minister I set four objectives for my Department.

Creating more Good Jobs, so that working families enjoy a decent standard of living. Increasing productivity, which is the fundamental driver of overall living standards. Promoting regional balance, ensuring that everyone shares in the benefits of prosperity. And decarbonising, in order to safeguard the planet for future generations.

In pursuit of these objectives my Department will tailor its interventions to the needs of specific sectors. It will develop clusters of businesses and gear its support to start-ups and local SMEs. It will take full advantage of the export opportunities created by Dual Market Access. And it will embrace the potential of the all-Ireland economy.

With significant limitations in terms of our resources and powers, it is all the more important that the Department and its delivery agencies are operating in a highly effective and strategically focused manner. My Department has already been recalibrating its activities in line with my approach.

Action Plans have been published to grow seven of our most innovative, productive and export-orientated sectors. Co-design groups have been established to develop the tourism and social enterprise sectors. A consultation on a landmark Good Jobs Bill is underway. A Taskforce is producing a plan for 10,000 students at Magee campus. College lecturers have been given a substantial pay uplift and a new £12 million fund has been announced to address skills shortages. Licensing of onshore oil and gas exploration and production has been ended.

This 2024/25 Business Plan and three-year forward look sets out how, working in a spirit of partnership, we will continue this programme of change. It highlights upcoming key projects including the restructuring of Invest NI so that it is more focused on regional economic development, a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, a new electricity grid connection policy, an Aviation and Route Development Policy, improved support for people with Special Educational Needs after they leave school, and a circular economy strategy.

Together, we can turn the dial on our economic performance.



Minister Conor Murphy
MLA



A WORD FROM THE EXPERTS

We welcome the opportunity to provide our collective and independent voice to the Department's 3 year forward look, and 2024/25 Business Plan.

Our role is a unique and an important one which, we think, shows a desire for genuine engagement and co-design on the significant work needed to improve Northern Ireland's economy in a responsible and sustainable way, which benefits everyone across the North.

The context within which we are all working is complex; the move to net zero, dual market access, high levels of employment, difficulties in recruitment, limited public sector budgets, the growth of innovative sectors, and the return of the Executive.


This presents many challenges but also many great opportunities which need to be harnessed.

The Economic Vision set out by Minister Murphy provides a clear direction for government, the wider public sector, the private sector and social partners, to collaborate on four clear and important objectives.

And collaboration is key. This will not work without a collective drive to move the dial on our economy, with skills at the heart of this change.

We know that three years will not deliver the change that is needed, long term change will take much longer to deliver, but we can set the direction of travel and now is the time to start.

This document sets out how the Department for the Economy is beginning to align with the new Economic Vision. We will play our part individually and collectively to inform the Department on how this alignment should continue.



We have already seen and are encouraged by the pace of change being driven by Minister Murphy; with the launch of the new capital scheme for decarbonisation, publication of the Good Jobs consultation, work with Invest NI to develop sub-regional economic plans, and the Minister's recent Skills Statement to the Assembly.

We are delighted to be a part of this reorientation of policy and look forward to continuing to support the Department on this journey.



Dr David Jordan

Lecturer in Economics
Queen's Business
School



Professor David Rooney

Professor of Chemical
Engineering
Queen's University
Belfast



Dr Lisa Wilson

Senior Economist
Nevin Economic
Research Institute



Dr Conor Patterson

CEO of Newry and
Mourne Co-operative
and Enterprise Agency



OUR DEPARTMENT

The Department for the Economy (DfE) was established in May 2016. It operates under the direction and control of the Minister for the Economy.

The Permanent Secretary, Ian Snowden, as the Departmental Accounting Officer, is responsible for the overall organisation, management and staffing of the Department.

DfE is responsible for delivering the Minister's Economic Vision by developing and implementing economic policy for the North of Ireland. It is supported to do this, with and through our Partner Organisations. These include:

- Invest Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Screen
- Tourism Northern Ireland
- Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Construction Industry Training Board–Northern Ireland
- Labour Relations Agency

We support and work closely with the North's Higher and Further Education Institutions.

We also work closely with InterTradeIreland, Tourism Ireland, and the Office of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal.

A new Programme for Government (PfG) is expected to be published later this year. Once finalised, DfE will take the lead on economy-focused policy commitments, with contributions to other commitments.

The Executive has issued the 2024-25 opening Budget which allows DfE to allocate budget within the Department and to its Partner Organisations. The combined DfE Resource and Capital Opening Budget is £1,462.3 million. A high level breakdown of the Department's budget is attached at Annex B.

Further details of the Department's role, budget, statutory responsibilities, structure, governance arrangements and culture values can be found at: [DfE website](#).

TAKING ACTION

	GOOD JOBS	RAISE PRODUCTIVITY	REGIONAL BALANCE	DECARBONISATION	
<p>1 Grow and strengthen the social enterprise sector within the North, by publishing and then beginning to deliver a three-year Social Enterprise Action Plan.</p>	✓	✓	✓		TARGET DATE: SEPTEMBER 2024
<p>2 Support business over the next 3 years of this plan to decarbonise, through the delivery of an energy efficiency support scheme.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: JULY 2024
<p>3 Expand the pipeline of future talent for business, as well as skills and employment opportunities for citizens, by publishing and beginning to deliver on a three-year Apprenticeship Action Plan.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: AUGUST 2024
<p>4 Grow our tourism sector over the next decade, by developing, publishing, and beginning to deliver on a ten-year Tourism Action Plan.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: NOVEMBER 2024
<p>5 Drive growth within our economy's seven most innovative and high-potential sectors, by setting policy direction and publishing sectoral action plans, developed in collaboration with partners.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: AUGUST 2024
<p>6 Develop a Net Zero Accelerator Fund to attract net zero investment and cut greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Climate Change Act.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025

FOCUS ON SKILLS

GOOD JOBS

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

REGIONAL BALANCE

DECARBONISATION

7

Work towards expanding the campus at Magee to 10,000 students as set out within New Decade New Approach, by working with the Magee Taskforce, and partners, to publish and begin to deliver on an action plan.



TARGET DATE: **JANUARY 2025**

8

Work to address the skills imbalances in our economy by publishing and beginning to deliver on a three-year Skills Action Plan, which will include a dedicated Skills Fund.



TARGET DATE: **SEPTEMBER 2024**

9

Support increased student numbers, improve learners' attainment, and deliver a curriculum focused on meeting the needs of a regionally balanced economy, by transforming the delivery of Further Education.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

10

Strengthen the North's careers ecosystem and ensure people of all ages - including those in school - have timely access to high quality and impartial careers advice, by agreeing a three-year Careers Action Plan, in collaboration with the Department of Education.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

11

Progress agreed recommendations from the Independent Review of Education in line with the action plan from the Department of Education, once published*.



TARGET DATE: **AUGUST 2025***

CONSULTING & LEGISLATING

GOOD JOBS

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

REGIONAL BALANCE

DECARBONISATION

12

Promote and protect the rights of all workers by consulting on proposals for a new Employment Bill and beginning to draft the legislation.



TARGET DATE:
MARCH 2025

13

Strengthen and support the role of Credit Unions through policy co-design with the Ulster Federation and Irish League of Credit Unions. Publish a Credit Union consultation and begin the process to modernise Credit Union legislation in the North of Ireland.



TARGET DATE:
MARCH 2025

14

Support victims of domestic abuse to take safe leave from their employment, by consulting on proposals for new legislation and guidance and progressing the necessary actions to operationalise the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act.



TARGET DATE:
MARCH 2025

DELIVERING ON EXISTING COMMITMENTS

GOOD JOBS

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

REGIONAL BALANCE

DECARBONISATION

15

Work in partnership with Invest NI to implement the Invest NI Review Action Plan.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

16

Close the current Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme, to enable a more effective scheme to be delivered which better utilises available funding, for better environmental outcomes.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

17

Support delivery of the 80% renewable electricity by 2030 target, within the Climate Change Act, by publishing a final design of a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

18

Accelerate the mobilisation and delivery of City and Growth Deal projects, to meet their aims of delivering place-based economic growth, by increasing support to our delivery partners.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

19

Commence delivery of Project Gigabit to provide near universal gigabit access.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

20

Vacate Fermanagh House and relocate the Department's Insolvency Service to reduce our carbon footprint.



TARGET DATE: **SEPTEMBER 2024**

21

Invest a further £25 million via DfE's Invest to Save scheme into the public sector's transition to net zero.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

22

Progress recommendations from the Independent Report on Community Wealth Building in partnership with the Department for Communities and the Department of Finance.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

TAKING AN ALL-ISLAND APPROACH

GOOD JOBS

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

REGIONAL BALANCE

DECARBONISATION

23

Maximise the opportunities to promote all-island tourism, and encourage further economic growth, by extending Failte Ireland's regional branding into the North.



TARGET DATE:
JANUARY 2025

24

Develop new, and enhance existing, areas of all-island cooperation for mutual economic, social, and environmental benefit, by agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the Department for Enterprise Trade and Employment.



TARGET DATE:
MARCH 2025

25

Enhance the All-Island Skills Ecosystem, by developing a collaborative approach with partners across the island, including delivery of Cross Border Skills Initiatives, as part of the Peace Plus Programme.



TARGET DATE:
MARCH 2025

SHAPING POLICY

GOOD JOBS

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

REGIONAL BALANCE

DECARBONISATION

26

Strengthen and build upon industry collaboration by publishing a cluster policy for some of the most innovative and high-potential areas of the economy.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

27

Ensure our young people have the skills and knowledge they need by working with the Department of Education to deliver a collaborative approach to the implementation and oversight of the 14-19 Education and Training Framework.



TARGET DATE: **SEPTEMBER 2024**

28

Better target productivity improvement by agreeing a more consistent approach to business support with our partner organisations.



TARGET DATE: **SEPTEMBER 2024**

29

Maximise air connectivity to drive economic growth by developing an Aviation and Route Development Policy.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

30

Initiate a review of the current skills and training landscape for young people with Special Educational Needs after they leave school, in order to provide recommendations for improvements.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

31

Publish a Circular Economy Strategy that will set a pathway to designing a systems approach that increases resource efficiency, reduces waste and supports the legislative target of Net Zero by 2050.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

32

Commence review of the Energy Strategy to ensure the remaining 5 years to 2030 use up-to-date data and insights, bringing a renewed focus on affordable renewable energy.



TARGET DATE: **JANUARY 2025**

33

Work with Conradh na Gaeilge, NDPBs and Independent Autonomous Bodies to develop an Irish Language Policy and promote the use of the Irish language across the Department and its Partner Organisations.



TARGET DATE: **MARCH 2025**

CO-DESIGNING

	GOOD JOBS	RAISE PRODUCTIVITY	REGIONAL BALANCE	DECARBONISATION	
<p>34 Inform and empower our partners and stakeholders by publishing a new Research Programme aligned to the Minister’s Economic Vision.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: AUGUST 2024
<p>35 Help to tackle fragmentation and create growth within the Life and Health Sciences Sector by investing in the development of the Future Medicines Institute to develop leading edge innovations.</p>		✓	✓		TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025
<p>36 Support businesses in offering good jobs for all by working with the Labour Relations Agency to develop a Good Work Charter.</p>	✓				TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025
<p>37 Drive long term sustained regional growth, by working with Invest NI and partners across the North, to publish and oversee the implementation of a Sub-Regional Economic Plan.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: SEPTEMBER 2024
<p>38 Work towards the delivery of an Enhanced Investment Zone for the North, co-designed with DLUHC, to harness £150m of available funding to drive economic growth.</p>		✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025
<p>39 Change electricity grid connection policy in partnership with Utility Regulator, to support the installation of renewable and low carbon technology and deliver the benefits to electricity consumers.</p>		✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025
<p>40 Establish a Tourism Partnership Board to support development and delivery of the 10-year Tourism Action Plan.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025
<p>41 Establish an all of Government approach to develop community benefit through a pathfinder community energy project.</p>		✓	✓	✓	TARGET DATE: MARCH 2025

THE STATE OF PLAY

For too long our economy has been weighed down by structural weaknesses that have limited our ability to reach our full potential. Those weaknesses restrict opportunities for all in society to both contribute and benefit from true economic success.

Ultimately, we want to improve the quality of life for all our people and this is where our four objectives come together to support real, life-changing outcomes for people.

We want to see employment providing better rewards and to be fulfilling and accessible, we want to see people benefit from better jobs wherever they live, and we want those jobs and the lifestyles they support to be greener.

The following sets out the challenges we face, the prizes that success will bring and how we will measure that road to success.

GOOD JOBS

The Carnegie Framework helps us assess work quality across seven aspects of jobs - terms of employment; pay and benefits; health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing; job design and the nature of work; social support and cohesion; voice and representation; and work life balance.

Focusing on terms of employment and pay, aspects fundamental to all jobs, shows that while almost 94% of employees are in permanent jobs with guaranteed hours, approximately 11,000 employees are employed on zero-hours contracts.

Excluding the self-employed, approximately a third of the working age population in the North are not working or employed in a job that provides security of employment through a permanent contract with guaranteed hours.

Increases in the National Minimum Wage and Living Wage have led to increases in pay for low paid workers but also a degree of wage compression around the legal minimum wage rate.

84% of working age employees in 2023 were paid on or above the Real Living Wage rate (a voluntary hourly wage rate of £10.90 based on cost of living), a proportion below most UK regions.

Variation in pay differs across sectors and industries with the average pay in occupations such as sales assistants and retail cashiers below the Real Living Wage rate and the average pay of IT professionals more than double the Real Living Wage rate.

RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity in the North has been below the UK average for decades and is the lowest across these islands.

While the gap between productivity here and the UK average has narrowed in recent years (from 17.4% in 2019 to 13.2% in 2022), output per hour worked in the North ranked 10th amongst the twelve UK regions in 2022 - £34.70 per hour worked in the North compared to a UK average of £39.70 per hour worked.

The productivity gap is even more pronounced when compared to the rest of Ireland with the 2023 Northern Ireland Productivity Dashboard (based on 2021 data) reporting that output per hour worked in the South of Ireland was 8% higher than the UK average.

REGIONAL BALANCE

The North faces a number of economic challenges at a regional level with issues such as employment, productivity, income and economic inactivity, all areas where we perform poorly compared to our nearest neighbours.

When viewed at the sub-regional level however, these disparities can be even more pronounced, with areas such as the North West lagging significantly behind the average on a number of key economic indicators – for example, the employment rate (including students) in Derry City & Strabane in 2022 was 10 percentage points lower than in Mid Ulster.

Furthermore, the output per job worked was c.£50k in Derry City & Strabane in 2022 compared to c.£66k in Belfast.

DECARBONISATION

We have a legal and moral obligation to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.

Done right, the transition to a greener and more sustainable economy can be a just transition that also generates prosperity for all.

The North has been successful in reducing Green House Gas emissions, achieving a 26% reduction since the base year of 1990 while the South of Ireland saw a 7.2% increase in emissions over the same period.

However, our reduction compares to a fall of 53% in England, 51% in Scotland and 36% in Wales. Our emissions reduction needs to go much further and faster if the targets set out in The Climate Change Act are to be achieved.

OUR IMPACT

Successful delivery of the Minister’s Economic Vision will take time.

This document outlines what the Minister, through the Department, and our partner organisations will do to drive positive progress within the remaining three years of this mandate.

Progress against our plan - 2024/25 will be monitored internally. A progress report will be published in summer 2025. However, longer term economic measures are also important to track progress against the Minister’s Economic Vision.

Successful delivery will not be down to the actions of DfE alone. It will require cross Departmental collaboration, co-design and close working with all our stakeholders if we are to be successful in delivering the Minister’s Economic Vision.

SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY WILL MEAN:

GOOD JOBS	Higher levels of pay and prosperity that benefits all, with fewer people earning below the Real Living Wage. More secure work with secure incomes in current and emerging sectors.
RAISE PRODUCTIVITY	More innovative businesses that are adopting productivity enhancing technologies, that are investing in R&D and have a growing international focus, with world class management practices driven by an increasingly skilled workforce.
REGIONAL BALANCE	Empowering communities right across the North to tackle social, economic, environmental and geographic barriers to prosperity.
DECARBONISATION	Creating a self-sufficient, well-skilled energy landscape, which leads, supports, and enables economic, social and environmental stability.

Our top line measure of success will be: Baseline (based on latest available data)	With a further measurement focus on: (See Annex A for baseline position)
<p>Good Jobs measure based on earnings, permanent contracts and minimum guaranteed hours. TBC (in development)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Department will measure progress on job quality across the breadth of the Carnegie Framework using both official data sources and bespoke research.
<p>Output per hour worked £34.70¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross fixed capital formation Total R&D as % of GDP and number of R&D companies Innovation Active Businesses and number of Innovation Recognitions Proportion leaving NI HEIs with narrow STEM qualifications (first degree and postgraduate qualifications) Business births and deaths as % of active enterprises Management Practices Exports and external sales as % of GDP
<p>Regional Employment Rate (including Students) Lowest – Derry City & Strabane 73.7%² Highest – Mid Ulster 83.7%</p>	<p>While all indicators will be monitored on sub-regional basis, the following additional indicators added under Regional Balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualifications by level of study Household Disposable Income Economic Inactivity Rate excluding students
<p>CO₂ Emissions per Capita 7.4 tonnes of CO₂ per capita³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources Size of low carbon and renewable energy economy Energy intensity Energy efficiency Circular economy material and carbon footprint

1. Current Price (smoothed) per hour worked 2022 [Subregional productivity: labour productivity indices by UK ITL2 and ITL3 subregions - Office for National Statistics](#)

2. Aged 16 to 64, 2022 data

3. Based on the 14.1MtCO_{2e} in 2022 (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/NI%20Greenhouse%20Gas%20Statistics%201990-2022%20Report.pdf>) divided by 2022 NI population (1.91 million). Note if take all greenhouse gas emissions into account, NI produced the equivalent of 11.2 tonnes of CO₂ per person.

ANNEX A

BASELINES FOR SUPPORTING INDICATORS

	INDICATOR	BASELINE
GOOD JOBS	Permanent and not zero-hours contract	66.3%
	Earning above Real Living Wage	83.5%
	Median gross weekly earnings	£641
RAISE PRODUCTIVITY	Gross fixed capital formation	TBC
	Total R&D as % of GDP	1.97%
	R&D Companies	2,054
	Innovation Active businesses	32%
	Innovation Recognitions	1,884
	Proportion leaving NI HEIs with narrow STEM qualifications*	24%
	Business Births as % of all active enterprises	8.3%
	Business Deaths as % of all active enterprises	8.2%
	NI Management Practices Score	0.53
	Exports as % of GDP	23%
	External Sales as % of GDP	51%
REGIONAL BALANCE	Qualifications by level of study	Various inc. 'No qualifications (16-64)' Highest LGD - 15.6% Lowest LGD - 8.1%
	Household Disposable Income	Highest LGD - £19,223 Lowest LGD - £16,572
	Economic Inactivity Rate excluding students	Highest LGD - 24.5% Lowest LGD - 14.8%
DECARBONISATION	Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources	45.4%
	Size of low carbon and renewable energy economy	£1.6bn turnover
	Energy Intensity	3.86 MJ/£
	Energy Efficiency	TBC
	Circular economy Material Footprint	16.6 tonnes of resources per person per year
	Circular economy Carbon Footprint	9.1 tonnes of CO ₂ e per person per year (carbon dioxide equivalent)

* First degrees and postgraduate qualifications. Indicator to be updated to include narrow STEM qualifications via Further Education College and/or Higher Level Apprenticeship route.

YEAR	SOURCE
2023	NISRA Work Quality Indicators
2022/23	NISRA Work Quality Indicators
April 2023	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
TBC	Current estimates based on experimental ONS statistics only
2022	NI R&D Survey
2022	NI R&D Survey
2020-22	NISRA Innovation Survey
Total (unique) from start	Invest NI
2021/22	DfE Higher Education Statistical Fact Sheet
2022	NISRA Inter Departmental Business Register
2022	NISRA Inter Departmental Business Register
2023	ONS Management Practices Survey
2022	NISRA – Northern Ireland Trade Statistics
2022	NISRA – Northern Ireland Trade Statistics
2023	NISRA Labour Force Survey DfE Further Education and Higher Education statistics
2021	ONS Household Regional Disposable Income
2022	NISRA Labour Force Survey
April 2023 - March 2024	DfE Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation Statistics
2022	ONS Low carbon and renewable energy economy statistics
2021	GOV.UK Total final energy consumption at regional and local authority level statistics. Note - Multiplied by 41.868 to convert it from Ktoe TJ. Denominator is GDP.
TBC	TBC
2017	NI Circularity Gap Report, Circle Economy
2017	NI Circularity Gap Report, Circle Economy

ANNEX B

	Non Ringfenced		Ringfenced
	RDEL	CDEL & FTC	RDEL
	£'000k	£'000k	£'000k
2024-25 Budget set by the Executive	766.6	225.6	470.1
DfE Internal Budget			
Core Department	386.3	161.3	465.5
Partner Organisations			
Intertrade Ireland	5.3	0.2	0.0
Tourism Ireland	17.8	0.8	0.4
Invest NI	73.4	40.9	4.3
NI Screen	20.2	0.1	0.5
Tourism NI	22.7	4.3	1.4
Labour Relations Agency	4.8	0.4	0.2
Consumer Council	1.5	-	0.0
Health and Safety Executive	7.4	0.0	0.1
FE Colleges	234.7	28.0	33.5
CITB	0.2	0.4	0.1
Stranmillis	4.6	2.0	-
Total DfE Internal Budget	779.1	238.4	506.1









Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
Geilleagair



[economy_ni](#)



[DeptEconomyNI](#)



[economy_ni](#)



[dept-for-economy-ni](#)