

AMBITION TO GROW

JANUARY 2025

FAQs

Please read these FAQs alongside our [Ambition to Grow guidance notes](#) before applying.

What is Ambition to Grow?

[Ambition to Grow](#) is a support programme aimed primarily at businesses that are not yet Invest Northern Ireland clients. Grant assistance of up to £45,000 is available to help businesses with the costs of creating new employment and selling into markets outside Northern Ireland.

When does the application call open?

The Ambition to Grow call is open from **Monday 6 January 2025, 9:00** and closes on **Friday 24 January 2025, 12noon**.

What sort of business is Ambition to Grow aimed at?

Invest NI targets manufacturing or tradeable services businesses that:

- have the potential to achieve at least 25% of sales outside Northern Ireland (or £250,000 external sales, whichever is lower) and;
- have the potential to employ at least 10 staff, within five years

Ambition to Grow support is a stepping stone to realising this potential. Although the external sales and new employment detailed above do not need to be the outcome of your Ambition to Grow project which will typically cover the next two years, it does need to be demonstrated that it is achievable within the next five years.

I sell a product that I have designed but it is manufactured elsewhere. Can I apply?

This will depend on the nature of the product as well as the level of your input to its design and ownership of any intellectual property. It would be a good idea to discuss your proposal with our Business Support Team before starting an application, they can be contacted on 0800 181 4422 or by completing an [online enquiry form](#).

What do you mean by a tradeable service?

Tradeable services refer to services that can be sold to customers on an international basis, with the customer not required to travel to the provider to avail of their services.

If you are unsure if your business provides a tradeable service, you can discuss it with our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or by completing an [online enquiry form](#).

What are Invest NI's target sectors?

Invest NI target sectors are:

- Advanced manufacturing and engineering
- Agri-food and drink
- Low carbon and green tech
- Life and health sciences
- Financial, professional, and business services
- Construction
- Digital ICT

If your business operates outside these sectors and would like to apply to Ambition to Grow, you can contact our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or by completing an [online enquiry form](#).

Who can I talk to about an application?

If you would like to discuss a potential application to Ambition to Grow, you can contact our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or by completing [online enquiry form](#).

Our Business Support Team can discuss the application process with you and help determine if Ambition to Grow is the most appropriate support for your business.

What alternative supports are available?

Invest NI has a wide range of [support available](#) for businesses including those that meet the criteria to become an Invest NI client and those that do not. More information can be provided by contacting our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or completing an [online enquiry form](#).

What do you mean by external sales?

External sales are sales made to customers who are located outside Northern Ireland. To be considered an external sale, the customers must not need to travel to Northern Ireland to access your product or service. Only sales made directly to customers outside Northern Ireland are considered external sales, indirect sales made through a Northern Ireland based distributor/wholesaler/contractor are not considered external sales.

My business does not have any sales yet, can I apply?

Ambition to Grow support is designed for businesses that are already selling or that are about to commence selling and have sufficient funding resources in place. If your business is not ready to sell, there may be more appropriate support available until such time it is selling and ready to apply for Ambition to Grow.

Contact our Business Support Team for guidance on 0800 181 4422 or by completing an [online enquiry form](#).

Does my business need to be selling outside Northern Ireland to apply?

Your business does not currently need to be selling outside Northern Ireland but does need to have a plan to generate sales from external markets. Support available through the council run [Go Succeed](#) service can help you with developing this plan/

Market research activities are key to identifying appropriate target markets and our [Business Information Centre](#) can provide access to market and sector reports to help with this research.

Does my business need to have access to other funding?

Yes. The financial support available through Ambition to Grow will only make up a small proportion of the overall investment your business will be making in new employees as well as market, product, and skills development. It is important that you have access to a level of funding that will ensure your business does not run out of cash as it invests in new growth activities. This could be existing cash in the business, investment or loan funding that has been received, cash that is projected to come from new sales or a combination of all or some of these funding sources. When assessing your application, Invest NI will consider the availability of funding and how this impacts the risk level of the proposal.

My business is already an Invest NI client, can I apply?

Existing Invest NI clients may be able to apply depending on prior support received. Speak to your client executive who will advise if an application can be submitted.

Do I have to do what I say in my application?

Yes. Grant payments to a business are linked to it carrying out activities as detailed in its application. If the activities such as creating new employment or investing in new market, product or skills development do not take place, then the grant will not be paid.

Grant support is provided through a Letter of Offer, which is a contract between Invest NI and the business. This contract includes conditions relating to grant payments and what the business needs to do and includes a provision for grant money to be repaid should the business not meet its obligations.

CREATING NEW EMPLOYMENT

Do I need to commit to creating new employment?

Yes. Businesses must create:

- At least three full-time equivalent roles paying the Real Living Wage (currently £12.60 per hour), or
- At least one full-time management role with a gross annual salary of at least £30,000.

If your business is seeking to grow into new markets but does not have an immediate employment requirement, [other support](#) may be available. More information can be provided by contacting our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 or completing an [online enquiry form](#).

Can the jobs I am proposing be part time?

If you are proposing at least three new full time equivalent positions these can be a mixture of part time (contracted for 15-30 hours per week) and full time (30+ hours per week). Each part time role is equivalent to 0.5 full time positions. As an example, two full time positions and two part time positions would be the equivalent of three full time positions.

If you are seeking support towards management positions these do need to be full time roles and contracted for a minimum of 30 hours per week.

How many new jobs can I get support towards?

Support can be provided towards up to six new full time equivalent positions or up to two full time management positions. Your application can include a mixture of management and non-management roles and provided your application passes Stage 1 the structure of proposed support will be discussed at the Stage 2 project meeting.

What if I receive an offer of support but do not create any jobs?

As Ambition to Grow is designed to assist businesses in creating new employment, if no jobs are created within the timescales detailed in the Letter of Offer there may be a request for repayment of grant money paid in whole or in part.

How long do I need to keep my new employees for?

New employment levels/positions supported through Ambition to Grow are required to be maintained for a minimum of 3 years. Otherwise, grant repayments in whole or part may be requested.

What are the criteria for a management position to be eligible for support?

Management roles must:

- Contribute to increasing sales outside of Northern Ireland
- Be full time (minimum of 30 hours per week)
- Pay a basic gross salary of at least £30,000 per year (not including bonuses, commission, overtime or shift allowances)

SELLING OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND

What do you mean by “selling outside Northern Ireland?”

Ambition to Grow aims to help businesses increase the value of sales to customers outside Northern Ireland. This includes customers based in Great Britain (GB) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) or in any other market outside Northern Ireland. These sales are also referred to as “external sales”.

Are customers who come to my premises from outside Northern Ireland counted as external sales?

No. To be considered an external sale the customer must be based outside Northern Ireland and your product or service must be able to be provided to them without the requirement for them to travel to your place of business within Northern Ireland.

My customer is a Northern Ireland based distributor/wholesaler who then sells my product outside Northern Ireland, is this an external sale?

No. Selling to a Northern Ireland based distributor or wholesaler would be classed as a local sale regardless of where they sell the product to. If you sell your product to a distributor or wholesaler based outside Northern Ireland, then this would be classed as an external sale.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

When does the call open?

The Ambition to Grow call is open from **Monday 6 January 2025, 9:00** and closes on **Friday 24 January 2025, 12noon**.

How do I apply?

An Eligibility Checker will go live on the [Ambition to Grow webpage](#) on **Monday 6 January 2025, 9:00**.

If your business is eligible to apply you will then be given access to an application form through the MYINI online portal. You are also required to upload accounts for your business and personal identification documents, this can all be done through the MYINI portal as part of the application process.

How long will it take to complete the application?

The length of time it takes to complete the application will vary and will depend on how much of the required information you have readily available. If you have recently completed a business plan and financial projections, you should be able to complete the application quicker than someone who does not have these prepared.

What happens when I complete the application?

It is important that you submit your application before the closing date of Friday 24 January 2025, 12noon. When submitted, it will be assessed by your local Invest NI team and our aim is to have outcome notification emails issued within 4 weeks of the call closing.

Can I save my application and return to it later?

Yes. You are encouraged to regularly save your application, and you can update it at any time prior to submitting before the call window closes.

What do you mean by a two-stage process?

The application process is split into two stages.

The first stage is the application form which is assessed, and a score awarded. The highest-ranking successful applicants are invited to the second stage which is an in-person meeting to discuss the proposal and additional information and/or clarification may be sought during this meeting which is scored on a pass/fail basis. On passing the second stage, and subject to successful Know Your Customer checks, an offer of grant support is issued to the business.

GRANT SUPPORT

What level of grant can I expect to receive?

The actual amount of grant offered per applicant will depend on the level of new employment and proposed spend related to new market, product, and skills development activities.

1a. Employment Grant

If support is being provided towards increasing employment levels by between three and six new full time equivalent positions, the grant will be £5,000 per new Full Time Equivalent position up to a maximum of £30,000.

1b. Management Salary Grant

If support is being provided towards creating new management positions, the grant will be up to 40% of 12 months' salary costs, up to a maximum of £15,000 per position and a maximum of £30,000 in total.

2. Development Grant

Support for market, product, or skills development activities at a rate of up to 50%, with a maximum grant of £10,000.

3. Revenue Grant

A payment of £5,000 paid on completion of an export marketing plan, [Innovate NI Self-Assessment](#), and Invest NI [Export Health Check](#).

Each successful applicant will receive an offer of support consisting of an employment related element (1a or 1b), a development element (2) and a revenue element (3).

The maximum level of grant that can be offered under Ambition to Grow is £45,000 per applicant with the level and type of grant support proposed confirmed at the second stage project meeting.

What activities does the grant support cover?

The various elements of the grant are designed to incentivise different types of activities.

The Employment Grant element is designed to support the business with the costs of creating good new jobs that pay at least the Real Living Wage which is currently £12.60 per hour.

The Management Salary Grant is designed to support the business with the costs of creating new management position(s) that will directly contribute to increased sales to customers outside Northern Ireland.

The Development Grant is designed to assist with the costs of investing in new market, product, or skills development activities. Market development activities can include attending trade shows, developing a new brand or packaging for a new market, or engaging specialist consultancy to ensure the business is properly prepared to enter new markets.

Product development activities can include the cost of registering a trademark for an external market, engaging a third-party specialist to ensure a product meets the requirements of an external market, or obtaining quality standards required to target new markets e.g., ISO or SALSA accreditation. Skills development activities can include the costs of staff training or qualifications related to selling outside Northern Ireland e.g., sales pitch training.

The Revenue Grant is designed to incentivise the business to focus more on exporting and innovation than it is at present.

When do I receive the grant?

The various elements of the Ambition to Grow grant are paid in slightly different ways.

The Employment Grant is paid when each new employee contributes to an increase in overall headcount and goes through company payroll, usually after they have been employed for one month.

The Management Salary Grant is paid against salary costs incurred over a period of 12 months against the supported position. Once three months' salary has been paid an agreed percentage of these costs can be claimed for, and this is then repeated a further three times on a quarterly basis to cover the full 12-month period.

The Development Grant is paid against costs incurred against eligible activities. When cost is incurred and the activity takes place e.g., a trade show outside Northern Ireland, the business can claim back an agreed percentage of the cost and can submit a claim every three months until the grant is fully claimed.

The Revenue Grant is paid as a lump sum on completion of the required activities.

OTHER

If my application is successful, how do I access other Invest NI support?

Successful applicants will be assigned a client executive who will work with your business to assist you in using your Ambition to Grow support and to identify any other areas where Invest NI can help.

What are Know Your Customer (KYC) checks?

KYC checks are an analysis of information relating to a business and the individuals involved in its operation that ensure the fullest picture of its current situation and historical activities is available to Invest NI. KYC checks include credit searches and analysis of publicly available databases to ensure the awarding of grant support is the correct decision.

Does my business need to be registered in Northern Ireland to be able to apply?

Although it does not need to be registered in Northern Ireland your business does need to already be operating in Northern Ireland with at least one Director residing here to be able to apply to Ambition to Grow.

Can my business apply if I sell my products online?

If your business uses online selling as a sales channel for products that it manufactures, then it can apply if all other eligibility criteria are met. This is different from online retail which is an activity not eligible for support through Ambition to Grow and relates to the buying of products to sell via an e-commerce website or online sales platform.