Grow your business in Northern Ireland

Cyber Security and Software - Webinar transcript

Presenter	Eire Dunne, Business Development Manager, Invest Northern Ireland
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About this transcript
This document follows the spoken recording. Timestamps mark natural content sections and are provided to support navigation.

Opening

00:00 - 01:02

Eire Dunne: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining. My name is Eire Dunne and I am a Business Development Manager with Invest Northern Ireland's GB Investment Team, where I work with companies exploring growth and investment opportunities in Northern Ireland. Over the next fifteen minutes, I'd like to discuss a challenge many cyber security and software firms are currently facing. How do you continue to scale capability, accelerate innovation, and remain competitive without simply increasing cost?

Eire Dunne: This isn't a presentation about incentives or relocation. It's a discussion about talent, growth, innovation and how leading cyber security and software firms are increasingly rethinking where they build and scale their operations. I want to share some of the trends we're seeing in the market, why Northern Ireland is becoming an increasingly attractive location for cyber security, software, and technology firms, and how Invest Northern Ireland can help organisations explore that opportunity.

Cyber security and software firms are under pressure to grow differently

01:05 - 01:56

Eire Dunne: Let's start with what we're hearing from leadership teams across the cyber security and software sectors. The challenge isn’t growth itself, it's how to continue scaling while maintaining innovation, delivery quality and profitability. Competition for specialist talent remains intense. Technology cycles continue to accelerate.

Eire Dunne: Clients expect more responsiveness, flexibility and value than they ever have before, and organisations are under pressure to grow capability without losing the culture, quality and agility that helped make them successful in the first place. For many firms today, the challenge is no longer winning business. It's finding the talent, expertise and delivery capacity needed to support growth effectively and sustainably.

What we are seeing in the market

01:58 - 03:07

Eire Dunne: There are three clear trends reshaping the cyber security and software sectors. First, security, resilience and client expectations continue to rise. Organisations are expected to deliver more secure, more resilient and more sophisticated technology solutions than ever before. Secondly, nearshoring is increasingly replacing traditional offshoring models.

Eire Dunne: Cost remains important, but firms are placing greater emphasis on collaboration, quality, oversight and operational control. Third, competition for specialist talent continues to intensify. Whether it's software engineering, cyber security, AI, cloud infrastructure, DevOps or data analytics, demand for specialist skills continues to grow faster than supply does. Put simply, the conversation has shifted.

Eire Dunne: It's no longer about finding the cheapest location. It's about finding the right combination of talent, value, innovation, and scale.

Industry trends favouring nearshoring

03:08 - 04:12

Eire Dunne: Here's some data that reinforces the shift that we've been discussing. Last year, 56% of large European and US organisations invested in reshoring or nearshoring activity. At the same time, 81% of CEOs and COOs reported plans to bring operations closer to their primary markets. Why does this matter for cyber security and software firms?

Eire Dunne: Because proximity supports stronger collaboration. It enables faster decision making, it improves connectivity between delivery teams, customers and stakeholders. And it helps organisations balance cost, control and innovation. For software development, cyber operations and technology functions, firms increasingly recognise that the lowest cost solution isn't always the best.

Eire Dunne: The most successful organisations are now looking for the right balance between cost, talent, quality, and scalability. And that is where Northern Ireland enters the conversation.

How Northern Ireland aligns with today’s priorities

04:15 - 06:10

Eire Dunne: Northern Ireland aligns particularly well with what cyber security and software firms are looking for today. Firstly, talent. Access to highly skilled graduates and experienced professionals across software engineering, cyber security, AI, data analytics and cloud technologies, as well as digital transformation. Secondly, value. On average, operating costs here are around 40-55% lower than other parts of Western Europe.

Eire Dunne: Businesses here benefit from a 40% reduction in typical salary costs compared to London, and a 30% reduction compared to Dublin. Thirdly, the ecosystem. Belfast was named the UK Silicon Valley of the Future by Samsung UK in 2024. Cyber security and software are already established sectors here.

Eire Dunne: From global technology companies and cyber security specialists to high-growth indigenous firms, Northern Ireland has developed a strong and connected technology ecosystem. Around 60% of new investors choose to reinvest here, which demonstrates the strength of the region as a long-term growth location. Many firms are also making the most of the fact that Northern Ireland is an easily accessible location. Our capital city, Belfast, is only an hour away from London by air and only two hours from Ireland's capital, Dublin, by rail and road.

Eire Dunne: The region has three airports and there are regular flights to a variety of European business locations. And finally, scalability. Organisations can establish a focused capability, validate the model and then scale over time as demand grows. Together, these strengths provide firms with a practical route to sustainable growth.

Deep and diverse talent

06:11 - 07:45

Eire Dunne: One of the biggest concerns for any executive team today is talent sustainability. Can we recruit today? Can we recruit next year? And can we continue to recruit at scale? In the cyber and software sectors, those questions have become even more important as demand for digital skills continue to grow.

Eire Dunne: That's where Northern Ireland's talent pipeline becomes a real differentiator. At the heart of that pipeline are two excellent universities. Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland's Russell Group university, develops talent across computer science, cyber security, AI, data analytics and engineering disciplines. And alongside that, Ulster University is a major source of digital and computing talent, with campuses in both Belfast, Coleraine and Derry/Londonderry helping to support employers across the region.

Eire Dunne: That pipeline is strengthened further by our network of further education colleges, providing practical, industry-focused routes into software development, cyber security, digital technologies and IT careers. Together, these institutions help create a deep and diverse talent pool that supports both high-growth technology companies and established global organisations. Importantly, we are seeing increased demand for software engineering, cyber security, AI, data analytics, cloud technologies, and digital transformation skills. These are exactly the areas where companies are investing as they innovate, scale and prepare for the future.

The ecosystem behind the talent

07:48 - 09:17

Eire Dunne: Of course, talent on its own is only part of the story. What really strengthens Northern Ireland's proposition is the ecosystem that sits behind the talent. The region benefits from close collaboration between academia, industry and government, helping organisations access expertise, innovation and support as they grow. In cyber security, CSIT, the UK's Innovation and Knowledge Centre for Cyber Security, combines world-class research with industry collaboration and innovation to support sector growth.

Eire Dunne: In artificial intelligence, the £16.3 million pound Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre, also known as the AICC, is helping businesses accelerate AI adoption, build capability in data analytics and machine learning, and unlock new opportunities for innovation and growth. And through Software NI, organisations gain access to a strong industry network representing Northern Ireland's £1.7 billion software sector and connecting technology companies, industry leaders and key stakeholders. Together, these organisations create an environment where talent can be developed, innovation can be accelerated, and businesses can scale with confidence.

Eire Dunne: That's a key reason why Northern Ireland has become an increasingly attractive location for cyber security, software and technology investment.

Northern Ireland helps de-risk growth

09:20 - 10:15

Eire Dunne: If there's one theme that comes up repeatedly in conversations with technology leaders today, it's risk. How do we continue to grow without creating delivery risk? How do we access talent without creating recruitment risk? How do we scale without creating operational risk?

Eire Dunne: Everything we've discussed today ultimately comes back to those questions. Northern Ireland helps address talent risk through access to specialist software engineering, cyber security, AI and data capability. It helps address margin pressure through a more competitive cost base. It helps reduce concentration by enabling organisations to diversify beyond a single location, and it reduces scalability by allowing teams to grow gradually and expand in line with business demand.

Eire Dunne: Ultimately, Northern Ireland provides a lower-risk route to sustainable growth.

Northern Ireland by the numbers

10:17 - 11:16

Eire Dunne: The numbers provide further confidence. Northern Ireland isn't an emerging technology location, it's an already proven one. Belfast is ranked the number one UK city for US research and development investment, demonstrating the strength of the region's innovation ecosystem. Today, more than 1,500 international companies operate successfully here.

Eire Dunne: Northern Ireland is also ranked the second most attractive UK region for software investment in Western Europe, highlighting its growing reputation among international technology companies. And perhaps more importantly, there are now more than 38,000 people employed in technology-related roles across the region, providing a substantial and experienced talent base for businesses looking to grow. These aren't indicators of potential. They're indicators of a mature, established and internationally recognised technology ecosystem.

Proof it works

11:18 - 11:57

Eire Dunne: Perhaps the strongest evidence is who's already here. Across cyber security, software development, AI, cloud and digital technology services, many globally recognised organisations have already established significant operations in Northern Ireland. These companies are delivering critical work, supporting global customers and continuing to invest. The question is no longer whether technology firms can successfully build capability in Northern Ireland. The question is, if your competitors are already benefiting from what Northern Ireland has to offer, why aren’t you?

Case study introduction

12:00 - 12:16

Eire Dunne: Rather than hearing any more from me, I'd like you to hear directly from an organisation that has chosen Northern Ireland and experienced the benefits firsthand. This short example highlights what successful growth in Northern Ireland can look like in practice.

Embedded client case study video

12:16 - 14:05

Greg Watson (CEO, Napier AI): My name is Greg Watson. I'm the CEO here at Napier AI, so we would class ourselves as a next generation regulatory technology company really aimed at solving what is a blight on society, which is money laundering, where $3.2 trillion a year is laundered. So the money launderers are very successful but we believe AI can start to get the jump on them. So we're headquartered in London. We have about 225 people currently globally, from Australia through the Middle East, the Nordics into the US. So it really is a global business, and we wanted to move away from a really London-centric model because we felt there was talent all over the world that we could leverage. So we came to Belfast after a really extensive search over about 18 months and then working with Invest NI was really the edge, you know, and I would recommend to any other country or government that they should have something similar, because that was the difference in terms of the support, you know, the research, the facilitation, you know, the ability to hook into the universities. You know, I think it's been fantastic for us. There's a framework there, there's a well-trodden path, there's experts, there's people you can talk to, you can reference and I think that just gives you a comfort level that is just, you know, so much different from, you know, looking at a location by yourself.

Greg Watson: With financial crime compliance, what we're trying to do is automate out the manual activity, which means that there are humans involved in the process always, but they're doing much more interesting work so the roles here are super high end. We're going to hire over 100 people here as we look for new opportunities to do more in this location. I think the thing that made the edge for us here, clearly the skill set, I think that's the thing that stood out. When you factor those things in with the support of Invest NI, I think for us it just became a no-brainer.

Case study reflection and Invest NI support

14:05 - 15:32

Eire Dunne: What I particularly like about this story is how it demonstrates the combination of talent, scalability and long-term commitment that Northern Ireland can provide. So what support looks like as an Invest NI client. This is where Northern Ireland becomes different. We're the economic development agency for Northern Ireland and our role is very simple - to make investment decisions easier.

Eire Dunne: For organisations considering Northern Ireland, we offer what I like to describe as a red carpet concierge service. We'll help assess talent availability. We'll connect you with universities, recruitment partners and key stakeholders. We'll help identify property and location options.

Eire Dunne: We'll introduce you to the companies already operating successfully in Northern Ireland. We'll help you understand the wider technology ecosystem and what support may be available to underpin your growth plans. In short, we do everything that we can to de-risk and accelerate your journey from initial conversation right through to operational delivery. Competition for specialist technology talent will only intensify over the coming years.

Eire Dunne: The firms that succeed will be those that can access exceptional people, continue to innovate and scale effectively, and that is exactly what we're helping organisations to achieve today.

Closing

15:34 - 16:47

Eire Dunne: I'll leave you with one final thought. Most cyber security and software firms today are trying to solve the same equation. How do we access great talent, accelerate innovation, manage costs, and continue to scale? Northern Ireland gives organisations an opportunity to achieve all four.

Eire Dunne: You gain access to a highly skilled workforce. You benefit from a competitive operating environment. You remain close to customers, decision-makers and key markets. And you have a partner in Invest Northern Ireland committed to helping make that journey as straightforward and successful as possible.

Eire Dunne: Like I say, if your competitors are already benefiting from what Northern Ireland has to offer, perhaps now is the time to see what it could do for your organisation. Whether you're actively exploring expansion opportunities or simply just curious about what's possible, we'd love to start a conversation. If you have any queries or questions following this webinar, we would be delighted to hear from you. You can email us directly at gbinvestment@investni.com or, to make things even easier, simply scan the QR code and it will do it for you.

Eire Dunne: Thank you very much for your time.