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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Moderator: Let's talk now to Moira Lochran, Moira is the head of Northern Ireland Connections, who's joined today by Gavin Core, one of our diaspora, joining us from New York, Rachel McGoukin, director of business development at Visit Belfast, John Harken, from Alchemy Technology Services, based in Derry, who's joining us virtually. As well as Laura Montgomery, who is described here as a returner to Northern Ireland, so as many of those that we can embrace I think at any one time. Moira I'll hand things over to you then, as you look after our next discussion, which is all around making those connections, people coming home, celebrating the best of what makes us that little bit more special, thank you Moira.

Moderator: Thank you very much Karen for that great introduction and I'm delighted to be hosting this final panel session today, which is focussed on the power of the diaspora, something that we've heard quite a lot about throughout the day. So before-, without further ado, I'm actually going to jump straight in and invite some of our virtual guests because, we're very privileged to have Gavin Core joining us this, this afternoon, from New York. Gavin, you're very, very welcome, and I know you have another work commitment to get to, so we'll kick the session off with you if that's okay. Perhaps if we could start by hearing a little bit about, about your journey from your, your home in County Armagh, where you-, where you were born and bred, through to New York where you are today. Could you tell us a little bit about that career journey?

M: Hey Moira, good morning, well it's good morning here I guess. Thanks for taking the time and thanks for inviting us along to this, it's, it's a critical factor for us, the relationships that we have between here and New York, and the team we have in Belfast. It's been something that's really, anchored all of the business that I've done and my career over the last few years. I went to Queen's for my undergrad, and then postgrad at UU, or Ulster as it's now called, and I was one of the first cohort of folks to join First Derivatives way back in the late '90s, and the first, from First Derivatives to start expanding that business into the US, first in California and then up to, to New York in 2001. It was-, it's a very interesting journey, and it's-, we were actually having a conversation about this last week, we had a-, we sponsored an event here which was the Irish-American 40 under 40, and we were talking a lot about shared experience of those people in the room that had done some-, still, you know maintained those coast ties, back with Belfast and with home. It mainly comes down to a guy called Brian Conlen, who started First Derivatives back in 1998, and Brian was the, really the first, sort of, outward expansion from Northern Ireland to the rest of the world. Whereas, I think, if you look at the success that City and Liberty IT have had, it's, it's the other way, they realised that there were a lot of high quality graduates and, kind of, smart people in the room, and came in and found places for them. Brian went over to London and came back and said, 'You know what, we can do this the other way, we can grow a company from here.' And, we

were very fortunate, and, you know, timing is everything, and, you know, First Derivatives has gone from strength to strength.

I joined then a company over here, called Gemstone, which is now part of Pivotal, I was-, he owned another company called Cycle Computing, which is now Microsoft's high performance computer, and every time we went through the journey, we did ties back to Belfast. I ran an options trading business for a bank called Cowen, Cowen now has 75 people in Belfast, with a New York Stock Exchange bought Wombat Consulting, or Wombat Market Data way back when, with Danny Muir, who was the CEO of Wombat. We worked very closely with Invest NI to do, what was then the biggest inward investment from the US into Europe, which was the, the 450 people into Belfast. So it's always been a great anchor for me, we have been very fortunate in, you know, the ties that you have with, Invest NI are able to, to sort of, localise and bring knowledge and, assistance to anybody who's moving into that space. So we've been very, very fortunate in having that support multiple times, but at the end of the day it comes down to people, we have always had a fantastic experience in the quality of the people that we have, you know, been fortunate enough to work with, and that, skillset. I mean, Queen's and Ulster with the platform that they have, they do a very good job around education, and there is a mindset that we can now, compete with anybody and our opinion is as valid as anybody else's, and maybe, twenty years ago, that wasn't the case. So it's been a great journey for me, I've been very fortunate, and, it, it's all about people.

And the other thing that I would say, and the importance of this particular session Moira is that when I came to New York first, really in 2000, 2001, there were a lot of people from home, who reached out, and gave me support when I had no idea what I was doing, and it's important, I think for many of us to, sort of, to keep that tradition going. I mean Sean Kelly was the global COO of KPMG at the time, and I was a know nothing 30 year old, and, he, kind of, took me under his wing, we, we had fortunate help from, you know John O'Donohue, who's one of the Queen's representatives here. And that kind of community and-, is, it's fantastic to see, and it's one that we want to keep as active as possible, as we can over the next few years.

Moderator: That's super Gavin, thank you, and great to hear, you talking about the talent and the people, and the importance of the people, it's something that we've heard so much about today. Gavin, reflecting on that global experience, that international experience that you've talked about, you referred to retaining connections to Belfast and to back home, was it important for you to give something back, to give something back here to Northern Ireland?

M: You know, I, I think I was lucky, in terms of people that looked after me through the process, and, you know, they were always very much of the mindset that you should always do what you can, to, to sort of, give back. I, I would love to tell you that I was that noble, but my mindset was significantly more selfish, I knew that I could get really good people back in Belfast, and that they would, kind of, enjoy the work that we were doing. So that was the first thought, you know, we have been very lucky, I mean, I think four times with Invest NI we've set up companies back in Belfast and every one of them has been

successful. Is that giving back? I'm not sure, but it really is-, it's been a great journey for us. And I will say that the community, that is here, in New York, that is the expats, really do stick together, they're-, we, where we can, we try to do advisory work for companies or governments or anyone in that space, and it's-, it is very rewarding to do that. But, the giving back was not really the first-, the first thought.

Moderator: And just on that theme Gavin, of the community that you refer to, I'm really interested in your thoughts on that, and on the important role that, that the diaspora community and diaspora networks have to play, in helping our local companies export but, but also, in really promoting Northern Ireland as a great destination for investment and for doing business. What are your thoughts on that?

M: I, I think it's critical, I mean, it was an interesting-, you know it's been an interesting journey personally, because when I came here, first, a lot of, kind of, what would have been the folks that had been here twenty years, has left, right smack bang in the middle of the troubles. So when they were having conversations about what was going on back in Belfast, from a business perspective, or a technology perspective, their, perception of what was happening in Belfast was coloured by their own experience at the time that they left. But if you look now, that group, has changed their mind completely, and a lot of the people who came over here, you know, 30, 40 years ago, actually are now some of the strongest advocates for, for Belfast, and, and ties back home to Northern Ireland. It's always important to have people that can, you know, walk you through the steps and try to help you, miss the, maybe the pitfalls that they fell into, here it's-, the sense of pride of being from home, is, is still key, and a lot of people will make introductions on that basis. There is a trust in, inherent within that group of people, who, will always go out of their way to put their, you know, their money where their mouth is, in terms of, of introduction, or kind of, sponsorship, or making sure that you get the help you need along the way. And, maybe that's more important to me, but that giving back is critical, we, we got to make sure that we always maintain that, that tie and you know, I spent a few years at Google, and Google is, is very much a West Coast mentality. So that kind of tradition and network is maybe not something that they embrace as much, and it was interesting to see it kick off again as soon as I got right back out again. So yes, the community and the ties back home are critical from that point of view.

Moderator: Thank you so much, Gavin, that's super, and in the interests of time, I'm going to move on to one of our next guests here on stage, Rachel from Visit Belfast, you're very welcome here. And actually that's a very nice intro, because I know that the importance of diaspora and the contribution that they can make to our future economic growth is something that really resonates with you. We heard this morning, from Minister Lyons, talking about the importance of the 10X economy, and of course, business tourism is a, a very strong element within that, and the ability to attract international meetings and events to Northern Ireland, and the contribution that that can make to our economy. And recently, an initiative was launched here, the ambassador circle, and Rachel, I know you're going to tell us a little bit more about that, what exactly is the ambassador circle?

F: Great, thanks Moira and thanks for the opportunity to speak to everyone today. We've heard a lot

today, that really, the best way to showcase Northern Ireland as a place to do business, to work, live, study and invest, is really about inviting the global decision makers, and industry here to experience that first hand. And business events and international conferences are a brilliant way to do that, because they actually bring all of the global ecosystem and decision makers, of an industry together in one place. And our job at Visit Belfast is to make that place Northern Ireland, but we can't do it alone, we do have a dedicated team, who's day job it is to bid for and attract media conferences and events here. But we really rely on ambassadors, many of your represented here, in the room along with Mark and a number of others, and the diaspora, because we need to be credible in a sector whenever we're going to bring that event here to Northern Ireland. And that credibility comes from the talent in this room, and the amazing work that you all do, whether it's cybersecurity, precision medicine. So we do all of the heavy lifting, but we really need an army of ambassadors who can help us sell Northern Ireland, in that sector, make a connection and give us some advice. So, that's really why we set up the ambassador circle, to put some structure around that, and really focus on the big, game-changing events, aligned to the 10X sectors, that we can attract here.

Moderator: Thank you Rachel, and, are you taking a new approach to what you're doing, because the ambassador circle was around previously, but, I believe what you're doing is entirely new, and there is a new approach to this. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

F: That's right yes, so the ambassador circle the, it-, we know that the concept works, we have worked with ambassadors for twenty years, and in that time we've brought over £400 million of business events to the local economy, and that's just on tourism spend. So it is really lucrative, and important business for the local economy, but I think the big changes we've made, there's three or four, first of all, we're expanding it out regionally. So we used to have a programme in Belfast, a programme in Derry, and now we're really working at an NI level to make sure that we can really bring events that deliver for the entire region. The second thing is that we are working hard to expand it internationally, there's a huge opportunity through the Invest NI global offices, and through our fantastic diaspora, to do more, so we'd like to do that. And the third thing is that we're being really focussed now around 10X, and we're also being focussed on the fact, it's not just getting the event that's-, it's the win, it's about how do we make sure there's a legacy from that event, how do we make sure that that cybersecurity event creates opportunities for the universities, for FDI, for trade, export? So it's really about those wider benefits, not just the bums in beds, benefits of tourism which are really important, but it's actually a lot more than that as well.

Moderator: And just on the benefits, can we explore that a little bit further, what are the benefits, what are the tangible benefits of bringing those business events here to Northern Ireland?

F: Great question, so, in terms of-, there's a number so if I start with tourism, that's the obvious one, if you think about our tourism economy, and certainly the pandemic I think has put that into sharp focus. Business events bring mid-week, year round visitors to Northern Ireland, so that's really important, they spend four times more as well, so it's really important, in terms of the trading mix of our hotels, our bars, our restaurants, that business cannot be sustained on leisure alone, and Summer business alone. We need

that year round business, and of course, fantastic venues like the ICC Belfast here today. So that's a tourism reason, and that's a big one, and an average event actually bring £1,000,000 to the local economy, so it's really, really, important, and that's a big job creation element as well. But secondly, if we think about export, if you think about, you know, we talked to a brilliant panel there, about export earlier, but actually events bring customers here, and isn't that really powerful, if we can be really smart and attract those events that bring customers to the doorstep, create opportunities for our local companies. And a brilliant example is Colin Williams who many of you will know from Sixteen South, by accident, and not design, we brought the European Cartoon Finance Conference here, very random, in 2014, but that brought a lot of VCs, working in creative industries together. He then got an opportunity and a contract worth £1,000,000 with Nick Jr, and he attended that conference every year, and it was only whenever it came here, he got that deal over the line.

And then if I look at research and investment, we work with University of Ulster, and one of our ambassadors there Professor Tara Moore, who many of you may know, she secured a media research contract, about £400,000 I think, with a precision medicine company, just after speaking at an event. And they've gone on to invest and it's worth about £1 million. So, that's on the research idea. And it creates opportunities for investors and showcasing our universities and our talent. And then, finally, if we look at our FDI companies here, we know that Invest NI and the companies here have done a brilliant job of attracting major global business, but there's also a job then to retain that and to grow and scale that investment. So, we've worked with Jackie in Deloitte and Pinsent Masons, Taricks (ph 16.30), Baker Tilly Mooney Moore to bring their global leadership teams over here to show-, I think we've heard a lot about the people here today, to show the talent, to say, 'This is why the Northern Ireland operation works, and here's how we can scale that operation.' So, I think there's, there's quite a lot of benefits there.

Moderator: So, a, a real range of fantastic opportunities, Rachel. And I know that there are some in the room here today who are already involved in the ambassador circle, you mentioned some of them, but we're-, I'm also aware there are many people dialling in today from, from all parts of the world, what would you say to any of them who would like to find out a little bit more or maybe like to get involved with the ambassador circle?

F: Well, I'll just, I suppose, hopefully reassure people that, you know, you're all incredibly busy in your day jobs, it isn't a lot of work, we do this, this is our day job, this is what we're targeted to do. So, we're gonna do the heavy lifting on the event, but I think what my ask would be, just to think about potential events that you think we should be bidding for, that you think would actually benefit Northern Ireland. And, you know, occasionally, you know, make an introduction, open a door, that would be really, really helpful for us. And I think the other thing is, you know, you may not actually have an event or an opportunity right now, but now that you maybe understand how powerful business events can be and how they can showcase Northern Ireland, I'm pretty sure you will come up against an opportunity, and hopefully contact us and we can help you.

Moderator: Great, thank you so much, Rachel. I'm going to now jump back to our virtual panellist,

and a very, very big, warm welcome to John Harkin, who's dialling in from Derry. John, very welcome, particularly because I know that you've gone to a lot of effort to really fit this into your very tight schedule today. You'll literally just, within moments, returned from an event in the city, the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce event, where I know that your company, Alchemy Technology Services, was the sponsor, so I really hope that event went well for you and for all involved in the north-west today. John, you returned to Derry a number of years ago to start up that business, Alchemy Technology Services, can you tell us a little bit about when you left Derry, your career journey, and what has brought you full circle back to your home city?

M: Sure, thanks for the opportunity to get involved, it was my pleasure to fit this in. I left in 1981, I think at the end of the movie, Belfast, the comment on those that stayed, those that left and those that were lost, I was one that left, and I went to study computer science in London. That took me on a career around the world as an IT consultant first with KPMG and other household names, like PwC and others, other large SIN (ph 19.29) consulting firms. I, I then specialised in the insurance sector when I ran a number of insurance software companies. And it was really Invest NI that reached out to me, a Derry girl working in London, Julie-Anne Brace (ph 19.45) , took me for coffee over, as she explained to me, it was a three-year period, I had no idea it was that long, but I was a slow-, a slow responder, I think. But I had a very good business idea, and, you know, Invest NI brought me back to these shores, unlike, unlike your previous speaker there, Gavin, I'd lost touch, really. So, it was a great re-introduction back to what, what basically is my homeland, and the rest is history.

Moderator: And, John, why did you choose to bring Alchemy to Derry?

M: Well, I'd written down here on my notepad 'the people', interestingly enough, which seems to be a theme that'd come up today in, in, in your conference. When, when Invest NI brought us along, we, we decided to look at the north-west region, which is where I was from, and we, we actually asked to meet with students from Ulster University, North West Regional College and some, some of those areas. And we had focus groups, and we talked to them about our concept and the company, and would, would this be something they'd be excited and interested in as a career. And, and they were wonderful interactions. The other thing really was the collaborative nature we saw amongst the, the different groups that we'd be working with. So, the public sector, the private sector and academia, they really did give us a very clear commitment in a collaborative way, that they would help us succeed. And that has proven to be the case, there's no question about it, and we, we have many people to thank for that. So, so, so that was-, that was wonderful. And then I guess the last thing, let's, let's not beat around the bush, we, we wanted to do things well, and at that time it was gonna be really expensive for us to train people to the global standard we needed them to, the, the-, you know, we talked-, we called the company Alchemy, the, the base metal was there, but we wanted to turn it into gold. And so that took money, time, effort and support from the department, the economy and, and Invest NI. So, that, that absolutely was part of the formula for success.

Moderator: Thank you, John, and, and you're right, the, the theme of the people and the talent is absolutely something that is coming through so strongly right, right throughout today. And, and I know in Alchemy you have created and, and continue to create some really exciting job

opportunities, and, and pathways into technology roles. Could you share some insights as to how you've done that and the approach that you've taken to doing so?

M: Yeah, I know it's hard to say 'exciting' and 'insurance' in the same sentence, but, but in reality, the technology transformation going on in the insurance industry is second-to-none. All the leading age technologies are being used to bring that industry right up to date. So, for technology people, it's very, very exciting. Fundamentally, I would say the only product we have is our people, so to be successful, clearly you've got to find an opportunity that's, that's exciting and that's, as we would say in the industry, very sticky, as in that skill-set is in great demand. And to bring new, fresh talent into the insurance industry is, is a wonderful, welcomed opportunity from the industry. So, we are-, we are seen and held in high esteem by both the software providers and the insurance companies there, we're seen as a breath of fresh air bringing in this new talent. And, and then to train them and not cut corners but get them to the highest standard so that our individuals can reach their true potential. So, we had a vision for our people, much bigger than the vision they had for themselves, in all honesty, and they have risen to the challenge. The feedback we get from our clients is always about the people, and it's always about the great attitude and skill-set, and I think that's the foundation for our success.

Moderator: Thank you, John. Very quick final question 'cause I'm conscious we're slightly pushed for time, but I'm really keen to know what would you say to anyone out there who's, who's listening in today and is thinking about coming back to Northern Ireland to start up a business? What would your advice be to them?

M: Oh my goodness, you know, I'm, I'm so pleased we made that decision, I'm pleased for myself and my family, they absolutely love living in Northern Ireland. You know, I left in very difficult circumstances back in 1981, but it's-, but it's such a marvellous environment to live and, and grow in and bring up your children. Well, the facilities, the countryside, the, the sea and the north coast, it's just-, it's just unbelievably good. The quality of lifestyle is, is second-to-none, and I've lived just about everywhere in the world that there is to live. I, I would also say that, that fundamentally, it's an exciting thing to do, you know, it's a vibrant environment here that's going through dramatic change. And to contribute to that and be part of it, all, all of our staff that signed up to Alchemy, we have a less than 5% attrition rate, which is outstanding, really, because the staff have shared in our mission to help with the socioeconomic recovery of Northern Ireland, and they want to be part of that story and that journey. So, it's, it's a-, it's a wonderful place to work and live in, and it's great to be part of this transformation.

Moderator: John, thank you so much for sharing your insights, and certainly you're making me feel like I'm ready for a trip back up to the north-west and, and the north coast. Thank you. Moving on to our final panellist this afternoon, Laura, Laura Montgomery is joining us from Almac, you're very welcome, Laura. And, Laura, our panel this afternoon and indeed throughout the day, we've heard a lot from our diaspora, who have been away and have led investments back into Northern Ireland, have influenced investments or the likes of John who've been away and come back and set up a business. But, increasingly, we're hearing about more and more people who are locating here for the first time or returning back here to avail of some of the fantastic job

opportunities across all of our growth sectors. And you were one of those people that went away and came back.

F: I was, yeah.

Moderator: Can you tell us a little bit about your experience and your, your journey?

F: Sure. So, I studied in Scotland for five years, and then I came back to Northern Ireland, actually, for a year to, kind of, figure out what I wanted to do. And I didn't really know, as a lot of people don't, and myself and my now husband decided that we would move to Manchester. I took a graduate role there, he wanted to train in, kind of, a different trade. So, we moved over there just the two of us, hadn't really a clue what we were doing or what we were going into or anything, and we stayed there for seven years, we became quite settled there. I stayed in the same job, he got a job, and we liked it. And then I think something just, sort of, triggered in us and we thought, 'We need to start thinking about starting a family, perhaps. You know, what's our future going to be like? What are we gonna do in the long-term?' And we started to look at opportunities back home. And I was lucky enough to find a job which was at the same sort of level, the same sort of industry that I was working in, and I, I got the job, and then we moved back, and we've been back now about-, I suppose about seven or eight years. So.

Moderator: And, and, Laura, you work for Almac.

F: I do, yes.

Moderator: Can you tell us was it difficult when you came back here first to find a job? And now that you've been back for a number of years, are there opportunities in a-, opportunities for career progression within the life and health sciences sector and in Northern Ireland in general? What are your, your thoughts on that?

F: I think probably at the time when that was-, so seven or eight years ago, when I moved back or definitely whenever I left there wasn't a lot of opportunity there, sort of, fourteen, fifteen years ago, I think things were very different then. I think when I came back maybe seven or eight years ago, I think things were starting to pick up. I was very lucky to find that role that I have in Almac, just in terms of the, kind of, I guess, the niche that I-, that I worked in, you know, over in, in Manchester. And that I was able to have, you know, those transferable skills to be able to get a job, you know, of that level, and with the opportunities that I've had with Almac, it's, it's been fantastic. But I would say now I think it's completely different, I think there are so many opportunities here, I think there's so many exciting things happening in Northern Ireland, and I would encourage, you know, anybody that's, that's been away or that is not originally from here, you know, to look-, to look at it as a potential place to come and have a career and live. You know, as John said, it's such a fantastic place to live, and if you can do that while advancing in

your career, and having those opportunities then I think, you know, you definitely should.

Moderator: So, I take it it was a-, it was a good move for you coming back, Laura. You live quite close to Omagh.

F: I do, yes.

Moderator: And you now do have a young family.

F: I do.

Moderator: What would you say to anyone who's listening who's perhaps thinking of moving back or making that move back to Northern Ireland? What advice would you have?

F: I'd say-, well, there's lots of things to consider, obviously, I mean, it was a-, it was a big move for us to come back, but the two main areas, I suppose, are really, obviously, like, your career and, you know, what you want to do in the future. And in that area I would say, you know, thinking outside the box as well because, you know, I-, I think for me I was always, sort of, thinking, 'This is the-, you know, I'm in-, I'm in research within healthcare, this is what I always have to do,' but I think you need to think about, you know, what skills are maybe transferable. Like, could you go to a different industry, like, for example, within Almac, you know, we're life sciences, but there's, there's-, we employ so many people in different sectors that, you know, you don't have to have a life sciences background to come and work for our company. So, that's just one example. So, I'd definitely encourage people to think, you know, 'What opportunities are there for me, and how can I dip into all those exciting things that are happening in Northern Ireland?' And then from a personal perspective, you know, again, back to what John said, I really wanted to raise our family here, I had a great upbringing, I want the same for them. And I missed my family, and I missed Northern Ireland, and it's a great place to live. So, I think it's just considering, you know, for your future, what you want for your family and how you want that to look and if this is-, this is the right place for you, so.

Moderator: Thank you so much, Laura. And that brings us to, to the end of our session. A big thank you to all of our panel members here, I feel like we've lots more to talk about, but I know that we'll continue those conversations and indeed the conversations from all of our panellists throughout the day beyond, beyond this. So, thank you again, and thank you to John and Gavin dialling in.