



INVEST NI AMBITION TO GROW SUPPORT SCHEME FOR NEW BUSINESSES TO INVEST NI FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs should be read in conjunction with the [Guidance Notes](#). The information and evidence required, as outlined in the Guidance Notes, are necessary to demonstrate that the business meets the eligibility criteria, and to ensure public funds are managed properly.

Please take time to read the Guidance Notes and FAQs carefully before applying.

What is Ambition to Grow?

Ambition to Grow is a pilot scheme aimed at encouraging businesses who are **not currently Invest NI customers**, to commit to investing in both new employees and business growth activities, and lead to more sales being generated from customers outside Northern Ireland.

When does the application close?

The application call will open on Monday 22 May 2023, 12 noon. The eligibility checker, and on successful completion of this, a link to the application form, will be available at investni.com/ambitiontogrow from this date.

The application call will remain open until Friday 16 June 2023, 15:00.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call early, or extend its opening, based on the volume of applications received. Only applications submitted at the time of closing will be considered.

What sort of businesses is it aimed at?

Ambition to Grow is aimed at Start-up and established Micro, and Small to Medium Enterprises based in Northern Ireland, that have either turnover **under** £1m **or** sales to customers outside NI of less than £300k.

Invest NI is seeking to support businesses in the manufacturing or international tradeable services sectors that have plans to increase sales from customers outside Northern Ireland and with this create new employment.

Businesses that are involved in innovative activities, paying higher salaries for new positions as well as those adding value to a product are also likely to score highly. Please see our [current draft business strategy](#) and The Department for the Economy's [10X Economic Vision](#) for more detail.

How many grants are there?

The number of grant offers issued by each Invest NI Regional Office will depend on the number of applicants that meet or exceed the pass mark as well as that Regional Office's budget availability. All applications received will be scored in line with the Assessment Criteria detailed in the Guidance Notes, with applications that meet or exceed the pass mark being ranked from highest to lowest scoring for each Regional Office. The top-ranking applications in each region will be invited for a validation interview and on successful completion will then be offered financial support towards their proposed growth plans.



ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

How do I know if my business is eligible to apply for Ambition to Grow?

Details on business eligibility and exclusions can be found in the Guidance Notes, and you will be required to complete the online Eligibility Checker as part of the pre-application process.

The Eligibility Checker will be available from Monday 22 May 2023, 12 noon at investni.com/ambitiontogrow.

What do you mean by 'not previously assisted by Invest NI'?

Businesses that have previously received a formal contract or letter of offer of support under any Invest NI scheme (not including Covid-19 emergency support measures, Innovation Vouchers, Economic Recovery Innovation Grant (ERIG) or through Access to Finance funds such as Techstart NI Proof of Concept grants) can apply as long as long as no Invest NI grant offers or payments have been made to the Company within the last 5 years, subject to all other criteria being met.

Businesses that have received an offer of support from Invest NI which was subsequently cancelled prior to the Ambition to Grow application call opening date, and that have received no other offers or payments of support, can apply.

If I have a live offer from Invest NI, can I apply for Ambition to Grow?

No, current Invest NI customers are not eligible to apply. Please contact your Client Executive if you wish to discuss support towards export growth activities.

What is a Client Executive?

A Client Executive is a member of our team who will be your main point of contact in Invest NI and support you to complete the project if you are successful in this competition.

If I have a Business that is registered with Invest NI but want to set up a separate business, should I apply to Ambition to Grow?

We would suggest in the first instance you contact your Invest NI Client Executive to discuss the financial arrangements of the businesses. If these are interlinked via financial and management structures, it is important that Invest NI manages these under one Client Executive.

Can I apply if I am not an Invest NI customer but received support through the COVID-19 support schemes or recovery schemes?

Yes, you can apply. The COVID 19 support and recovery schemes are not regarded as mainstream Invest NI support, and you would not have a dedicated Client Executive.

Do I need to be over 18 to apply for the ATG Competition?

There needs to be a director aged 18 or over within the company authorised to sign Letter of Offer Contractual Agreement. If under 18, they cannot be held liable to the contract with Invest NI.



What does match funding/balance of funding mean?

Invest NI support will only make up a small proportion of the costs of new Employment and Business Development activities. Applicants will need to demonstrate that their business will remain cash positive and be able to sustain new employees. This funding can be from existing cash reserves, loan funding, external investment in the business or future sales and needs to be detailed in the application form. It is not sufficient to assume that Invest NI knows where your funding is coming from, you do need to outline in the application how the business will meet its outgoings in the coming years.

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

Businesses wishing to apply for Ambition to Grow need to be physically located in Northern Ireland and have at least one director residing in Northern Ireland.

The registered address of the business does not need to be in Northern Ireland.

For businesses with multiple locations, including locations outside Northern Ireland, the overall turnover of the entire business and location of sales (to NI based customers or customers from outside NI) will be considered when determining eligibility.

The growth activities, including investment and employment creation which the company is seeking Invest NI support for, must relate to the Northern Ireland location.

We would emphasize that this scheme is only open to SMEs with turnover **under** £1m **or** sales to customers outside NI of less than £300k.

Can an advisor make an application on behalf of the business?

You can give permission to company contacts to complete the online application. All applications must be authorised in the case of a Limited company, by a director or the Secretary. In the case of a Sole Trader or Partnership, by a Proprietor or Partner.

We would advise that nobody knows your business better than you do, and the application form has been designed to enable an Owner/Manager to be able to complete it without outside assistance. Should an application be successful, and a validation interview arranged, the interview will be with the business Owner/Manager and direct knowledge of what was in the application will be essential.

You may also wish to review NIBusinessinfo **Guidance** and **Templates** to assist with completion of the form:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/cashflow-forecasts>

MAKING AN APPLICATION

How long will it take to complete the form?



The online application process should take approximately two hours to complete if you have all the information to hand e.g., if you have recently completed a business plan. We will seek information on your company projections, sales into markets outside Northern Ireland and what your company's projections might look like without Invest NI grant aid.

Can I save my application and return to it at a later stage?

Yes, you can save a draft of your application and complete later but saved applications must still be submitted before the scheme closes. It is recommended that you save your application on a regular basis to reduce the risk of losing any unsaved work.

How do I submit my application?

You need to click on the 'Submit' button when you have completed your application. If you have any problems submitting your application, please call Invest NI's Business Support Team for assistance. You will receive a confirmation email when successfully submitted.

Can I submit my application in a different format?

If you require an application form in an alternative format, please contact <mailto:equality@investni.com> or see our [Equality Statement](#) for further details.

If I think I am eligible, but I failed validation on the online eligibility checker, what should I do?

If you have failed the eligibility checker, then you are not eligible to apply to this competition but please speak to our Business Support Team who can signpost you to alternative support. You can reach them by completing an Enquiry Form or by telephone on 0800 181 4422.

I made an error on my application form. What should I do?

If your form is still saved as Draft, and has not been submitted, then you can go back to the relevant section and update with the correct information.

You will need to click on the '**Submit**' button when you have completed the changes to your application.

If you have submitted your application form but require changes before the closing date on Friday 16 June 2023, 15:00 please complete this [enquiry form](#) and a member of Invest NI's Business Support Team will contact you. The Business Support Team can also be contacted by telephone on 0800 181 4422. Your application will be returned for you to update your details.

How do I check on my application progress?

Applications will be scored after 16th June 2023 and successful businesses invited to interview.

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

Invest NI is seeking to support businesses that want to sell more outside Northern Ireland, and with that create new employment within their business. Each business will outline its plans via the application form, with the top ranked applications being offered support. The success of each engagement will be determined by how the business



performs against what it says it will do in the application, and the potential for further Invest support will be based on success measured against the Ambition to Grow application (achievement of Employment and External Sales targets).

If a business does not do what it said it will do in the application, the ability to draw down grant money will be impacted as will the ability to apply for Invest NI support in future. Businesses are encouraged to only apply for support if it is realistic that they will be able to commit to, and achieve, the activities and outcomes outlined in the application.

As the total grant offer is based on the proposed creation of new employment, should grant money be paid out and proposed new employment is not created, or supported positions not maintained for a minimum of three years, repayment of grant money (in full or in part) may be sought.

PAYMENT

How much grant can I expect to receive?

Following the application process, each successful business selected will receive **up to £45,000** in support. This will be offered via a contract with Invest NI, and this will include an offer of the following:

- up to £30,000 towards new employment within the business. This can be a £5,000 grant per new position (minimum of 3 new full time equivalent roles) or can be targeted towards 1 or 2 new management positions within the business (minimum salary of £30,000 with up to £15,000 grant per new role at a support rate of up to 40% of 12 months' salary costs).
- up to £10,000 towards business development activities at a support rate of up to 50% of eligible costs which can include expenditure on market, product, or skills development.
- £5,000 on the completion of an Export Health Check, Development of an Export Marketing Plan, and completion of an Innovate NI Self-Assessment.

The actual amount of financial support offered will be dependant on the activities proposed with the application. State Aid guidelines will impact the amount of support available for some applications that are creating a low number of new jobs and the actual value and makeup of the offer of support will be discussed in detail during the interview stage. The total grant amount offered will not be more than 30% of two times the total annual salaries of new positions being created.

The full conditions associated with the grant will be within an offer from Invest NI to the successful businesses. You will need to sign this offer and return prior to commencing any elements of the project.

Support is conditional on the business securing new employees, with the expectation that increased employment is maintained for a minimum of three years. Should new employees be taken on, grant be drawn down and then employment levels decrease within three years from payment of grant, it is reasonable to expect that repayment of grant money (in full or in part) will be requested.

When can I expect to receive the grant payment?

Payment of grant is not up-front and will depend on the execution of specific activities as outlined in any offer of support e.g., creation of new employment. Any successful applicant will receive a contract or Letter of offer from Invest NI and then be able to incur activity. When the activity has taken place, they can then make a claim to Invest NI.



A Client Executive will be assigned to each successful company and provide a guide to claiming from Invest NI.

It is essential that we review each application and all the evidence provided to ensure public funds are managed properly.

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

Support is conditional on the business securing new employees, with the requirement that the assisted employment is maintained for a minimum of three years. Should new employees be taken on, grant be drawn down and then employment levels decrease within three years from payment of grant of grant money (in full or in part) may be sought.

Is the grant awarded on a first come first served basis?

The Ambition to Grow scheme will be open for applications from Monday 22 May 2023, 12 noon to Friday 16 June 2023, 15:00.

Funding will be awarded to applicants on a competitive basis. Applications will be assessed and scored, with the highest scoring projects in each area awarded funding following a successful validation interview.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call earlier or extend it depending on the volume of applications received. In this case of the application window closing early, only applications submitted on the portal at this time will be considered.

How will I know if my application is successful?

We aim to assess all applications within 4 weeks from close of the competition, with interviews to be completed with those shortlisted. Applicants will be informed via email that their application has been successful.

Applicants who are unsuccessful will also be informed via email.

My business trading account is a Euro account, can I still apply?

No, you must have a UK Sterling business account to apply for the Ambition to Grow scheme and be registered in NI, with Directors residing in Northern Ireland.

OTHER FAQs

What other support is available?

Invest NI has a range of business support measures available to Northern Ireland businesses. You can find more at www.investni.com

If you have a question that is not covered in the Guidance Notes or Frequently Asked Questions you can contact the Invest NI Business Support Team by completing an [Enquiry Form](#) or by telephone on 0800 181 4422.