

## **INVEST NI AMBITION TO GROW PROGRAMME**

**GO GREEN APPLICATION CALL  
FEBRUARY 2024**

### **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 | Go Green?**

Ambition to Grow (ATG) is a scheme aimed at encouraging businesses that are not currently Invest NI customers, or that have received limited Invest NI support to date, to commit to investing in both new employees and business growth activities that will lead to more sales being generated from customers outside Northern Ireland.

The current application call, Ambition to Grow |Go Green, aims to encourage businesses engaged in the Green Economy to apply for support to accelerate their growth.

#### **What is the Green Economy?**

Green Economy is a collective term for businesses that delivers products or services that drive decarbonisation, increased sustainability, and energy efficiency.

#### **What if my business is not in the Green Economy? Can I still apply?**

Yes. Although there is some additional assistance for Green Economy businesses that are successful in this application call, businesses not in the Green Economy can still apply. Eligibility and support available is in line with previous ATG calls and includes grant assistance of up to £45,000 and a dedicated point of contact within Invest NI.

#### **When does the application call open?**

The application call will open on Monday 5 February 2024 at 12 noon. The eligibility checker will be available at [investni.com/ambitiontogrow](https://investni.com/ambitiontogrow) from this date. On successful completion of the eligibility checker, access to an application form will be granted through the MYINI online portal.

The application call will remain open until Friday 1 March 2024 at 12 noon.

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?**

ATG is aimed at Start-up and established Micro, and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) based in Northern Ireland, that have either turnover **under** £1m **or** sales to customers outside Northern Ireland of less than £300,000.

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.

Invest NI wants to support ambitious and innovative businesses that have a clear plan to grow annual sales to be more than £250,000 with at least 25% of this to customers outside Northern Ireland, and with this create new, sustainable well-paid jobs.

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 Draft [Business Plan 2023/24](#) and The Department for the Economy's [10X Economic Vision](#) for more detail.

ATG is aimed at businesses that are already generating revenue or are about to generate revenue in the very near future. If your business is currently developing a product or service that is not yet ready for market, or if you are yet to secure other funding required for your plan to be viable (e.g., equity investment or loan funding), ATG may not be right for your business at this time although other support options are available.

### **How many grants are there?**

The number of grants 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 meeting and on successful completion and subject to Know Your Customer (KYC) checks 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 ATG?**

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 **12 noon on Monday 5 February 2024** at [investni.com/ambitiontogrow](https://investni.com/ambitiontogrow).

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

Businesses that have previously received a formal contract or accepted a 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 access an application form via the Eligibility Checker as long as no Invest NI grant offers or payments have been made to the business within the last 5 years and subject to all other criteria being met.

### **What if my business meets all other Criteria but has received Invest NI support within the last 5 years?**

If your business meets all other criteria but has received Invest NI support within the last five years you can contact your Invest NI Client Executive to discuss if an application is appropriate at this time.

Please note that you cannot apply for ATG support if your business has been offered support or received grant payments under the Selective Financial Assistance (SFA) or Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP) schemes with the last 5 years, and that support was linked to new employment or sales growth targets.

### **If I have a business that is registered with Invest NI but want to set up a separate business, should I apply to ATG?**

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.

### **Do I need to be over 18 to apply for ATG?**

There needs to be a Director/Proprietor/Partner aged 18 or over within the business 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 ATG 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 Northern Ireland based customers or customers from outside Northern Ireland) 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 emphasise that this scheme is only open to SMEs with turnover **under** £1m **or** sales to customers outside NI of less than £300,000.

### **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 meeting arranged, the interview will be with the Directors/Owners of the business 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:

[www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales](http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales)

[www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting](http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting)

[www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/cashflow-forecasts](http://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. If this information is not immediately available, it may take longer although you can save the application and update it at any time before the application call closes.

In the application we will ask you to outline the current position of your business, what your plans are for the future, and what impact Invest NI support will have on making these plans a reality.

### **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. Saved applications must still be submitted before the application closing date. 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 [equality@investni.com](mailto:equality@investni.com) or see our [Equality Statement](#) for further details.

### **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 need to make changes before the closing date, 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?**

Once your application is submitted it will then be assessed and scored along with all other submitted applications. The outcome of your application will be communicated via email when scoring has been completed, with those that pass the first stage then being invited to a validation meeting.

### **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 NI support will be based on success measured against the ATG 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 the proposed new employment 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.

## **NEW EMPLOYMENT**

### **Do I need to commit to creating new jobs as part of an application for ATG?**

For an ATG application to be considered eligible it must outline plans to create a minimum of three Full Time Equivalent (FTE) roles, or if fewer than three FTE roles then at least one full-time Management Position.

### **What are the criteria for a Management Position to be eligible for support?**

For a Management Position to be considered for support under ATG it must be a clearly defined Management Role, be a full-time position (minimum 30 hours per week) paying a minimum salary of £30,000 and contribute to growth of the business into markets outside Northern Ireland.

### **Do new jobs need to be full time?**

For a Management Position to be considered for support it must be a full-time position (contracted for at least 30hrs per week). If support is not being sought for a Management Position, then at least three FTE positions must be proposed although these can be a mixture of Full Time and Part Time roles.

### **What does Full Time Equivalent (FTE) mean?**

If no management roles are being created, then at least three new FTE roles must be proposed. FTE can be a combination of full-time or part-time positions where full time is considered 30 or more contracted hours per week and equivalent to 1.0 FTE, and part-time is considered between 15 and 30 contracted hours per week and equivalent to 0.5 FTE.

As an example, two full-time roles (2.0 FTE) and two part-time roles (1.0 FTE) would be equivalent to 3.0 FTE.

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

ATG is a programme that aims to incentivise the creation of new employment, along with growth into markets outside Northern Ireland.

If support is offered under ATG and some elements of the grant are paid out with no resultant long-term uplift in employment levels within the business, this may impact the ability of Invest NI to offer support to the business in the future. There may also be the possibility where repayment of grant money paid may be requested should grant support be paid out and no new employment created, or if created employment is not maintained for a minimum of three years.

It is important that businesses in receipt of ATG support keep their appointed Client Executive informed of any changes in employment levels so that an appropriate course of action can be discussed.

## **PAYMENT**

### **How much grant can I expect to receive?**

Following the application and interview process, and subject to successful KYC checks, 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 FTE roles) or can be targeted towards one or two new Management Positions within the business with support of up to £15,000 grant per new management position at a rate of up to 40% of 12 months' salary costs. For Management roles to be considered for support they must be a clearly defined full-time (30hrs+) Management Position, paying a minimum salary of £30,000 and contribute to growth of the business into markets outside Northern Ireland.
- 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, products, 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. Each successful applicant will receive an offer/contract from Invest NI and will then be able to begin incurring spend on activities against which grant money will be paid. 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.

### **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](http://www.investni.com)

### **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 ATG scheme and be registered in NI, with at least one Director residing in Northern Ireland.

### **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 ATG scheme will be open for applications from 12 noon Monday 5 February 2024 to 12 noon Friday 1 March 2024.

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.

### **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.

### **How will I know if my application is successful?**

We aim to assess all applications within four weeks from close of the competition, with project meetings 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.

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.