

Department for the Economy
An Roinn Geilleagair
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SME ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACTION PLAN

NOVEMBER 2026

Minister's foreword



Entrepreneurship is central to the delivery of my Economic Vision, helping to drive productivity, create good jobs and support prosperity in every part of the north. Entrepreneurs create jobs, bring new ideas to market, strengthen local economies and help ensure that opportunity exists in every community.

Across the north, more people are choosing to start and grow businesses. This is an encouraging sign of increasing entrepreneurial ambition, but we know there is more to do. We must unlock the full potential of entrepreneurship and ensure that success is not determined by where someone lives, their background or the networks they can access. This includes recognising that some groups continue to face additional barriers to entrepreneurial activity, including women, people with disabilities, and those in rural areas. We must work collectively to reduce those barriers and create the conditions in which everyone with the ambition to start and grow a business can fulfil their potential.

My vision is for the north to be a place where anyone with the ambition to start and grow a business has the opportunity to do so. A place where entrepreneurship is celebrated, where barriers to participation are reduced, and where local ecosystems work together to help entrepreneurs thrive.

This Action Plan sets out how we will work towards that vision. Developed through collaboration between organisations from across the ecosystem, it focuses on creating the conditions in which entrepreneurship can flourish.

The actions will make support easier to access, help build a stronger culture of entrepreneurship, strengthen local ecosystems and improve collaboration between the organisations that support entrepreneurs. Together, they will help create a more joined-up and effective environment in which entrepreneurs can start, sustain and grow their businesses.

I would like to thank the members of the Codesign Group for their commitment and expertise in developing this Action Plan. I look forward to working with them, and with partners across the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as we take forward these actions and help realise entrepreneurial ambition in every community.



Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA
Minister for the Economy

Chair's foreword

Entrepreneurship has long played a vital role in shaping our economy, communities and future prosperity and contributes not only to our economic growth, but also to the resilience, vibrancy and sustainability of our towns, cities, and rural communities.

Increasing productivity, encouraging innovation, and creating high-quality employment opportunities to support regional balance will all depend, in part, on our ability to foster an environment in which entrepreneurs can start, grow, and scale successfully.

Recognising this importance, I was pleased to collaborate with Minister Archibald, her team in the Department and the SME Entrepreneurship Codesign Group to consider how we could create an environment that actively supports entrepreneurs.

The Codesign Group brought together a diverse range of perspectives from across the entrepreneurial ecosystem and through a collaborative process, participants shared their experience, expertise and insights to develop an Action Plan that will enhance the support landscape, promote a more positive entrepreneurial culture, strengthen sub-regional entrepreneurship and improve collaboration throughout the ecosystem.

The Plan should be viewed as the beginning rather than the conclusion of our collective efforts. Achieving its ambitions will require continued partnership, shared ownership and sustained commitment from organisations and individuals across the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Importantly, this Action Plan seeks not only to support those who are already engaged in entrepreneurship, but also to encourage and inspire future generations of entrepreneurs.



Georgina Grieve
Codesign Group Chair

Introduction

What is entrepreneurship?

Entrepreneurship is a word that can mean different things to different people. An entrepreneur may be a person starting out with just a business idea, or someone who has been running their own business successfully for many years. It may also describe a student exploring a business opportunity, a self-employed individual, or someone turning a hobby or side venture into something more. Many people undertaking these activities may not think of themselves as entrepreneurs, yet they are demonstrating the same entrepreneurial behaviours of identifying opportunities, taking initiative and creating value.

Some commonly used definitions of entrepreneurship are:

- 'The activity of making money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks'[1]
- 'The pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled'[2]
- 'Entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural or social'[3]

While these definitions vary in their wording and intent, there are commonalities between them, including the ability to spot opportunity, take risks and create value.

Within the context of this document, the definition set out in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) is used, which is:

'Any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organisation, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business'.[4]

This is a wide definition that covers:

- Both successful and unsuccessful efforts to start or grow a business;
- Broad forms of activity, including starting a new business, becoming self-employed or expanding an existing firm; and
- A broad range of participants, including individuals, teams and existing businesses.

1 Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/entrepreneurship
2 Harvard Business Review: https://hbr.org/2013/01/what-is-entrepreneurship
3 Entrecomp Europe: https://entrecompeurope.eu/entrecomp/
4 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: https://www.gemconsortium.org/wiki/1149

Why entrepreneurship matters

Higher levels of entrepreneurship boost productivity growth.[5] Raising productivity is a key priority of the Economy Minister's Economic Vision[6] due to its association with higher wages and overall living standards.

Entrepreneurship as it relates to the creation of new business ventures is therefore essential for a thriving, dynamic economy. It helps to create new jobs and improves the economic and social fabric of our communities. It can be a source of flourishing in an individual's life – offering them an alternative to traditional employment and a chance to pursue their own dreams and ambitions.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM),[7] Northern Ireland's rate of Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)[8] was at a record high in 2025 at 11.9%. This was up from 10.2% in 2024 and 9.7% in 2023.

While recent trends are encouraging, entrepreneurial activity levels remain lower than the UK average 10.6% from 2023-25 compared to the UK average of 13.0%)[9]. Table 1 below sets out TEA rate by council area across Northern Ireland. Derry City and Strabane and Fermanagh and Omagh had the highest average TEA rate at 16.2% compared to the lowest rate of 7.3% in Mid-Ulster.[10]

Table 1: Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland by council area, rolling average 2023-25

Council area	Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity, 2023-25
Antrim and Newtownabbey	11.7%
Ards and North Down	7.9%
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	8.9%
Belfast	12.0%
Causeway Coast and Glens	9.4%
Derry City and Strabane	16.2%
Fermanagh and Omagh	16.2%
Lisburn and Castlereagh	8.4%
Mid and East Antrim	8.4%
Mid Ulster	7.3%
Newry, Mourne and Down	11.9%
Northern Ireland	**10.6%**

5 OECD (2019), Strengthening SMEs and Entrepreneurship for Productivity and Inclusive Growth: OECD 2018 Ministerial Conference on SMEs, OECD Studies on SMEs and Entrepreneurship, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c19b6f97-en.

6 Department for the Economy, Minister's Economic Vision: https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/ministers-economic-vision

7 GEM Northern Ireland 2025/26 Report, GEM (2026)

8 The total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) index is the proportion of nascent entrepreneurs (those whose businesses have been paying wages for not more than three months) and new business owner/managers (those whose businesses have been paying salaries for more than three months but not more than 42 months), minus any double counting, in the working age population.

9 TEA rates for regional comparisons are pooled over a rolling three-year period to better account for fluctuations in regional data.

10 Due to small sample sizes the differences across council areas were not statistically significant.

There is also some evidence that certain groups are less likely to engage in entrepreneurship, with TEA rates in in 2025 being higher for men (15.4%) than for women (8.4%), which is a statistically significant difference.

Recent growth in entrepreneurial activity is facing rising headwinds. A lower proportion of working age people in NI believe that there are good start-up opportunities compared to the average for the UK (35.1% compared to 41.5% in 2025). Less than half of those in NI not engaged in entrepreneurial activity feel that they have the skills, knowledge and experience to start a business (43.3%). This is lower than the UK figure (48.0%).

According to the NISRA IDBR, the business birth[11] rate in 2024[12] was 9.5% (around 6,240 businesses), up from 8.3% in 2023, however the rate of business births in NI remains the lowest of all UK regions.

The resilience of businesses in NI in their first year of operation is improving, with the 1-year survival rate increasing from 90.2% for firms newly registered in 2021, to 93.0% for those registered in 2023. The 2023 rate for NI was broadly in line with the UK rate of 93.4%.

Longer term survival rates are higher than the UK average with NI having the highest five-year survival rate of the four UK regions for businesses registered in 2019 (42.8% for NI compared to 38.4% for the UK). This suggests that once established in the market, new firms in NI tend to be more resilient compared to those in other UK regions.

Estimated at 12.7% (Q4 2025), self-employment has been found to be more prevalent in NI than most other UK regions. A recent study published by Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC)[13] found that the makeup of self-employment in NI is notably different than the UK overall. The highest proportions of NI self-employed were found to be in skilled trades (35.5%) and retail/ trading business owners (16.1%), both areas are substantially over-represented when compared to the rest of the UK.

A smaller than average share of NI's self-employed population is made up of highly educated, consulting professionals, the self-employed group that tends to command the highest wages. A slightly higher than average proportion of self-employed in NI (8.1% compared to 7.6%) are in precarious, low autonomy gig-working.

11 New business registrations are referred to as business births. The birth rate is the number of births as a proportion of the active businesses.

12 Business Demography Northern Ireland 2024

13 Self-employment in Northern Ireland, Dr Karen Bonner, Anna Preston & Anna Dukelow (2026)

Why SME Entrepreneurship?

Northern Ireland's economy is overwhelmingly made up of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), accounting for around 99.5% of the registered business base.[14] Given this, why does this Action Plan refer specifically to 'SME Entrepreneurship'? The answer lies in recognising that entrepreneurship is not a single activity. Different types of entrepreneurs pursue different opportunities, contribute to the economy in different ways, and often require different forms of support.

The term 'SME Entrepreneurship' comes from research undertaken by the Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship which stated that:

'Policymakers and pundits who use entrepreneurship as a catch-all phrase to capture a single economic activity make an important mistake. There are two distinct types of entrepreneurship with different economic roles, requiring individually tailored policies to support each.' [15]

MIT's research described two different types of entrepreneurship – IDE and SME. IDE Entrepreneurship refers to Innovation Driven Enterprises that pursue global opportunities based on bringing to customers new innovations that have a clear competitive advantage and high growth potential. These businesses tend to pursue rapid growth, often require external investment, and operate with higher levels of risk, but can generate significant job creation and wider economic spillovers if successful.

SME Entrepreneurship typically focuses on serving local or regional markets. These businesses are often built around well-understood models, and success is driven by strong delivery, customer relationships, and steady growth. SMEs are vital to the economy. They provide widespread employment, support local communities, and offer accessible routes into self-employment.

Because of these differences, SMEs and IDEs tend to require different types of support:

- SMEs often benefit most from practical support, such as access to finance for day-to-day operations, skills development, mentoring, and initiatives that strengthen local demand and business resilience.
- IDEs typically need more specialised support, for example, help to develop and protect innovation, access to risk capital, connections to research and talent, and support to scale into export markets.

Neither model is 'better' than the other. Instead, they serve complementary roles. SMEs underpin local economies and employment, while IDEs drive innovation and longer-term growth. Recognising these differences helps ensure that support is better targeted and that each type of business can realise its full potential.

14 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Northern Ireland Business: Activity, Size, Location, and Ownership 2025, Inter Departmental Business Register, published 11 June 2025; latest IDBR page updated for 2026 release published 10 June 2026

15 A Tale of Two Entrepreneurs: Understanding Differences in the Types of Entrepreneurship in the Economy. Aulet, Murray, 2013: https://www.kauffman.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/a_tale_of_two_entrepreneurs_report.pdf

Codesign Group

Acknowledging the distinction between these two types of entrepreneurship, the Economy Minister established a stakeholder group tasked with developing an action plan focused on SME entrepreneurship. This group complements the Invest NI-led Regional Entrepreneurship Accelerator Programme (REAP) group, which has an IDE focus.

Mirroring the membership structure of REAP, the group's members were a mix of entrepreneurs, finance providers, businesses, education providers and government representatives. The group worked through a process of codesign to generate the actions included in this document. This codesign process was entirely stakeholder led. The group's members decided on the themes to focus on and created the actions that sit underneath them. Meetings were independently facilitated by the Department of Finance's Innovation and Consultancy Service. Department for the Economy officials acted as secretariat to the group.

The Action Plan seeks to strengthen the overall entrepreneurship ecosystem so that more people can participate in and benefit from entrepreneurial activity. In taking forward the actions, Codesign Group members recognised the importance of ensuring that opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship are open to all, including groups that may experience additional barriers to participation.

Meetings of the group were held in person over a six-month period at the following locations:

- Invest NI HQ, Belfast
- The Workhouse, Enniskillen
- Ulster Bank Business Centre, Cookstown
- IntertradeIreland, Newry
- Workspace, Draperstown
- Northern Regional College, Ballymena

A final online meeting was held in June 2026 to review the draft actions.

The actions

The Codesign Group identified nine actions for inclusion in the Action Plan. These are grouped under four themes:

1. Enhancing the Support Landscape;
2. Building a Pro-Entrepreneurship Culture;
3. Strengthening Local Ecosystems; and
4. Improving Ecosystem Coordination.

Enhancing the Support Landscape

Action 1: A Single Entry Point for Entrepreneurship Support

WHAT: This action will establish a user-centred single point of access for entrepreneurship support. The Single Entry Point will provide clear, up-to-date information on support available across the ecosystem and help entrepreneurs identify the most relevant next steps. This information will be accessible to a wide range of users. Where appropriate, users will be signposted to providers for more detailed advice and in-person support.

WHY: The Codesign Group highlighted that the current support landscape can feel fragmented and difficult to navigate. While a wide range of high-quality support exists, it can be time-consuming for entrepreneurs to identify what is most relevant to their needs. A Single Entry Point will simplify this process by acting as a clear 'front door', helping users quickly understand what support is available and how to access it.

HOW: The Single Entry Point will draw together and integrate information from a range of existing providers, ensuring a clear and coherent user experience without duplicating provision. It will combine digital functionality with access to in-person support. Ongoing input from partners will be required to ensure that information remains accurate, relevant, and up-to-date.

WHO: DfE will work with Invest Northern Ireland in the further development of this action.

WHEN: Initial scoping will be undertaken during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027), building on coordination activity and reviewing existing provision. Development of the approach and delivery model will be progressed during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028), with implementation in the longer term (from April 2028 onwards).

OUTCOME: A clearly defined, user-centred, Single Entry Point that simplifies access to support, improves navigation, and enables more effective referral pathways and progression across the ecosystem.

Action 2: Strengthening Business Advisor Capability

WHAT: This action will enhance the role of business advisors within the entrepreneurship ecosystem by strengthening their capability and capacity, and improving the consistency and inclusivity of support provided.

WHY: Business advisors play a central role in supporting entrepreneurs, particularly in the early stages of their journey. They provide guidance, identify potential challenges, and connect individuals to wider sources of support. Ensuring that advisors have access to up-to-date knowledge, skills, and networks will help improve the quality and consistency of support available to entrepreneurs.

HOW: This will be delivered through the development of a Business Advisor Development Framework. The framework will bring together opportunities for peer learning and networking, promote access to relevant training, and support clearer routes for ongoing professional development, including recognised qualifications. The framework will also promote awareness of barriers that may be experienced by under-represented groups and support advisors to provide more inclusive customer support.

WHO: DfE will work with Enterprise NI in the further development of this action.

WHEN: Initial engagement with partners and scoping of current provision will take place during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027). Development of the Advisor Development Framework will be progressed during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028), with rollout in the longer term (from April 2028 onwards).

OUTCOME: A more consistent, inclusive and professionalised approach to business advisory support across the ecosystem.

Action 3: Improving Awareness and Uptake of Finance

WHAT: This action will improve awareness, understanding and uptake of finance options available to entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland, through a more coordinated and accessible approach to how finance information is presented and promoted.

WHY: Access to finance is a key factor influencing business start-up and growth. While a range of finance options exists, awareness and understanding can be limited, reducing effective uptake. In addition, perceptions of risk and lack of confidence can influence whether individuals seek and use finance. Addressing this requires both clearer information and a more coordinated approach to how finance options are communicated and understood.

HOW: An initial review of evidence on access to finance in Northern Ireland will be undertaken, alongside engagement with finance providers and ecosystem partners. This will include consideration of any evidence relating to under-represented groups.

Findings will inform the development of a coordinated approach, including communications activity, improved signposting, and targeted interventions to increase visibility, accessibility and confidence in accessing finance.

WHO: DfE will work with British Business Bank in the further development of this action.

WHEN: An initial evidence review will be undertaken during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027), followed by engagement with finance providers. Development of the coordinated approach will be progressed during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028), with delivery in subsequent phases.

OUTCOME: A more coherent and accessible approach to finance, with increased awareness, improved understanding, and greater confidence and uptake among entrepreneurs.

Building a Pro-Entrepreneurship Culture

Action 4: Promoting Entrepreneurship Education

WHAT: This action will promote and strengthen entrepreneurship education across Northern Ireland, supporting the development of entrepreneurial awareness, skills and mindset from an early stage. It will increase opportunities for individuals to engage with entrepreneurship through education, including exposure to diverse entrepreneur role models and real-world entrepreneurial experiences.

WHY: The Codesign Group highlighted the importance of embedding entrepreneurship more strongly within the education system and ensuring it is seen as an accessible and achievable career pathway.

Early exposure to entrepreneurship, including experiential learning and engagement with role models, can play a key role in shaping aspirations and improving participation. Strengthening entrepreneurship education will help support a more inclusive and sustained pipeline of future entrepreneurs, including those from under-represented groups.

HOW: This will involve working with education providers and ecosystem partners to explore opportunities to strengthen the role of entrepreneurship within education.

This will include:

- supporting structured engagement between entrepreneurs and education settings,
- developing a diverse and sustainable pipeline of role models, and
- strengthening links between education and the enterprise ecosystem to support earlier and wider exposure to entrepreneurship.

WHO: DfE will work with Further Education Colleges and Young Enterprise in the further development of this action.

WHEN: This action will begin during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028). Early work will focus on engaging with education providers and partners, including strengthening links with role models and identifying practical opportunities to embed entrepreneurship in education settings. This will then be built on over time as delivery develops.

OUTCOME: Improved awareness of entrepreneurship as a career pathway, increased visibility of diverse entrepreneur role models, and stronger links between education and the enterprise ecosystem, with increased engagement across a broader and more diverse range of individuals.

Action 5: Celebrating Entrepreneurship

WHAT: This action will celebrate and showcase entrepreneurship across Northern Ireland, including international audiences, positioning the region as a place to start, grow and scale a business.

WHY: Entrepreneurship involves a degree of risk, and the Codesign Group highlighted a perceived stigma around failure that may discourage some individuals from pursuing this path. In addition, entrepreneurship is not always presented as a visible or valued career option.

Communications and storytelling play an important role in shaping these perceptions. A more coordinated approach can help to normalise the realities of entrepreneurship, including risk and failure, while showcasing a broader and more diverse range of experiences. This will support improved public understanding and reinforce entrepreneurship as a credible and accessible career pathway.

HOW: Activity will build on existing initiatives through a coordinated, year-round communications approach aligned with stakeholders and existing campaigns.

WHO: DfE will work with local councils in the further development of this action.

WHEN: This action will be taken forward during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028), following initial coordination activity in the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027). Early delivery will focus on aligning existing communications and strengthening shared messaging.

OUTCOME: A more coordinated and visible approach to promoting entrepreneurship, increasing its profile as a valued and viable career choice.

Strengthening Local Ecosystems

Action 6: Strengthening Local and Sub-Regional Support Networks

WHAT: This action will strengthen support networks for entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland, including rural areas and sub-regional locations and communities where participation in entrepreneurship may be lower.

WHY: Entrepreneurs across different locations, including rural and sub-regional areas can face uneven access to formal support services, many of which are concentrated in urban centres. This can limit opportunities to connect with peers, access advice, and build professional networks. Strengthening local networks will help improve access to both practical and peer support.

HOW: Existing networks will be mapped in collaboration with partners to identify current provision and gaps. Based on this work, proposals will be developed to strengthen or expand networks, including supporting existing groups or facilitating the development of new ones where needed.

WHO: DfE will work with Enterprise NI in the further development of this action.

WHEN: Initial mapping of existing networks will be undertaken during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027). Further development, including pilot activity and potential wider rollout, will be taken forward during the Building Momentum phase (June 2027 – March 2028) and beyond, informed by findings.

OUTCOME: Stronger and more accessible local networks, improving support for entrepreneurs across rural and sub-regional areas.

Action 7: Assessing Workspace Provision

WHAT: This action will map existing workspace provision across Northern Ireland, including incubators, co-working spaces, ‘grow-on’ space, and other forms of commercial premises for start-up and scaling businesses.

WHY: The availability of suitable workspace is an important factor in business development. Limited provision, particularly at key stages of growth, can constrain business expansion. A comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of current provision will support better planning and future investment decisions.

HOW: Data on existing provision will be gathered and analysed alongside stakeholder engagement to assess both supply and demand. Mechanisms for regular updating and monitoring over time will be considered.

WHO: DfE will work with Enterprise NI in the further development of this action.

WHEN: Initial scoping and data gathering will be undertaken during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027). Further assessment and any subsequent interventions will be progressed during later phases, informed by initial findings and wider delivery priorities.

OUTCOME: An up-to-date and evidence-based picture of workspace provision, identifying gaps and informing future policy and investment decisions.

Improving Ecosystem Coordination

Action 8: Cross-Departmental Coordination

WHAT: This action will establish a cross-departmental working group to improve coordination on entrepreneurship-related policy and activity.

WHY: Entrepreneurship is influenced by a wide range of factors that span multiple Executive Departments' responsibilities. A more coordinated approach will help improve alignment of policy and delivery, supporting more effective outcomes.

HOW: A Terms of Reference will be developed, with clearly defined outputs, and mechanisms to ensure continuity of engagement. Departments will be invited to nominate representatives. A programme of engagement will provide insight into the experiences of entrepreneurs and inform cross-departmental collaboration.

WHO: DfE will take this action forward, working with Executive Departments.

WHEN: Work on this action will begin during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027), reflecting its role as a foundational element of delivery. Initial activity will focus on establishing membership and agreeing a programme of work.

OUTCOME: A functioning cross-departmental group with improved shared understanding and coordination on entrepreneurship.

Action 9: Ecosystem Collaboration Forum

WHAT: This action will establish a forum for organisations and individuals involved in entrepreneurship support to communicate, collaborate and support ongoing oversight and review of delivery of the SME Entrepreneurship Action Plan.

WHY: The Codesign Group identified fragmentation across the ecosystem as a key challenge. A shared forum will support improved communication, greater understanding of roles, and more coordinated delivery of support.

HOW: A Terms of Reference will be agreed, including clear outputs and expectations for participation. Membership of the Forum will be shaped in collaboration with Codesign Group participants. A programme of meetings will be developed to support engagement and shared learning.

WHO: DfE will take this action forward, working with partners across the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

WHEN: Work on this action will begin during the Early Priorities phase (December 2026 - May 2027), reflecting its role in strengthening coordination and communication. Initial activity will focus on establishing membership and agreeing a programme of activity.

OUTCOME: An established Forum supporting collaboration, coordination, and stronger connections across the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Delivery timeline

The actions will be delivered over time, starting with activity that strengthens coordination and builds a clearer understanding of what already exists. This creates the conditions needed to take forward more complex changes in later stages.

Early Priorities (December 2026 – May 2027)

The first six months will focus on putting the right foundations in place and building a shared picture of the current landscape.

This includes:

- improving Cross-Departmental Coordination (Action 8)
- establishing the Ecosystem Collaboration Forum (Action 9)
- early evidence and mapping work under:
  - Action 3 (Improving Awareness and Uptake of Finance)
  - Action 6 (Strengthening Local and Sub-Regional Support Networks)
  - Action 7 (Assessing Workspace Provision)
- beginning early scoping work for:
  - Action 1 (A Single Entry Point for Entrepreneurship Support), including reviewing existing provision and approaches
  - Action 2 (Strengthening Business Advisor Capability), including engagement with partners on current provision and needs

This work will strengthen coordination, build a shared understanding of the current landscape, and lay the groundwork for more detailed development.

Building Momentum (June 2027 – March 2028)

With these foundations in place, the focus will shift to early delivery and more structured development of key actions.

This includes:

- taking forward a more coordinated approach to Celebrating Entrepreneurship (Action 5), including aligning existing campaigns and strengthening shared messaging
- progressing work on Promoting Entrepreneurship Education (Action 4), including structured engagement with education partners and role models
- using the findings from Action 3, Action 6 and Action 7 to:
  - agree priority areas for improvement

  - identify where existing provision can be strengthened
  - develop and agree specific proposals with delivery partners
- progressing development of:
  - Action 1 (A Single Entry Point for Entrepreneurship Support) including defining the approach, scope and delivery model
  - Action 2 (Strengthening Business Advisor Capability) including developing the structure and content of an Advisor Development Framework

This phase moves from evidence into delivery, while also developing the design of more complex actions.

Longer-term Delivery (April 2028 onwards)

More complex or system-wide actions will be implemented over a longer timeframe, building on earlier development work.

This includes:

- implementing A Single Entry Point for Entrepreneurship Support (Action 1)
- rolling out the Business Advisor Development Framework (Action 2)
- taking forward agreed proposals arising from earlier work on finance, networks and workspace as needed

The approach will continue to evolve based on what is learned in earlier phases and where there is capacity to go further.

Thanks

The Department for the Economy would like to thank the following organisations for their contributions to the work of the Codesign Group and development of the Action Plan.

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- Further Education Colleges
- The Workspace Group
- Innovation and Consultancy Service, Department of Finance
- InterTradeIreland
- Invest Northern Ireland
- Ulster Bank
- Ulster University
- Young Enterprise

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