

# BUILDING THE FUTURE WE NEED

NORTHERN IRELAND DIGITAL DIALOGUE AND NATIONAL REPORT 2020



# TECHUK DIGITAL DIALOGUES

Throughout the past year, techUK held a series of Digital Dialogues with leaders across the United Kingdom's nations and regions to better understand how we can harness digital innovation to build a better future in the wake of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Working together with stakeholders and members these conversations were intended to help understand what actions could be taken at the local level in the short, medium, and long-term to support a levelled-up recovery and build the future we need.

# Ambition in the face of adversity

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present huge challenges for the UK's nations and regions.

As we plot a course to recovery, we have an opportunity to apply technology with purpose to deliver better outcomes for people, society, the economy, and the planet.

Our mission should not be simply to get back to where we were, but to build the future we need.

A future that empowers people, strengthens society, grows the economy, and restores the planet.



WE RECOGNISE THE NEED FOR A RENEWED FOCUS ON DIGITAL SKILLS AT ALL LEVELS, AND IT'S ABOUT WHERE NORTHERN IRELAND IS ALREADY WORLD-CLASS IN THE DIGITAL SECTOR, IT'S KEEPING US WORLD-CLASS IN THE DIGITAL SECTOR BY BRINGING NEW PEOPLE INTO THE SECTOR ON A REGULAR BASIS, AND THE DEMAND FOR SKILLS IN THE SECTOR IS VERY GREAT INDEED. WE ALSO WANT TO WORK DIRECTLY WITH COMPANIES AND EMPLOYERS TO UNDERSTAND THE SKILLS NEEDS THAT YOU HAVE, AND WORK WITH THE EDUCATION SECTOR TO DEVELOP THE CURRICULUM TO DELIVER THAT CAPABILITY THAT WILL DRIVE THE COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION THAT WE NEED TO TAKE US ANOTHER STEP FORWARD.



# Executive summary

The Northern Ireland Digital Dialogue brought together local leaders from across the public and private sectors on 13 October 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on Northern Ireland and how digital technology can support a levelled-up recovery.

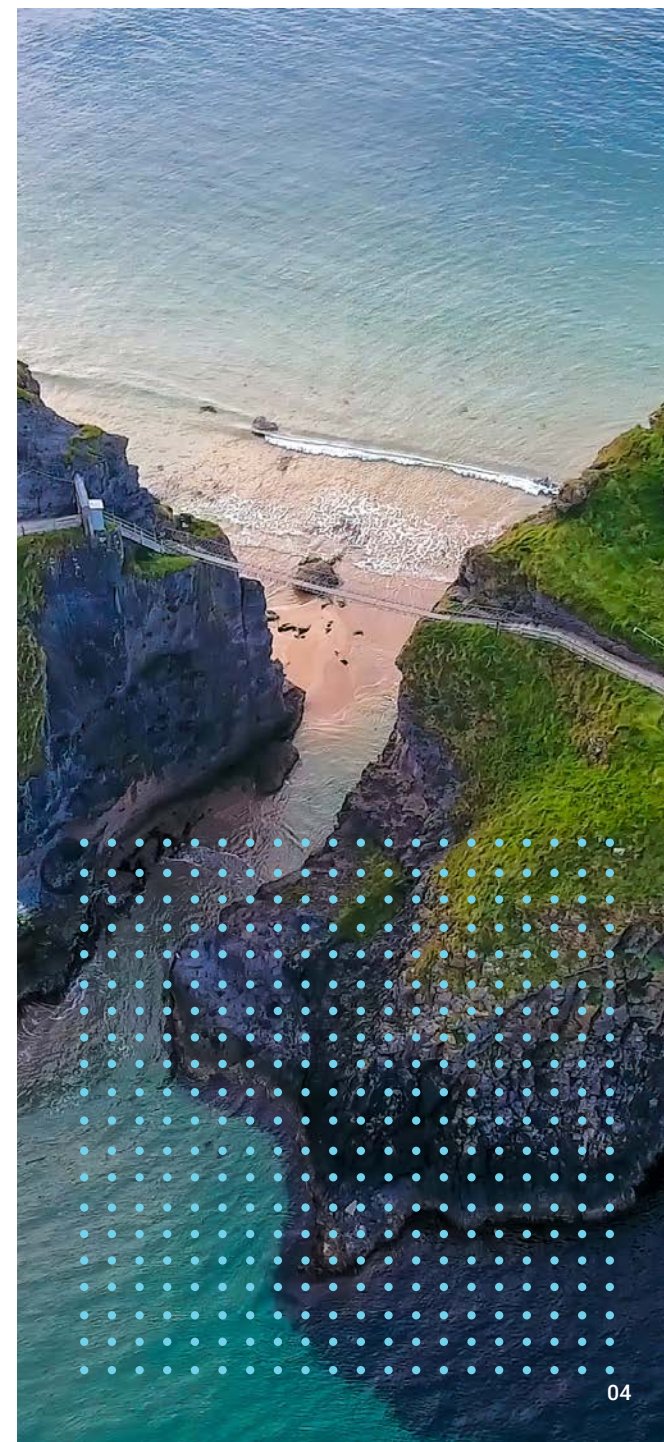
The discussion revealed serious concerns about the social and economic impact of COVID-19 and the long-term ambition to level up the whole of the UK.

However, these concerns were matched with optimism about the opportunity to accelerate digital transformation and apply digital technology to address both long-standing issues and new challenges brought about by COVID-19.

There is a strong desire for greater collaboration across public and private sectors to enable digital innovation and help Northern Ireland recover from the impact of COVID-19.

This report sits alongside six other national and regional reports, as well as a UK-wide report, and sets out some recommendations, based on the Digital Dialogue, about how this could be achieved in Northern Ireland, focusing on the following areas:

- › Strengthening local digital capital
- › Seizing local growth opportunities
- › Innovating to tackle urgent problems



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A nighttime photograph of a city street in Dublin, Ireland. In the background, the illuminated dome and facade of St. Patrick's Cathedral are visible against a dark blue sky. The street is lined with buildings, and there are light trails from cars and streetlights, creating a sense of motion and digital connectivity. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, purples, and greens, with warm lights from the buildings and streetlights.

# NORTHERN IRELAND DIGITAL DIALOGUE





## Participants

The key senior stakeholders who participated in the digital dialogue came from a variety of organisations, from the tech sector and beyond. These ranged from large corporates to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); professional services and legal firms; trade organisations, cluster groups, and incubators; the public sector and government; and universities and other educational institutions.

# The impact of COVID-19 on Northern Ireland

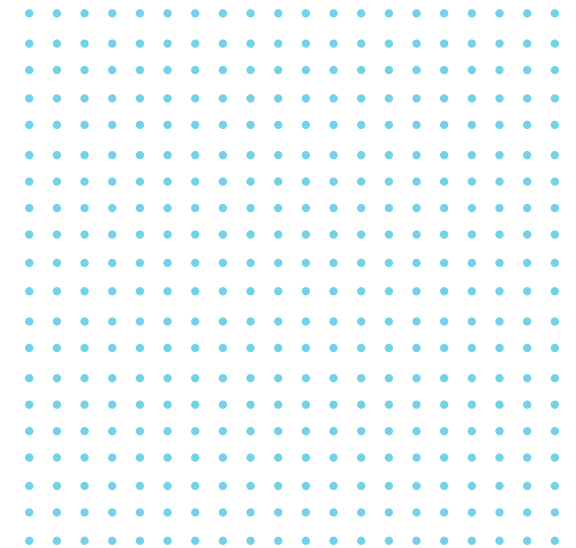
The COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have **reduced the economic output of Northern Ireland by as much as 9.6%** in 2020.

It is estimated that nearly 235,000 workers have either been temporarily laid-off, or have been furloughed and supported by the Government's Job Retention Scheme.

A further **71,000 people who are self-employed** have received income support from the Government.

The economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 comes against **a background of growth in the Northern Irish economy**. As with the exception of a decline in 2017, economic activity has increased gradually since the financial crisis.

Northern Ireland has also benefited from a **lower unemployment rate** and a stronger growth in employment than the UK average in recent years. However, the impacts of both the pandemic and Brexit could pose challenges in the coming years.





# Concerns from the Digital Dialogue

**Digital skills:** participants were particularly concerned about the overall lack of digital skills. The discussion included the need to develop a talent pipeline by attracting more young people to the industry, starting with computer science and IT courses in primary school. The need for greater emphasis on reskilling and training existing workers to address the supply issues were also discussed.

**Brexit:** participants were concerned with the comparative attractiveness of Northern Ireland compared to the Republic of Ireland from a business perspective, especially when discussing foreign direct investment and the potential impact of Brexit. Another concern was around the ability of Northern Irish tech firms to hire skilled workers from the European Union after the Brexit transition period.

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THOSE OF US IN THE TECH INDUSTRY, WE WANT PEOPLE TO COME TO NORTHERN IRELAND, BOTH ENTREPRENEURS AND TALENT, AND BREXIT MAKES THAT MORE DIFFICULT. WE WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO BUILDING OUT OUR TEAM AND ACCESSING EUROPEAN TALENT, BUT WE FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO DO THAT NOW BECAUSE THERE IS A PERCEPTION IN EASTERN EUROPE THAT THEY ARE UNWELCOME HERE, AND THAT'S A MAJOR ISSUE FOR US

Digital Dialogue Participant

“

I'M A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT HOW WE ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE INDUSTRY, WHETHER THROUGH COMPUTER SCIENCE OR IT, IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, EDUCATION, OR UNIVERSITIES. I'M CONCERNED, AND WE NEED TO MAKE SURE TECH IS A TOP SECTOR FOR EMPLOYMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

Digital Dialogue Participant

# COVID-19 as a catalyst for change in Northern Ireland

Participants in the Digital Dialogue discussed a number of opportunities that could catalyse positive change brought about by digital technology in Northern Ireland.

**Collaboration:** participants discussed how more partnerships between the education sector and employers, from primary school through to higher and further education, could help to close the digital skills gap. Participants also saw better public and private sector coordination, in order to better deliver on shared goals, as a key priority.

**Digital skills:** participants discussed the need to have a better IT curriculum and more focus on and incentives for STEM studies, in order to help more children get interested in jobs in the tech sector and inspire them about possible future careers in tech.

**Regulatory sandboxing:** the opportunity for Northern Ireland to be a regulatory sandbox was discussed, building on the already known idea of regulatory sandboxing and seeking to bring those types of programmes and opportunities to Northern Ireland.

**Local projects and programmes:** participants discussed improvements to the Small Business Research Initiative programme, in order to increase the number of scale-ups and ease the transition to commercial viability. Project Kelvin, a transatlantic fibre optic submarine cable connecting Northern Ireland to the United States and Europe, and the vital connectivity infrastructure and opportunities it brings were also highlighted.

**Reimagining future workplaces:** participants discussed this in a public sector context, reimagining the office so that staff are allowed to work remotely, and establishing regional office hubs enabling staff to remain closer to home but still have a physical workspace.



WE NEED TO GET KIDS INTO THE INDUSTRY, NOT AT 15 OR 16, BUT AT AGE EIGHT OR NINE WHEN THEY ARE USING SMART DEVICES AND LAPTOPS AT HOME AND UNDERSTAND THE TECHNOLOGY. WE NEED A CONCISE, AGREED-UPON CURRICULUM TO USE ACROSS ALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS, THAT WOULD ATTRACT MORE PEOPLE TO THE INDUSTRY.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Recommendations

A wide range of ideas were discussed at the Digital Dialogue which have been synthesized into three broad recommendations for next steps:

## **Work together to strengthen local digital capital**

Northern Ireland's potential to recover will depend upon the strength of its local digital capital. Local stakeholders from across the public and private sectors should work together to develop an integrated plan to strengthen the eight component parts of local digital capital.

## **Use digital to accelerate local growth opportunities**

Northern Ireland has several sectors that are primed for success, particularly advanced manufacturing. Concerted action should be taken to ensure that these sectors are at the forefront of digital adoption to support and accelerate their growth.

## **Launch local innovation challenges to tackle urgent problems.**

COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on many businesses, services and communities across Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive should challenge local innovators from across the public and private sector to come forward with new ideas and innovative solutions to some of its most urgent local problems, from housing and healthcare to supporting high streets, public spaces, and the creative economy.



USING NORTHERN IRELAND AS A REGULATORY SANDBOX IS BEING EXPLORED IN THE CITY DEAL. THIS IS NOT A NEW IDEA, BUT IT IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF. IT IS ABOUT GETTING TO 'YES' AND SUPPORTING PEOPLE BEING INNOVATIVE.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# STRENGTHEN LOCAL DIGITAL CAPITAL

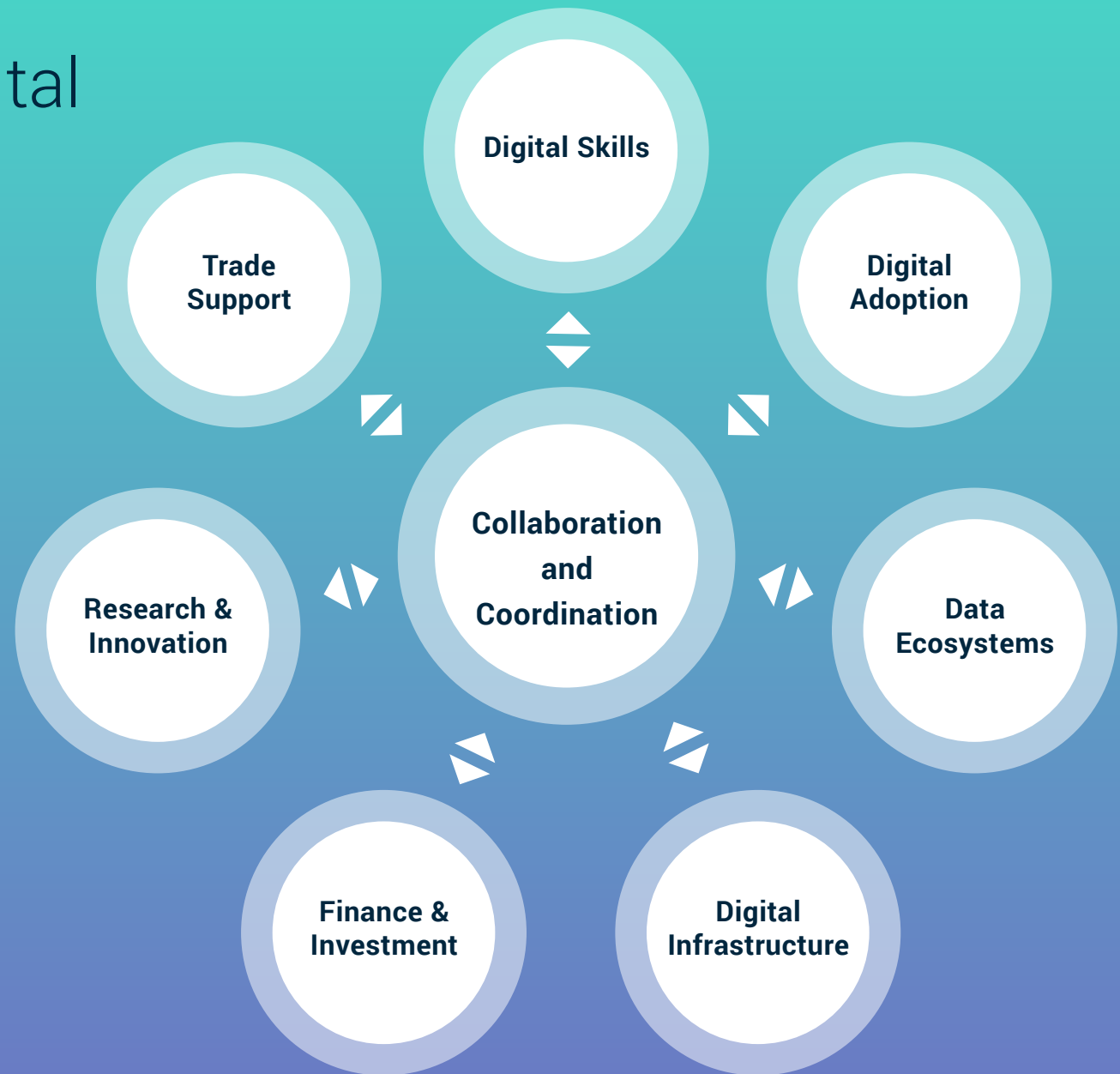


# Local Digital Capital

Local digital capital describes the inputs needed at the local level to maximise the benefits of digital.

These eight components were identified by participants across techUK's Digital Dialogue events as the essential inputs necessary for a nation or region to benefit from digital innovation.

techUK believes there is real value in thinking about these inputs in aggregate and developing a strategy that focuses on strengthening digital capital at the national and regional level.



# Strengthen local digital capital

While participants in the Digital Dialogue touched on many of the different aspects of local digital capital, the four that were the most frequently discussed were:

- › Digital skills
- › Digital adoption
- › Finance and investment
- › Collaboration and coordination

Participants discussed the importance of developing digital skills, and inspiring young people to consider jobs in the tech sector from a young age by overhauling school curricula, reskilling, and developing better collaboration between industry, schools, and the higher and further education sectors. This will hopefully help solve the supply issue facing the tech sector in Northern Ireland.

Second, participants discussed digital connectivity, particularly in regards to the COVID-19 remote working trend, for rural areas, and the opportunities afforded by connectivity and new projects, with a discussion of Project Kelvin. Participants also discussed the need for sufficient kit to fully utilise connectivity.

Third, trade support and particularly Brexit and the potential for greater differentiation (in terms of corporation tax and comparative attractiveness from an investment perspective) between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, concerns about how European Union (EU) funding will be replaced, and concerns about how Brexit will impact the ability of Northern Irish firms to hire talent from the EU.

Finally, participants stressed the need for greater levels of coordination and collaboration between the public and private sectors.





# Digital skills

Over the last few decades, rapid technological change has taken place which has had significant effect on society, economy, skills, and employment. Although there is no reliable local research data on Northern Ireland's digital development, **research by Citizens Online (UK)** in 2017 suggests that Northern Ireland has the worst rates in the UK regarding digital skills, with 32.2% of those aged 16-65 (representing over 378,000 people) having low or no digital skills. This research also suggests 38% of small Northern Ireland businesses lack basic digital skills.

The local digital sector is **worth around £1 billion to the Northern Ireland economy** and employs nearly 28,000 people.

**The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has found** that when looking at automation by area, we can see that London and the South East have the lowest and Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of jobs most susceptible to automation. In Northern Ireland, 48.5% of jobs have a high potential for automation, compared to 45.4% on average across the UK.



WE TALK ABOUT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS OFTEN GEARED TOWARDS THE WORKPLACE ALONE, AND YET A HUGE PART OF PEOPLE'S DIGITAL LIVES ARE OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE. WE NEED TO ENGAGE PEOPLE IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS THAT IS MUCH MORE RELEVANT TO PEOPLE'S LIVES AND HELP THEM SEE THE OPPORTUNITIES.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



IN TERMS OF YOUNG PEOPLE COMING INTO THE SECTOR, THE NARRATIVE AROUND OPPORTUNITY IS WEAK. INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES ARE WORKING ON IT, BUT NOT THE WHOLE SECTOR. CAREER ADVICE IS SHOCKING AND PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THE OPPORTUNITIES. PEOPLE THINK OF JOBS IN DIGITAL AS CALL CENTRE WORK.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Digital infrastructure

Residential superfast **broadband coverage in Northern Ireland reached 89%** in 2019 , with **4G data services at 75% for geographical coverage by all operators**. Voice call coverage is 80%.

Openreach announced in September 2020 that it had **reached 420,000 premises with fibre-to-the-premises broadband in Northern Ireland, just over 50%** of the whole nation.

Project Stratum was **devised around 2017 with the intention of delivering ultra-fast broadband to poorly served areas of Northern Ireland**. The £165 million programme aims to improve broadband connectivity by extending Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband infrastructure to approximately 79,000 premises across Northern Ireland that cannot yet access broadband services.

BT announced in October 2020 that it will **build a 5G private network within Belfast Harbour**. In a UK and Ireland first, BT will build and manage a live 5G private network designed specifically to achieve the highest levels of ultrafast mobile connectivity, coverage, reliability, and security across the port's main operational areas.



WITH THE INFRASTRUCTURE WE HAVE, REMOTE WORKING WILL BE AN OPTION IN THE FUTURE.

Digital Dialogue Participant



WE CAN TALK ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO ONLINE SERVICES, BUT UNLESS WE CAN BRING THE PUBLIC WITH US, UNLESS THEY HAVE ACCESS, CONNECTIVITY, AND UNDERSTAND HOW TO DO THAT, WE WILL FAIL.

Digital Dialogue Participant



# Trade support

Significant levels of cross-border trade and movement of goods and people between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland take place every day.

Provisional **estimates indicate that in 2016**, Northern Irish registered businesses made more than 758,000 cross border exports worth more than £3.4 billion. Additionally, there were more than 410,000 import deliveries worth nearly £2.0 billion from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland.

Brexit presents a significant challenge to this cross-border trade, and digital technology can be used to make customs inspections and border crossings faster, safer, and more efficient.



WE HUGELY BENEFIT FROM FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT, BUT THERE IS A RISK DEPENDING ON HOW BREXIT PLAYS OUT, THAT U.S. FIRMS LOOKING TO IRELAND FOR INVESTMENT WILL PLAY TO EITHER DUBLIN OR BELFAST'S STRENGTHS. THERE IS A RISK THERE, BUT ALSO BIG OPPORTUNITIES AS WE HAVE A BIT MORE AUTONOMY, ESPECIALLY AROUND TAX. WE COULD BRING MORE FDI TO NORTHERN IRELAND. THIS IS ALL A POTENTIAL CONCERN BUT ALSO A POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Collaboration and coordination

Collaboration also emerged as a key priority in Northern Ireland, with participants citing the benefits of a strong devolved administration, while also wanting deeper collaboration within the digital sector and between the digital sector, local government, universities and colleges, and other economic sectors.

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WE NEED BETTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS – HOW DO WE WORK BETTER TOGETHER? WE ARE TRYING TO PROVIDE THE SAME ANSWERS AND SOLUTIONS BUT IT STILL SEEMS DISCONNECTED, AND WE ALLOW PROCUREMENT TO GET IN THE WAY. FINDING A HUB OR A WAY TO GET BOTH PARTIES TOGETHER TO EXPLORE OPTIONS COSTS US NOTHING, AND IS VERY IMPORTANT TO DRIVE THE PRIORITISATION OF IT AND DIGITAL SERVICES AS WELL AS MAKING IT HAPPEN. I WOULD LOVE TO EXPLORE THAT A BIT FURTHER TO SEE HOW WE CAN MAKE THAT REAL.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**





# SEIZE LOCAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



# Seize local growth opportunities

The participants in the Digital Dialogue highlighted advanced manufacturing as a key sector for Northern Ireland where the use of digital technologies can be used to drive innovation, as well as productivity and efficiency growth.

Project Kelvin, a **transatlantic fibre cable linking Northern Ireland to the United States** was another opportunity discussed by participants, allowing for fast international data connectivity and the potential for data centres and other innovative tech businesses to come to Northern Ireland.



ADVANCED MANUFACTURING WE KNOW IS A GROWTH AREA. HOW DO WE GROW THE DIGITAL SECTOR, BUT ALSO HOW DOES DIGITAL SUPPORT OTHER AREAS OF THE ECONOMY TO BECOME MORE PRODUCTIVE?

**Digital Dialogue Participant**



# Seize local growth opportunities

In addition to what was discussed in the Digital Dialogue, Northern Ireland has strengths in several growth sectors:

- › Advanced manufacturing and engineering
- › Business services
- › Digital tech
- › Food and drink
- › Life sciences
- › Tourism

These key sectors are ripe for innovation and growth driven by digital innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need to double down on these key growth sectors to help Northern Ireland recover and thrive post-COVID-19.

Opportunities for collaboration and coordination should be deepened by building up strong networks, to join up sectoral ecosystems and harness any potential spill over effects from the tech sector to other sectors.

New business starts should also be encouraged in the key growth sectors in the long-term, in order to better utilise the developing talent pool, encourage entrepreneurship, and raise productivity.

These sectors are the key sectors we believe have the best chance of increasing digital uptake and innovation.



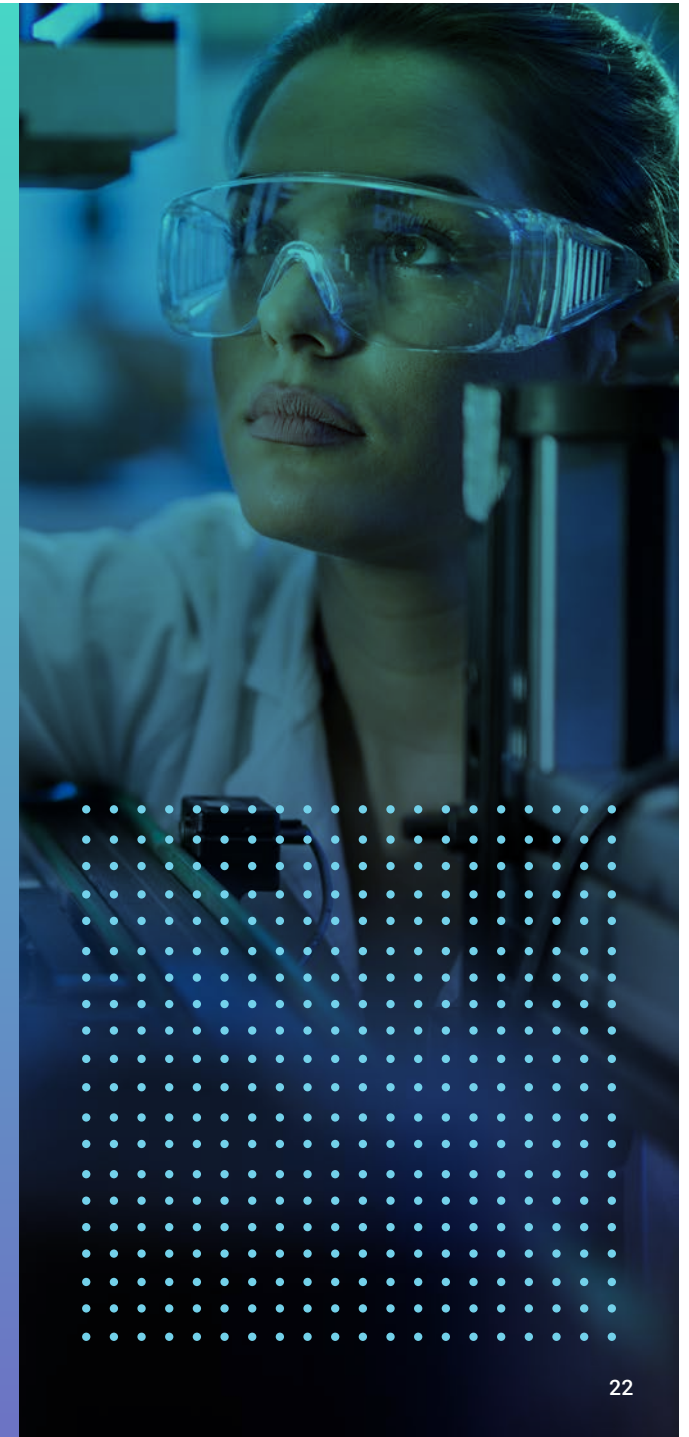
PROJECT KELVIN IS A GOOD LINK RIGHT ACROSS ALL OF NORTHERN IRELAND, THAT AFFORDS THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOCATE WHERE YOU WANT. THE HISTORY AROUND THE PROJECT, AND THE FACT THAT WE HAVE INFRASTRUCTURE LIKE THAT TO BE BUILT UPON, FOR PROJECT STRATUM, WE SHOULD BE SHOUTING ABOUT THESE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES AND NOT HIDE THE LIGHT.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**

# Advanced manufacturing and engineering

Northern Ireland has a **diverse advanced manufacturing and engineering sector which has grown more than three times faster than the rest of the UK**, and accounts for over 11% of employment and over 15% of gross value added (GVA). The sector has a strong focus on research and development (R&D) investment and has particular strengths in plastics, polymers, and composites; stress modelling, power generation, and aerospace.

Northern Ireland is also home to a number of centres of excellence undertaking relevant research and channelling academic expertise into innovative new products and firms, including the Northern Ireland Advanced Composites & Engineering Centre and the Polymer Processing Research Centre.





# Business services

Northern Ireland offers a **high-quality and skilled workforce** with proven experience in a low-risk and cost-competitive environment – and has a long history of delivering services to British, European, and American clients.

**Financial services is a particular strength**, with Northern Ireland playing host to numerous global financial services institutions as well as several homegrown innovative entrepreneurs like First Derivatives, Datactics, and FSCOM.

Belfast is ranked as the world's top destination for financial technology investment projects and has been ranked in the top three fintech locations of the future after London and Singapore. Blockchain has recently become a particular speciality.

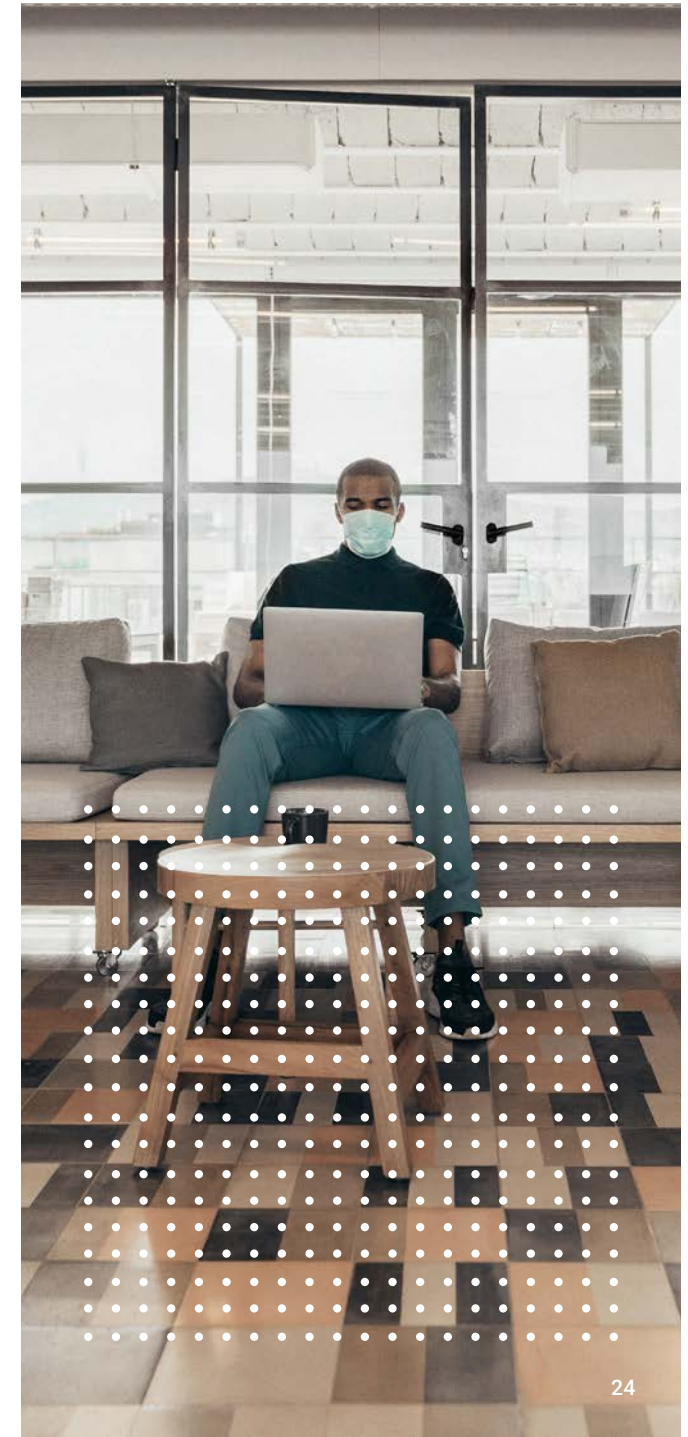


# Creative and digital

Northern Ireland has a large tech sector and is home to world-class creative facilities. The nation's **animation expertise** is supported by specialised undergraduate and graduate courses in the field.

Additionally, Northern Ireland is an important global centre for film and television, with Game of Thrones largely being filmed in Northern Ireland as one example.

Northern Ireland is also **home to more than 1,200 tech companies**, with more than 100 global leaders establishing a presence in the nation and many local companies like First Derivatives, Kainos, and Novosco exporting internationally as well. Tech research in Northern Ireland and Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University has particular specialties in artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security, and data science.





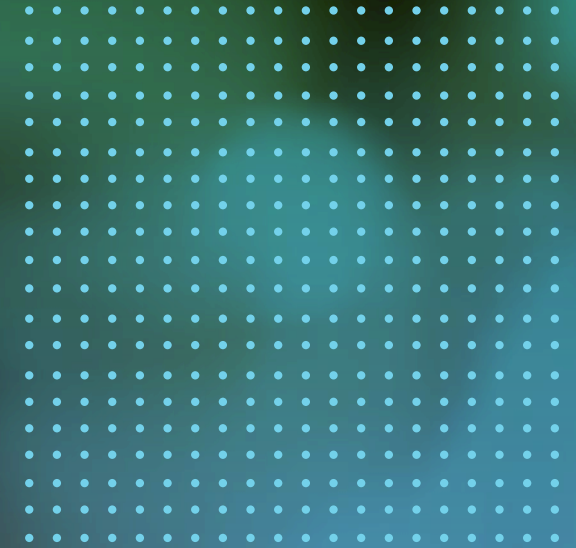
# Food and drink

Northern Ireland's **food and drink sector** is based on family farms and fisheries, and is home to numerous centres of excellence doing research on food safety, health, and nutrition standards, like the Nutrition Innovation Centre for Food & Health at Ulster University, and the Institute for Global Food Security at Queens University.



# Life sciences

Northern Ireland is home to a **thriving life sciences and biotech sector** with a significant focus on R&D and an established reputation for innovation. Two of Northern Ireland's main universities, Queens University Belfast and Ulster University are ranked among the top ten in the UK for bioscience research, and have helped the nation establish expertise in precision medicine, medical technology, health data analytics, and machine learning diagnostics.



# Tourism

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was a key growth sector for Northern Ireland, **worth 4.9% of GDP and sustaining more than 40,000 jobs**. The nation is home to significant maritime heritage, the world's largest Titanic exhibit, and other famous sites like the Giant's Causeway.

While the coronavirus pandemic has made tourism difficult, digital technology has a role to play in helping the sector's economic recovery through the use of innovative technologies, from e-commerce and online marketing to the use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to create new and immersive experiences and increase accessibility.





# Digitising key growth sectors

The best way to enable the digitisation of Northern Ireland's key growth sectors is to do two things:

Ensure that the strategic economic planning for key growth sectors has a strong digital underpinning.

Foster greater collaboration, crossover, and links between local tech firms and firms in the key growth sectors, to best utilise digital technology to supercharge growth sectors. This could take the form of events to generate collaboration or the creation or expansion of cross-sectoral groups and organisations.



WE TALKED ABOUT AI AND THE IMPACT OF DISRUPTIVE TECH, AND NORTHERN IRELAND HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE IN THE VANGUARD OF THE UK ABOUT HOW BUSINESS CAN EXPLOIT THAT. IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WE REACH OUT TO SMES AND COLLABORATE BETTER WITH PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND PUBLIC SECTOR IN PARTNERSHIP CAN BETTER REACH OUT TO SMES, AS THEY ARE THE A VITAL LINCHPIN TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

**Digital Dialogue Participant**





# LAUNCH LOCAL INNOVATION CHALLENGES

# Launch local innovation challenges

Digital technology is not a panacea to deep-rooted issues but can help support new approaches and solutions.

The Northern Ireland Executive should set out “local innovation challenges” in the model of “The Grand Challenges” in order to spur new local innovation, with a commitment to scale successful ideas.

Participants discussed the education system, with issues like a need for curriculum reform, and getting younger kids into tech and raising awareness of potential careers in the tech sector. The discussion then turned to how tech could be used to support educators and school, through remote learning during the pandemic and beyond, by enabling new teaching techniques, new ways of learning, and greater flexibility around tailoring learning to individual styles and needs.

This is just an example of many local innovation challenges where digital solutions should be considered.



THE SECTOR SHOULD COME TOGETHER WITH INNOVATIVE AND JOINED-UP APPROACHES TO SKILLS AND RESKILLING – INNOVATIVE THINGS LIKE APTITUDE TESTING, ONLINE TRAINING, AS TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM TEACHING HAS CHANGED. WE NEED TO LOOK AT NEW AREAS , NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY, DOING A PUBLIC GOOD AND HELPING PEOPLE RESKILL INTO EMPLOYMENT AND HIGHER-VALUE EMPLOYMENT. UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM ARE TERRIFYING, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE TO BRING THOSE PEOPLE IN AND HELP THEM LIVE PRODUCTIVE LIVES IN TECH. HOW CAN WE DO SOMETHING BOLD AND INNOVATIVE, NOT JUST ON AN INDIVIDUAL COMPANY BASIS, THAT SUPERCHARGES THE DIVERSE FLOW OF PEOPLE INTO THE WORKFORCE?



# Conclusions

The continuing COVID-19 crisis remains a huge constraint on recovery efforts.

However, every effort should be made to incorporate digital into Northern Ireland's recovery strategy and future economic planning. There is evidence this is happening, but this will need to be maintained and built upon.

This report sets out some initial thinking on how that could be done, building upon existing strengths and assets.

Further work is required to develop these ideas, and the Digital Dialogue made it clear that collaboration both within Northern Ireland and across the UK will be essential for success.





# Survey of participants

techUK recently surveyed the participants of the Northern Ireland Digital Dialogue, asking them how optimistic they were about the potential for digital innovation to drive the economic recovery in Northern Ireland, and where they felt digital transformation efforts could make the biggest difference.

One-third of the respondents felt very optimistic, and two-thirds felt somewhat optimistic since taking part in the Digital Dialogue.

Respondents felt digital technology could make the biggest difference in the following areas:

- › Opening up new markets and customer bases for local businesses.
- › Developing a digital mindset and a more agile way of thinking.
- › The public sector and online public services.
- › Smart cities and freeports.





## Participants

Russell Beggs, Senior Director of Engineering and Belfast Site Lead, ESO

Jeremy Biggerstaff, MD, Flint Studios

Nial Borthistle, Business Development Manager, Glandore

Dan Cartland, Private Secretary, Department for the Economy

David Crozier, Head of Strategic Engagement and Partnership, Queen's University

John D'Arcy, Nation Director, The Open University

Mark Dames, Head of Policy, BT

Julian David, CEO, techUK

Shane Devlin, CEO, Southern Trust

Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for Economy, Department for the Economy

Marie Doyle, Director, Consulting, Deloitte

Conor Dunbar, Digital ICT Sector Lead, Invest NI

Matthew Evans, Director – Markets, techUK

Catherine Gardiner, CIO, Energia

Professor Philip Hanna, Dean of Education, Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Queen's University

Stuart Harvey, CEO, Datactics

Dr Jonathan Heggarty MBE, Director of Curriculum, Belfast Metropolitan College

Rachid Hourizi, Director, Institute of Coding

Alasdair Kilpatrick, Director, Consulting, Deloitte

Sanchia Kirkpatrick, Director, Economic Development & FDI, Rise & Global Development

Jennifer Liu, Head of Trade, London (Technology) & UK DIT Relationship Lead, Invest NI

Tim Magness, CMO, Civica

John Mathers, Director, Barclays Corporate Banking, TMT, Barclays

Bob McClean, Business Development Director, Civica

Eoin McFadden, Head of Innovation Strategy, Department for the Economy

Ann McGregor MBE, CEO, NI Chamber of Commerce

Roxanne Morison, Head of Digital Policy, CBI

Paul Murnaghan, Northern Ireland Director, BT

Denis Murphy, CEO, Anaeko

Iggy O'Doherty, Director of Digital Shared Services, Department of Finance

Paddy O'Hagan, CEO, Neueda

Mark Owens, MD, Civica NI

Professor Karen Rafferty, Head of School, School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Queen's University

Brian Roche, Director of IT, Belfast City Airport

Alistair Ross, Special Advisor, Department for the Economy

Margaret Sambell, Head of Strategy, Tech Partnership Degrees

Elaine Smyth, Director of Innovation Community, Catalyst

Dave Vincent, Chief Digital Officer, NI Tourist Board

Antony Walker, Deputy CEO, techUK

Ciara Watson, Marketing Executive, Civica

Jane Wood, UK Nations and Regions Director, BT