



2019 General Election  
Manifesto



# Our collective contribution to the economy

The outlook for the economy over the coming years is uncertain, but the sectors we collectively support through Trade NI will have an important contribution to make as Northern Ireland adjusts to a new economic reality.

Retail is the largest sector of our private sector economy. It provides over 140,000 jobs and makes up around 15% of Northern Ireland's economic output. Increasing local consumer confidence levels in the retail sector will help drive consumer spending and boost economic growth for Northern Ireland. Beyond employment, the retail sector is also recognised as an integral part of any region's character. Dynamic cities and thriving towns and villages rely on their retail outlets to provide atmosphere, a sense of community and uniqueness for attracting tourism and investment.

The manufacturing sector provides 88,000 jobs, which are often highly skilled, well paid and responsible for cutting edge research and development. It contributes 14% of our total economic output and has been the largest employment growth sector in the Northern Ireland economy since 2012.

The hospitality sector sustains 65,000 jobs in Northern Ireland and is one of the largest private sector services employers in the region after wholesale/retail and contributes £1.6bn in value added (GVA) annually to the local economy. The hospitality sector makes up 57% of tourism GVA and 75% of direct tourism jobs, highlighting its critical role in driving growth in one of Northern Ireland's emerging sectors. The sector has benefited from the strong performance of Northern Ireland's tourism industry in recent years and a general recovery in the local economy, but there are signs of challenges ahead, with the industry reporting a downturn for the last two consecutive quarters. This, along with rising costs, is causing real concern within the food and beverage element of the industry.

Together our sectors account for a high proportion of economic outputs and more than 293,000 jobs. This is a significant contribution to the economy and to the fortunes of communities across Northern Ireland. However, we want to do more.

Just think for a moment what growth in these areas of the economy would mean for jobs. Even modest growth of 3% would result in 8,800 more jobs. This would be transformative, but we have bigger ambitions. We want to collectively support an additional 65,000 jobs in Northern Ireland by 2030.



# Our vision

DELIVER SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND BECOME A NET CONTRIBUTOR TO THE NATIONAL BUDGET TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR A COMPETITIVE, SELF-SUSTAINED AND THRIVING ECONOMY. WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS BY PROVIDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE, INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SUPPORTIVE TO DOING BUSINESS AND EXPANDING OUR GLOBAL REACH.

This vision is supported by **four key priorities:**

- 1. A sustainable economy where growth is stimulated by enhanced productivity resulting from investment in education and skills, supported by responsible consumption and production.**
- 2. A competitive economy that provides a uniquely supportive environment for doing business.**
- 3. A global economy that is visible and attractive to the outside world with an infrastructure which supports local, national and international connectivity.**
- 4. An economy supported by revitalised communities where people want to live, work and visit.**

# 16 Point Action Plan

Delivering a **BREXIT outcome** which doesn't hinder our ambition



The first and foremost priority for the next government is to see the risk of a no-deal Brexit eliminated and to bring certainty and clarity to our single most important trading relationship. We have been promised and Government should deliver (1) frictionless trade (2) regulatory alignment (3) access to labour; and (4) a lengthy transition period that allows business time to adapt to change.

Fix the failing **Apprenticeship Levy** to boost the supply of domestic skills



Nationally, the apprenticeship levy system is failing, but in Northern Ireland firms do not have access to the funding, putting them at a disadvantage to GB competitors. The Government must use its current review to take a more radical look at how the system is functioning. It must be transparent with business providing NI firms with access to their contributions and direct funding towards areas which fill actual skills shortages and a target set to increase the uptake of apprenticeships by 40% by 2025.

Sustainable **funding for Skills**



Outcomes of the post-18 funding review have the potential to radically change the higher education landscape. Any recommendations to reduce tuition fees, without boosting funding elsewhere, risks reducing the number of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) courses offered by higher education institutions. In addition to looking at the impact changes to fees will have on these vital STEM subjects, Government should also reverse the real term decline in the premium that high cost subjects such as engineering and science receive, which currently fails to cover the true cost of delivery.

The MaSN cap for Ulster University campus at Magee should be lifted immediately to give a much needed boost to the North-West.

Create **credible vocational routes** for young people



For too long vocational education has remained in the shadow of academic learning. The Government's reform to post-16 technical education, including the introduction of T-levels, has the potential to give vocational education a much needed boost. However, post-16 fixes are not enough. Government must also look again at the pre-16 curriculum. We need a new age 14-19 strategy by 2021 which provides a new vocational route, running parallel to academic, from school right through to university and a long-term strategy to encourage/support the economically inactive back into the labour market.

## Invest in infrastructure



Government should set out a clearly prioritised pipeline for the UK's major infrastructure projects and ensure content is delivered throughout the UK. Our broadband coverage should match the UK average with superfast broadband (30mbps) available to 100% of NI by 2025 and a concerted effort to improve rural broadband coverage from 67% to 74% by 2021. Furthermore, we should aim to future-proof broadband access by improving the coverage of ultrafast broadband (300mbps) from 38% in NI up to the UK average of 50% by 2025.

## Deliver economic devolution



The UK economy is a world leader. However, its success is not shared evenly across the country. To address this, government must drive forward ultrafast broadband coverage, outline a roadmap to reform the planning process and help develop a culture of long-term investment across the public and private sector. This should include financing research and development, as well as investment in innovation and enterprise, improving skills and improving infrastructure across all UK regions. Air Passenger Duty (the highest in the world) should be abolished by 2021 to secure additional business and tourism air routes to and from Northern Ireland and Britain.

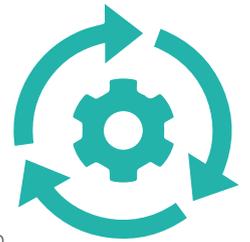
Delivery of the City and Growth Deals already approved and the prospective new City Deals should be escalated.

## Cut the cost of energy for business consumers



The whole of the UK and Northern Ireland in particular has consistently some of the highest industrial electricity prices in Europe. Government must introduce a range of measures similar to those already in operation elsewhere to ensure UK companies are on a level playing field.

## Implement the Made Smarter Review



The Made Smarter Review was a business-led commission which set out how UK manufacturing can be transformed through the adoption of industrial digital technologies to produce goods better and faster. The government must speed up the implementation of the review across the UK. A 'Made Smarter NI' pilot implemented by 2022 that offers funding, strategic advice, leadership development and technical student placements to enable makers to adopt new digital technologies.

## Reboot the **better regulation** target



Government must reaffirm its commitment to reduce the cost and burden of regulation to business and set out how it intends to transparently achieve this. Government should also return to the former practice of publishing a bi-annual summary of new regulations and, in particular, highlight the costs of any new regulations and savings borne by SMEs. Government should also re-impose the previous de-minimis threshold of £2 million, save where the net cost to SMEs exceeds £1 million, in which the impact assessment should be submitted to the Regulatory Policy Committee for validation.

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## Rethink UK immigration policy to ensure the **access to the skills** which business need



Access to skills is vital to growth and prosperity but additional costs including visa charges, the Immigration Skills Charge, and the Health Surcharge together make the current system increasingly unaffordable, especially for small businesses. Government must also rethink the proposed salary threshold, abolish the skills charge and introduce any changes to UK immigration rules in a phased approach.

## Increase UK **export support** to drive economic growth



To increase the UK's competitiveness in global markets we must boost our international trade in both goods and services. As well as boosting funding for export promotion, Government must develop and expand the trade missions and trade fairs programme to build links with potential new and existing trade partners. The publication of an International Framework by 2020 which sets out how public sector bodies engage externally to promote Northern Ireland.

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## Simplify the visa processing system to **help SMEs**



Britain needs to show that it is open to the world. Government should initiate a review of Home Office bureaucracy to develop and implement a plan to reduce the time and effort involved in applying for visas and increase the responsiveness of UK visa processing to meet employer needs.

## Business rates reform to encourage investment in growth



Government should also include business rates in its 'Making Tax Digital' programme and should work to simplify, clarify, and consolidate the current raft of reliefs and allowances available to businesses.

## Reform regulations to reflect modern working practices



Following the Taylor Review on modern employment practices, there is a need to create a more level playing field between the employed and self-employed by reforming National Insurance Contributions and a commitment to ensure Northern Ireland's employment rights regime is aligned to the rest of the UK.

## Foster future innovation



Increase financial support for R&D into emerging technologies (NI currently trails the rest of the UK on its investment into R&D). Adjust tax credits and subsidies to incentivise manufacturers. Accelerate international mutual recognition standards. Prioritise a competitive digital infrastructure and a long-term plan for smart infrastructure. Prioritise collaboration between manufacturers, Government and academia to fill skills shortages and improve our skills base around the requirements of Industry 4.0.

## Stop cybercrime costing business



Trade NI welcomes the steps the Government has taken to improving national cyber security resilience. However, it must recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach for business is insufficient and comprehensive security cannot be the exclusive domain of large corporations.





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