



Annual Northern Ireland Economic Conference 2023

Wednesday 6th December

Hilton Hotel Templepatrick

Host local authority



An agendaNi event

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Northern Ireland's economic summit

The Northern Ireland Economic Conference, now in its 28th year, is Northern Ireland's premier economic analysis event and is unique in being the only forum that takes a high level look at the performance of, and prospects for the local economy. It is firmly established as the annual summit for Northern Ireland's economic community, including policy makers and business leaders.

Conference overview

This year's conference takes place against a difficult economic and political backdrop. With no devolved administration the local economy faces economic headwinds on several fronts. High inflation still persists and the energy crisis is expected to continue well into the winter months, which has put a squeeze on living standards. Budgetary pressures mean that spending is constrained, at a time when Northern Ireland's economy aims to address long-standing issues such as being a laggard in terms of productivity, and having the highest rates of working age economic inactivity of any UK region. The response to these economic headwinds has been the 10X Economy strategy, targeting future high growth sectors of the economy. Expert speakers will discuss all the key issues and share their thoughts on the economic prospects for Northern Ireland.



Why attend?

- ✓ Expert local and visiting speakers
- ✓ Major economic summit
- ✓ Economic outlook and forecast
- ✓ Unique information presented
- ✓ Not-to-be-missed annual conference
- ✓ All sectors represented — government, business, third sector

Key issues to be addressed at the conference

- 01 **UK and global** economic outlook
- 02 Medium term economic outlook **for Northern Ireland**
- 03 **Addressing the** productivity gap
- 04 Impact of inflation **on growing the economy**
- 05 **Implementing the** 10X Economy strategy
- 06 Closing skills gaps **in the local economy**
- 07 The cost of living crisis: **Addressing the challenge**
- 08 Promoting innovation **in the economy**
- 09 **The economic opportunity** of net zero carbon technologies
- 10 **Tackling** economic inactivity



Sponsorship opportunities

There are still a small number of available sponsorship opportunities at this year's conference. Sponsorship of the annual Northern Ireland Economic Conference is an excellent way for organisations to raise their profile with a key audience of economic decision-makers and senior business leaders. For further details or to discuss how your organisation can benefit from close association with Northern Ireland's premier economic analysis event, **contact Lynda Millar on 028 9261 9933 or email lynda.millar@agendani.com.**



Programme

09:00 THE NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Chair's welcome and introduction: **John Campbell**, Economics and Business Editor

BBC Northern Ireland

WELCOME

Councillor Rosie Kinnear, Deputy Mayor, **Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council**

OPENING ADDRESS

Delivering the 10X Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland

Paul Grocott, Deputy Secretary, Economic Strategy Group, **Department for the Economy**

UK ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

UK economic prospects

Chris Giles, Economics Editor, **FT**

ECONOMIC FORECAST

The Northern Ireland medium term economic outlook

Gareth Hetherington, Director, **Ulster University Economic Policy Centre**

PUBLIC FINANCES

Sustainable public finances and fiscal devolution

Lisa Wilson, Senior Economist, **Nevin Economic Research Institute**

Questions & answers / Panel discussion

10:45 NETWORKING BREAK

11:15 THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Driving growth in the local economy

Richard Baker, Chief Executive, **Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council**

SKILLS

The evolution of apprenticeships

Sandra McNally, Professor of Economics, **University of Surrey** and Director, Centre for Economic Performance, **London School of Economics**

PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity: A long-standing challenge

David Jordan, Lecturer in Economics, **Queen's Business School** and Research Associate **The Productivity Institute**

GOODS TRADE

The structure of international goods trade for Ireland and Northern Ireland

Janez Kren, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, **The Economic and Social Research Institute**

Questions & answers / Panel discussion

13:00 LUNCH BREAK

Programme

14:00

NET ZERO

The economic opportunity of Net Zero Tech

Richard Rodgers, Deputy Secretary, Head of Energy, **Department for the Economy**

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Social Enterprise on the island of Ireland

Helen Johnston, Senior Social Policy Analyst, **National Economic & Social Council**

DIGITAL ECONOMY

Enabling the Digital Economy for economic growth

Frank O'Donnell, Public Sector Lead, **Microsoft Ireland**

PANEL DISCUSSION: THE COST OF LIVING: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

Noyona Chundur, Chief Executive, **Consumer Council for Northern Ireland**

Kevin Higgins, Head of Policy, **Advice NI**

Neil Johnston, Director, **Northern Ireland Retail Consortium**

Paul Mac Flynn, Co-Director, **Nevin Economic Research Institute**

Kirsty McManus, Director, **IoD Northern Ireland**

16:15

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY AND CONFERENCE CLOSE





John Campbell is Economics and Business Editor for **BBC Northern Ireland**, a position he has held since September 2013. Prior to that he was a senior BBC producer working across TV, radio and online with special responsibility for business coverage. He began his career on the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo.



Noyona Chundur was appointed Chief Executive of **The Consumer Council** in January 2021. She has extensive experience of consumer protection, economic development and arts and culture having successfully developed strategies at regional, national and international levels that deliver customer-centric business transformation. Noyona joined The Consumer Council from Invest Northern Ireland where she was Head of Campaigns and Digital Solutions since 2006, joining the organisation in 2004. She led their communications strategy for Northern Ireland, winning multiple internationally recognised awards for marketing and digital innovation, and is also Chair of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival.



Chris Giles is a columnist at the **Financial Times** and has been its Economics Editor since 2004. Based in London he has a particular focus on trends in the world economy and in the UK. Previously at the Financial Times, he was the economics editorial writer. Before joining the FT in 2000, Chris was an economics correspondent at the BBC. He started his career in research, spending seven years as an economist for the Institute for Fiscal Studies.



Paul Grocott is the Deputy Secretary for Economic Strategy Group in the **Department for the Economy**. Paul's team led the development of the Department's 10X Economic Vision and is now working on developing the transformational policies that can achieve these outcomes and the organisational changes that are necessary to make it all happen. He is currently responsible for coordinating the programme of engagements for the Special Envoy to Northern Ireland on Economic Affairs. Paul led the teams providing support to businesses during Covid and was responsible for Northern Ireland's 'High Street Scheme' that provided adults with £100 to spend in their local high streets. Paul is also the Department's Policy Champion which includes promoting and leading new policy development approaches.



Gareth Hetherington is the Director of the **Ulster University Economic Policy Centre**. The Centre is self-financing and carries out a broad range of economic policy focused research to inform Central and Local Government on key policy and strategy decisions. Typical areas of research cover skills, competitiveness, tax, community planning, economic forecasting and more recently COVID recovery. Gareth works closely with senior stakeholders in the public and private sector, providing briefings to NI Executive Ministers, evidence to Assembly Committees and engages with senior business leaders. He also provides regular economic commentary in the media. Separately Gareth is the non-executive chair of the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) and is a member of both the High Streets Task Force and the newly established Northern Ireland Skills Council.



Kevin Higgins is Head of Policy and Research at **Advice NI**. He has worked in the advice sector in Northern Ireland for over 30 years, both as an advice worker with an independent advice centre (Advice Officer, Ballynaveigh Community Development Association), with a CAB (Manager, Falls Road Bureau), with Law Centre NI (Legal Adviser) and latterly in a support capacity in his role within Advice NI. Advice NI is the umbrella organisation for the independent advice network in Northern Ireland – annually dealing with over 250,000 enquiries mainly on social security benefits, housing, consumer, employment and debt issues. A large part of his work revolves around addressing social policy issues raised by Advice NI members and responding to consultations. Welfare reform has taken up much of his time since the Coalition Government came to power in 2010, raising awareness of the impacts of the social security benefit cuts and the social security benefit reforms. He was part of the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group chaired by Professor Eileen Evason and he is currently an independent member of the DfC NI Joint Standards Committee.



Helen Johnston is a Senior Social Policy Analyst at the **Irish National Economic and Social Council (NESC)**. She was previously Director of the Irish Combat Poverty Agency. A native of Northern Ireland, Helen has previous experience working in the Northern Ireland civil service. She was chair of the Centre for Cross Border Studies from 2011 to 2021. Helen has qualifications in Environmental Science and Town and Country Planning, a Master's in Business Administration, and a Doctorate in Governance.



David Jordan is a Lecturer in Economics at **Queen's Business School**, and a Research Associate at **The Productivity Institute**. He is currently examining the reasons behind low levels of productivity in Northern Ireland, as part of the work of the Northern Ireland Productivity Forum. His wider research focuses on regional and public economics, alongside economic and financial history. He is particularly interested in the economics of devolution, including how institutions and policy have shaped the long-run performance of Northern Ireland's economy.



Janez Kren is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the **Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)** in Dublin and a Fellow at Trinity College Dublin. His research primarily focuses on international trade and applied econometrics. Prior to his current positions he was a doctoral researcher at KU Leuven in Belgium, worked as a consultant for the World Bank and was a visiting researcher at Loughborough University. He has published peer-reviewed research on topics related to Ireland, the UK, and European economy.



Paul Mac Flynn is co-director of the **Nevin Economic Research Institute** and is based in the Belfast office. In addition to managing the Belfast office he has co-responsibility for the NERI's research programme and for its strategic direction. He leads on the NERI's analysis of the Northern Ireland economy along with all research into the impact of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. Other research areas include regional productivity, the all-island economy and the future of work. He is a graduate of University College Dublin with a BA in Economics and Politics and the University of Bristol with an MSc in Economics and Public Policy, specialising in the economic impacts of political devolution in the UK.



Sandra McNally is a Professor of Economics at the **University of Surrey**. She is Director of the Education and Skills Programme at the Centre for Economic Performance, **London School of Economics**. She also directs the Centre for Vocational Education Research (funded by DfE from 2015 to 2020). Her research interests include economic evaluation of government policies in schools and further education and labour market returns to education and training. She is a co-editor of the *Economics of Education Review*.



Richard Rodgers is Head of Energy at the **Department for the Economy** where he led the development of the recently published Northern Ireland Executive's Energy Strategy – The Path to Net Zero Energy. He has almost 35 years' experience in the energy industry, including British Gas for eight years, Phoenix Natural Gas for 12, as MD (International) at Eaga for five years (responsible for the delivery of fuel poverty programmes for Governments across the world), five years as Strategic Advisor (Energy) at the Strategic Investment Board and for the past three years as Head of Energy in the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. Richard was also a non-executive director on the Board of the Utility Regulator for nine years (ending in March 2019).



Lisa Wilson is a Senior Economist at the **Nevin Economic Research Institute** and is based in the Belfast office. Her main research interests lie in the areas of labour markets, income distribution, poverty, public expenditure, living standards and well-being. Since taking up her position in the NERI Lisa has been among other things carrying out work concerned with job quality and its economic and social importance, the future of work, the gendered nature of employment, and housing and its impact for living standards in Northern Ireland. Lisa is a native of Donegal, and a graduate of Ulster University and Queen's University, Belfast. Lisa completed her PhD in Queen's University, Belfast focusing on income inequality and well-being.

conference registration form

I wish to

- ☐ Reserve _____ delegate places at the conference
Conference delegate rate **£255** + VAT @ 20% = £306
- ☐ Discounted rate for voluntary/community/councils
Conference delegate rate **£165** + VAT @ 20% = £198
- ☐ Receive details of **sponsorship & exhibition opportunities** at the conference

Personal details

Name: _____

Job title: _____

Organisation: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Acknowledgement of registration

Confirmation of registration will be emailed to all delegates following receipt of registration details. If you have not received your acknowledgement within 48 hours of registering, please contact registration@agendaNi.com to confirm your booking.

Terms and conditions

For those unable to attend, a substitute participant may be sent at any time for no additional charge. Please note once purchased delegate places cannot be cancelled.

Who should attend?

The Annual Northern Ireland Economic Conference is aimed at key decision-makers and those across business and government/the public sector with an interest in tackling the challenges to ensure Northern Ireland's economy is fit for the future. It will also appeal to those interacting with the public sector, both in policy advisory and service delivery or advocacy roles. Those interested in attending will include:

- Chief Executives / Directors / senior managers
- Finance directors / managers
- Central government / department officials
- Agencies, advisory bodies and NDPBs
- Frontline service delivery professionals
- Auditors / value-for-money specialists
- Local government officers and elected representatives
- Budget-holders
- Corporate planners
- Voluntary / community sector leaders / NGOs
- Services organisations – IT / telecoms
- Financial and legal advisors

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How to register...



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