

**AMBITION TO GROW
MAY 2024**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs should be read in conjunction with the [Guidance Notes](#). The information and evidence required, as outlined in the Guidance Notes, are necessary to demonstrate that the business meets the eligibility criteria, and to ensure public funds are managed properly.

Please take time to read the [Guidance Notes](#) and FAQs carefully before applying.

What is Ambition to Grow?

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

When does the application call open?

The application call will open on Monday 13 May 2024 at 12:00 noon. The eligibility checker will be available at investni.com/ambition-to-grow from this date. On successful completion of the eligibility checker, access to an application form will be granted through the MYINI online portal.

The application call will remain open until Friday 7 June 2024 at 12:00 noon.

What sort of businesses is ATG aimed at?

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

Invest NI is seeking to support innovative businesses in the manufacturing or international tradeable services sectors that can demonstrate plans to increase sales from customers outside Northern Ireland and with this create new employment.

Businesses that participate in innovative activities, paying higher salaries for new positions, as well as those adding value to a product, are also likely to score highly.

ATG is aimed at businesses that have commenced trading. If your business is currently developing a product or service that is not yet ready for market other support options are available.

How do I know if my business is eligible to apply for ATG?

Details on business eligibility and exclusions can be found in the [Guidance Notes](#) and you will be required to complete the online Eligibility Checker as part of the pre-application process.

The Eligibility Checker will be available from Monday 13 May 2024 at 12:00 noon at investni.com/ambition-to-grow

Does my business need to be exporting to apply?

ATG aims to assist businesses to increase sales outside Northern Ireland. Although you do not have to be currently selling to customers outside Northern Ireland to be able to apply, you will need to demonstrate how you will generate sales from customers in other markets.

What if my business has received Invest NI support within the last five years but meets all other criteria?

If your business meets all other criteria but has received Invest NI support within the last five years you can contact your Invest NI Client Executive to discuss if an application is appropriate at this time. If you are unsure of who your Client Executive is, or if you want to check if any support received will impact your eligibility to apply for ATG, you can contact us at the following link investni.com/contact-us

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

My business has received an Innovation Voucher, Covid-19 Emergency Funds, Economic Recovery Innovation Grant, or Access to Finance Funding in the last five years, can I apply?

Yes, if you meet all eligibility criteria. These funding supports do not have an impact on your eligibility to apply for ATG.

How much grant can I expect to receive?

Following the application form and project meeting stages, and subject to successful Know Your Customer (KYC) checks, each successful business will be offered up to £45,000 in grant support. This will be offered via a contract with Invest NI, and this will include an offer of the following:

- up to £30,000 towards new employment within the business. This can be a grant support of £5,000 per new position (minimum of three new FTE roles paying at least the Real Living Wage) or can be targeted towards one or two new management positions within the business with grant support of up to £15,000 per new management position at a rate of up to 40% of 12 months' salary costs. For management roles to be considered for support they must be a clearly defined full-time (30hrs+) management position, paying a minimum salary of £30,000 and contributing to growth of the business into markets outside Northern Ireland.
- up to £10,000 towards business development activities at a support rate of up to 50% of eligible costs which can include expenditure on market, product, or skills development.
- £5,000 on the completion of an [Export Health Check](#), development of an [Export Marketing Plan](#), and completion of an [Innovate NI Self-Assessment](#).

The actual amount of financial support offered will be dependent on the activities proposed within the application. State Aid guidelines will impact the amount of support available for some applications that are creating a small number of new jobs and the actual value and makeup of the offer of support will be discussed in detail during the project meeting. The total grant amount offered will not be more than 30% of two times the total annual salaries of new positions being created.

The full conditions associated with the grant will be within an offer from Invest NI to the successful businesses. You will need to sign this offer and return prior to commencing any elements of the project.

Support is conditional on the business securing new employees, with the expectation that increased employment is maintained for a minimum of three years. Should new employees be taken on, grant be drawn down and then employment levels decrease within 3 years from payment of grant, it is reasonable to expect that repayment of grant money (in full or in part) will be requested.

What are business development activities?

These are activities that are required to accelerate the growth of your business into markets outside Northern Ireland and that are not part of your normal business expenditure. Market development activities could include the costs of exhibiting at a trade show, marketing your business to an audience in a new market, or engaging a consultant to assist with the development of a detailed marketing strategy. Technical development could include the costs of developing a new product, protecting your intellectual property, or implementing quality standards such as ISO 9001. Skills development could include the costs of putting your employees through training or formal qualifications to better position your business for future growth.

When can I expect to receive the grant payment?

Payment of grant is not up-front and will depend on the execution of specific activities as outlined in any offer of support e.g., creation of new employment. Each

successful applicant will receive an offer/contract from Invest NI and will then be able to begin incurring spend on activities against which grant money will be paid. When the activity has taken place, they can then make a claim to Invest NI.

A Client Executive will be assigned to each successful company and provide a guide to claiming from Invest NI.

It is essential that we review each application and all the evidence provided to ensure public funds are managed properly.

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

Yes. For an ATG application to be considered eligible it must outline plans to create a minimum of three Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) roles paying at least the Real Living Wage (currently £12 per hour), or if fewer than 3 FTE roles then at least one full-time management position.

What are the criteria for a management position to be eligible for support?

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

Do new jobs need to be full time?

For a management position to be considered for support it must be a full-time position (contracted for at least 30hrs per week). If support is not being sought for a management position, then at least three new FTE positions paying the Real Living Wage must be proposed although these can be a mixture of full-time and part-time roles.

What does Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) mean?

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

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

What if my application does not contain the required level of new employment?

If your application does not detail plans to create at least three new FTE roles paying the Real Living Wage, or at least one new full-time management position with a minimum salary of £30,000, it will not be deemed eligible for support.

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

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

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

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

How long do I need to keep any new employees for?

Support is conditional on the business securing new employees, with the requirement that the assisted increase in employment is maintained for a minimum of three years. Should new employees be taken on, grant be drawn down and then employment levels decrease within three years from payment of grant, repayment of grant money (in full or in part) may be sought.

Does my business need to have access to other funding?

Invest NI support will only make up a small proportion of the costs of new employment and business development activities. Applicants will need to demonstrate that their business will remain cash positive on an ongoing basis and be able to sustain new employees. This funding can be from existing cash reserves, loan funding, external investment in the business or future sales and needs to be detailed in the application form.

It is not sufficient to assume that Invest NI knows where your funding is coming from, you are required to outline in the application how the business will meet its outgoings in the coming years.

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

In the first instance you should contact your Invest NI Client Executive to discuss the financial arrangements of the businesses. If these are interlinked via financial and management structures, it is important that Invest NI manages these under one Client Executive.

Does my business need to be registered in Northern Ireland to be able to apply?

Businesses wishing to apply for ATG need to be physically located in Northern Ireland and have at least one director/partner/proprietor residing in Northern Ireland.

For businesses with multiple locations, including locations outside Northern Ireland, the overall turnover of the entire business and location of sales (to Northern Ireland based customers or customers from outside Northern Ireland) will be considered when determining eligibility.

The growth activities, including investment and employment creation which the company is seeking Invest NI support for must relate to the Northern Ireland location.

We would emphasise that this scheme is only open to SMEs with turnover under £1m or sales to customers outside NI of less than £300,000.

Can an advisor make an application on behalf of the business?

You can give permission to company contacts to complete the online application. All applications must be authorised in the case of a limited company, by a director or the secretary. In the case of a sole trader or partnership, by a proprietor or partner.

We would advise that nobody knows your business better than you do, and the application form has been designed to enable an owner/manager to be able to complete it without outside assistance. Should an application be successful, and a validation meeting arranged, this will be with the directors/owners of the business and direct knowledge of what was in the application will be essential.

You may also wish to review nibusinessinfo.co.uk guidance and templates to assist with completion of the form:

nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales

nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting

nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/cashflow-forecasts

How long will it take to complete the form?

The online application process should take approximately two hours to complete if you have all the necessary information to hand e.g., if you have recently completed a business plan. If this information is not immediately available, it may take longer although you can save the application and update it at any time before the application call closes.

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

Can I save my application and return to it at a later stage?

Yes, you can save a draft of your application and complete later. Saved applications must still be submitted before the application closing date. It is recommended that

you save your application on a regular basis to reduce the risk of losing any unsaved work.

How do I submit my application?

You need to click on the 'Submit' button when you have completed your application. If you have any problems submitting your application, please call Invest NI's Business Support Team for assistance. You will receive a confirmation email when successfully submitted.

Can I submit my application in a different format?

If you require an application form in an alternative format, please contact equality@investni.com or see our [Equality Statement](#) for further details.

I made an error on my application form. What should I do?

If your form is still saved as 'Draft', and has not been submitted, then you can go back to the relevant section and update with the correct information.

You will need to click on the 'Submit' button when you have completed the changes to your application.

If you have submitted your application form but need to make changes before the closing date, please complete this [enquiry form](#) and a member of Invest NI's Business Support Team will contact you. The Business Support Team can also be contacted by telephone on 0800 181 4422. Your application will be returned for you to update your details.

How do I check on my application progress?

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

Do I have to do what I said in my application?

Invest NI is seeking to support businesses that want to sell more outside Northern Ireland, and with that create new employment within their business. These plans will be outlined in the application form and support offered to successful applicants following a validation meeting and KYC checks. The success of each engagement will be determined by how the business performs against what it says it will do in the application, and the potential for further Invest NI support will be based on success measured against the ATG application (achievement of employment and external sales targets).

If a business does not do what it said it will do in the application, the ability to draw down grant money will be impacted as will the ability to apply for Invest NI support in future. Businesses are encouraged to only apply for support if it is realistic that they

will be able to commit to the conducting the activities and achieving the outcomes outlined in the application.

As the total grant offer is based on the proposed creation of new employment, should grant money be paid out and the proposed new employment is not created, or supported positions not maintained for a minimum of three years, repayment of grant money (in full or in part) may be sought.

What other support is available?

Invest NI has a range of business support measures available to Northern Ireland based businesses. You can find out more at investni.com

Is the grant awarded on a first come first served basis?

The ATG scheme will be open for applications from Monday 13 May 2024 at 12 noon to Friday 7 June 2024 at 12 noon.

Funding will be awarded to applicants on a competitive basis. Applications will be assessed and scored, with the highest scoring projects being invited to a project meeting which is scored on a pass/fail basis. Businesses that pass the project meeting stage will, subject to KYC checks, be issued with an offer of financial support.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call earlier or extend it depending on the volume of applications received. In this case of the application window closing early, only applications submitted on the portal at this time will be considered.

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

There needs to be a director/proprietor/partner aged 18 or over within the business authorised to sign the Letter of Offer Contractual Agreement.

What is a Client Executive?

A Client Executive is a member of our team who will be your main point of contact in Invest NI and support you to complete the project if you are successful in this competition.

How will I know if my application is successful?

We aim to assess all applications within four weeks from close of the competition, with project meetings to then be scheduled with those shortlisted. Application outcomes will be communicated by email.

If you have a question that is not covered in the Guidance Notes or Frequently Asked Questions you can contact the Invest NI Business Support Team by completing an [Enquiry Form](#) or by telephone on 0800 181 4422.