



INVEST NI AMBITION TO GROW | SUPPORTING WOMEN

October 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 | Supporting Women?

Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women is a programme aimed at encouraging Women-led businesses that are not currently Invest NI customers 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.

Why is the programme only open to woman-led businesses?

Businesses that are led by women are an under-represented section of the business base in Northern Ireland, a viewpoint that is backed up by numerous academic studies. With a goal for businesses to be more inclusive, Invest NI has launched this application call targeted at supporting Women-led businesses to create new employment and target markets outside Northern Ireland.

A range of support is available to businesses that are not eligible for Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women, details of which can be found on the Invest NI website - investni.com/support-for-business

What do you mean by “woman-led businesses”?

There is not a specific definition of what a woman-led business is. For the purposes of this programme Invest NI is trying to attract businesses where a woman holds a key decision-making role such as CEO, Managing Director or Founder and can influence the strategic direction of the business.

As Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women involves participation in group sessions and the development of a network of women business leaders, it is a requirement that applicants can provide the time commitment necessary to get the most out of the programme.

When does the application call open?

The application call will open on **Wednesday 9 October 2024 at 9:00**. The eligibility checker, and on successful completion of this the application form, will be available at investni.com/ambitiontogrow from this date.

The application call will remain open until **Friday 8 November 2024 at 12 noon**.

Invest NI reserves the right to close the application call early, or extend its opening, based on the volume of applications received. Only applications submitted at the time of closing will be considered.



What sort of businesses is it aimed at?

Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women is aimed at women-led start-up and established micro, and small to medium enterprises based in Northern Ireland, which have either turnover **under £1m or** sales to customers outside NI of less than £300k.

Through this programme Invest NI is seeking to support businesses in the manufacturing or international tradeable services sectors that have 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. Please see our current [Draft Business Plan 2023-2024](#).

Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women is aimed at businesses that are already generating revenue or are about to generate revenue soon. If your business is currently developing a product or service that is not ready for market, Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women may not be right for your business at this time although other support options are available.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

How do I know if my business is eligible to apply for Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women?

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 **9:00 on Wednesday 9 October 2024** at investni.com/ambitiontogrow.

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 | SW, you can contact us at the following link www.investni.com/contact-us

Please note that you cannot apply for ATG | SW 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.

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

There needs to be a director aged 18 or over within the company authorised to sign the Letter of Offer which is a Contractual Agreement.



What does match funding/balance of funding mean?

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 as it grows 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, and you do need to outline in the application how the business will meet its outgoings in the coming years.

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

Businesses wishing to apply for Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women need to be physically located in Northern Ireland and have at least one Director residing in Northern Ireland.

The registered address of the business does not need to be 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 NI based customers or customers from outside NI) 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 Women-led SMEs with turnover **under** £1m or sales to customers outside NI of less than £300k.

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 business Owner/Manager and direct knowledge of what was in the application will be essential.

You may also wish to review NIBusinessInfo **Guidance** and **Templates** to assist with completion of the form:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/plan-and-forecast-sales>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/business-budgeting>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/cashflow-forecasts>

MAKING AN APPLICATION

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 information to hand e.g., if you have recently completed a business plan. If you are starting from nothing, 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 require making 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?

Through this programme Invest NI is seeking to support women-led businesses that want to sell more outside Northern Ireland, and with that create new employment within their business. Each business will outline its plans via the application form, with the top ranked applications being



offered support. 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 support will be based on success measured against the Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women 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, and achieve, the activities and 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 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.

NEW EMPLOYMENT

Do I need to commit to creating new jobs as part of an application for Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women?

For an Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women application to be considered eligible it must outline plans to create a minimum of two Full Time Equivalent (FTE) roles.

Do new jobs need to be full time?

The minimum of two new Full Time Equivalent (FTE) roles that need to be detailed in the application to make it an eligible application can be made up of Full Time or Part Time roles or a combination of both.

What does Full Time Equivalent (FTE) mean?

A role is Full Time if is contracted for a minimum of 30 hours per week and is then classed as 1.0 FTE. Part Time positions, contracted for 15-30 hours per week are equivalent to 0.5 FTE.

As an example, two Full Time roles, four Part Time roles, or one Full Time and two-Part Time roles would all be equivalent to 2.0 FTE.

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

Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women 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 Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women 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 the level of employment detailed in the offer document is either not created or if created is not maintained for a minimum of three years.



It is important that businesses in receipt of Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women support keep their appointed Client Executive informed of any changes in employment level so that an appropriate course of action can be discussed.

PAYMENT

How much grant can I expect to receive?

Following the application and meeting stages, and subject to successful Know Your Customer checks, each successful business selected will receive **up to £30,000** in support. This will be offered via a contract with Invest NI, and this will include an offer of the following:

A maximum of £30,000 is available for each successful applicant as follows:

- £10,000 towards new employment within the businesses to assist with the creation of two new full-time equivalent positions.
- £10,000 towards business development activities at a support rate of 50% of eligible costs which can include expenditure on market, product, or skills development.
- £10,000 on the completion of an Export Health Check, Export Marketing Plan, Innovate NI Self-Assessment, and participation on a series of Invest NI Leadership Development workshops.

The actual amount of financial support offered will be dependant on the activities proposed with the application. State Aid guidelines will impact the amount of support available for some applications that are proposing lower total salaries for the jobs they plan to create and the makeup of the offer of support will be discussed in detail during the meeting stage. 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 three years from payment of grant, it is reasonable to expect that repayment of grant money (in full or in part) will be requested.

When can I expect to receive the grant payment?

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

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

A Client Executive will be assigned to each successful company and will explain the detail behind the offer of support and provide guidance on how to draw down the support offered.



OTHER FAQs

What other support is available?

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

My business trading account is a Euro account, can I still apply?

No, you must have a UK Sterling business account to apply for the Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women programme, with the business to be physically located in Northern Ireland and with at least one director residing in Northern Ireland.

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

The Ambition to Grow | Supporting Women programme will be open for applications from **9:00 Wednesday 9 October 2024** until **12 noon Friday 8 November 2024**.

Funding will be awarded to applicants on a competitive basis. Applications will be assessed and scored, with the highest scoring projects in each area awarded funding following a successful validation meeting and completion of Know Your Customer (KYC) checks.

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 that time will be considered.

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 validation meetings to be scheduled with the highest-ranking applications.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application via 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.