



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

A 10X ECONOMY

AN OPEN CALL FOR 10X RESEARCH PROPOSALS

**PROVIDING AN EVIDENCE-BASE FOR 10X
POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

August 2023



NORTHERN IRELAND'S DECADE OF INNOVATION

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Strategic Context	4
3. Open Call for Research	6
4. Proposals	13
5. Submission and Key Dates	17

1. Introduction

In October 2022, the Department for the Economy (DfE) published [A 10X Economy - Research Programme 2022-23 and Beyond](#).

This research programme highlighted the key research areas for the 2022-23 year, and beyond, as the department seeks to deliver on its 10X Economy Vision. The overall mission of the research programme is as follows:

“To produce research and analysis that shapes policy decisions. The evidence-base should drive successful delivery, well informed Departmental economic priorities, rebuild a stronger economy and set us firmly on the journey to realise our vision for innovation led, inclusive and sustainable growth.”

In November 2022, DfE launched a 10X Economy: Open Call for Research Proposals. This produced a range of innovative and novel research ideas that will feed into key research themes and objectives under the new research programme and directly contribute to the evidence base of 10X policy making.

In June 2023, DfE also launched an Open Call specifically for energy-related research proposals.

DfE is now launching an additional Open Call seeking new proposals from the research community to address its research needs and build the evidence base to deliver the 10X Economic Vision and the 10X Skills Strategy for NI.

2. Strategic Context

DfE’s 10X Vision for a Decade of Innovation, Skills Strategy, Trade & Investment, and Energy Strategy documents set out our vision and approach for longer-term economic recovery, transformation, and development (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Strategic Context¹



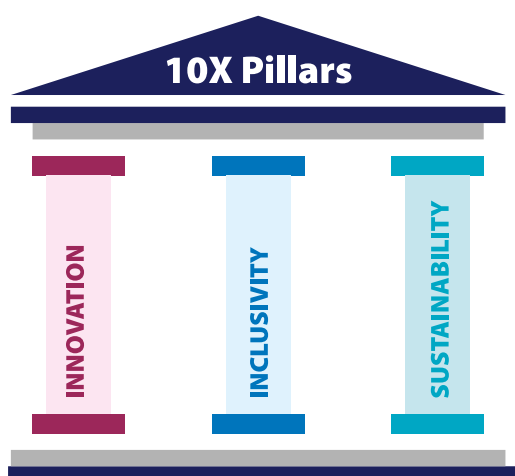
In May 2021, the DfE published its 10X Economy - an Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation Report. This provides the basis for an innovation driven recovery and provides long term plans on how to make Northern Ireland a better economy by 2030 and create a generational change.

In March 2022, DfE published Skills for a 10X Economy, a Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, setting a strategic framework for the development of our skills system to 2030 which will drive economic prosperity and tackle social inequality.

1 Further information on the Strategic Context can be found in the 10X Economy – Research programme 2022-23 and Beyond, noted above.

In October 2022, DfE consulted on its 10X Performance Management Framework and then outlined objectives for the Department, which target the achievement of innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability.²

DfE also set out how it will track Northern Ireland's economic performance across a range of indicators. These include international metrics (at Tier 1), underpinning metrics (at Tier 2) and policy and programme-level metrics KPIs (at Tier 3).³



In July 2023, the Department published its 10X Delivery Plan for 2023/24⁴, outlining work that has progressed by the Department and its partners as well as planned work. This includes a relevant action to work on research and a programme of evaluation over 2023/24 that will ensure that we deliver better outcomes through stronger policy.

The 10X Economy Research Programme provides an overview of the Research Programmes themes and projects for 2022-23 and beyond. The mission will be supported by seven key themes, with each theme including aspects of innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability:

1. Focus on Key Technologies and Priority Clusters.
2. A Changing World – A Sustainable & More Inclusive Economy.
3. Skills for a Contemporary Labour Market.
4. Diffusing Innovation.
5. Funding Interventions, Understanding Enterprise & Business Growth.
6. Place-Based Growth & Investment.
7. Measuring Success.

2 [10X Vision - Next Steps for Implementation \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://economy-ni.gov.uk/10x-vision-next-steps-for-implementation)

3 [Measuring Success - 10X Metrics to achieve a 10X Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://economy-ni.gov.uk/measuring-success-10x-metrics-to-achieve-a-10x-economy)

4 [10X Delivery Plan](https://economy-ni.gov.uk/10x-delivery-plan)

3. Open Call for Research

DfE is now initiating an Open Call for new research proposals from academics or firms⁵ that wish to undertake one or more of the listed research projects below. Innovative proposals aligned to the seven key themes listed at the bottom of page 5, but not listed below, are also welcomed.

Research Projects:

1. Is Northern Ireland's Skills offering meeting the future needs of our economy?

In light of the recent [Review of InvestNI](#) and the need to ensure we are maximising the potential of reaching our [10X](#) ambitions, research is sought on the skills programmes offered by DfE, InvestNI and public bodies, in order to identify any gaps or opportunities in existing or planned provision or where duplication exists.

The purpose of this research can ultimately be used to help align to the scale of our economic ambition and meet our triple bottom line of a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy.

2. Careers Service in Northern Ireland

Research is sought on the two areas listed below. Individual research proposals for each aspect will be accepted.

- A. (immediate priority) Compare the groups that the Careers Services of the Small Advanced Economy group⁶ target for their Careers advice and guidance. For example, the Careers Service of Northern Ireland offers an on demand all age service but also routinely provide a Careers Guidance Interview to every Year 12 pupil in post primary schools. The research is to determine what target groups other regions are focussing on for their own Careers Advice and Guidance. This will help inform future policy in the Northern Ireland Careers service.
- B. (lesser priority) Additionally, we would like to understand how satisfied users of the Northern Ireland Careers Service are with the interventions provided and what impact this is having.

5 Projects do not require a Northern Ireland partner. International organisations can apply on their own. A non-research organisation could apply and does not have to partner with a research organisation. The organisation applying for funding should be able to demonstrate that they have the required skills and expertise to undertake the research in the chosen area, which aligns to this Open Call.

6 A full list is noted on page 5 of the [10X Performance Management Framework](#)

3. Closing the gender employment gap in Northern Ireland

This research seeks to inform the debate about why the male employment rate is significantly higher compared with the female employment rate. It should provide clear evidence of the main explanatory factors as well as modelling what interventions would have the maximum impact on closing the gap (and potentially reducing economic inactivity or underemployment among females).

This should include modelling the impact of childcare on employment decisions and what the potential impact of government funded childcare in the early years, and/or beyond pre school, on the employment decisions of parents/families, specifically mothers, and the financial, economic, labour market and societal costs and benefits arising from such investment.

4. Young people with disabilities and the transition to the labour market

This research seeks to build on the Department for Communities research "[Disability within the NI Labour Market](#)" conducted in April 22, and examine the situation of young people specifically. It should give insight into the transition to post-16 education and subsequently the transition to employment by young people with disabilities, examining how young people are advised and supported in education to maximise their skills and employment opportunities and how this advice and support compares to that provided to young people without disabilities.

It should provide insight into the challenges faced particularly by young people with disabilities in gaining employment commensurate with their abilities. The report should provide recommendations on how to increase employment of young people with disabilities, and modelling of the impact in the medium and long term of this on the disability employment gap.

5. Baselineing Employability Skills

DfE has received anecdotal information from the business community that when hiring new workers, businesses have encountered issues with the number of applicants that lack basic employability skills. This study seeks to understand:

- if there is an employability skills gap in Northern Ireland;
- is it related to education leavers, job changers or both and the extent of this; and
- how do we compare with other countries.

6. Adult numeracy and literacy

Statistics on adult numeracy and literacy in Northern Ireland are now more than a decade old⁷. This commission seeks to provide an updated understanding of adult numeracy and literacy levels in Northern Ireland and if possible, how this compares with other nations/regions. Where possible, it should include information by different groupings including age, sex, disability, deprivation etc.

7. Impact of University Fee changes

How has the operation of differing fee regimes for accessing university across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and in particular fee increases in England, impacted the demographics of those who attend university and are there any lessons to learn for Northern Ireland?

8. Air Connectivity to support tourism and business growth

This seeks to update research published by DfE in July 2019, [Aviation connectivity research](#), focusing on innovative ways to meet two key objectives to:

- a) identify a set of strategic routes which will help drive inbound tourism and business growth in NI; and
- b) identify policy levers available to DfE to enhance NI's air connectivity.

This is in a post-COVID environment, where the markets driving Tourism and investment into Northern Ireland, and the way in which we do business in a post-Brexit environment, have changed. Proposals that draw on learning from other countries will be welcome, and it is understood that input will be required from aviation specialists.

9. Barriers for Apprentices that lead to non-achievement

Research aim

To improve the apprenticeship system in Northern Ireland by identifying barriers for apprentices that lead to non-achievement, and considering recommendations on how to address these barriers.

⁷ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/international-survey-adult-skills>

Objectives

- To consider the range of factors, both individual and systemic, that impact the successful completion of an apprenticeship, weight the impact of each, to include:
 - Wages and cost of participation.
 - Career ambitions.
 - Employment experience.
 - Training experience.
 - Entry profile and characteristics, including disability and gender.
 - Mentorship.
- To review the profile and experiences of those leaving Apprenticeship NI without full framework achievement and explore their range of qualifications outcomes, their destination and their experience of the programme.
- To identify emerging trends or patterns in timing of when apprentices leave the programme early.
- To consider barriers at a sectoral level, identifying trends that are sector specific.
- To review the system more widely and consider any aspect that can influence success.
- Recommendations for future policy development to improve achievement and retention of apprentices.

10. Barriers to understanding the importance of Innovation

Research is sought to identify and overcome barriers faced by businesses in understanding the importance of innovation that are created by language and communication. This includes terminology, framing, and the mode and presentation of communications. The output should include recommendations that will lead to innovation support becoming more accessible, increasing the uptake of support by businesses unfamiliar or new to innovation.

11. STEM employment outcomes

To gain an understanding of employment outcomes for NI STEM achievers and graduates, with a particular focus on narrow STEM subjects. This should include a gender breakdown to provide data relating to Women in STEM. The research should also consider the reasons why STEM graduates do not pursue careers in STEM if appropriate.

- a) STEM achievers and graduates include those from Further Education, Higher Education in Further Education and Higher Education Institutions.
- b) Core statistics will be made available as required where possible.

12. A focused analysis of the labour market performance by type of disability

To enhance understanding of labour market performance, building on the DFC research carried out in April 2022 by type of disability by:

- a) Analysis of existing data sets on labour market performance by disability type. To include analysis by a range of factors including employment rates, level of qualification, pay gaps etc. To include insights provided by analysis of Census 2021 data.
- b) Analysis of Census 2021 data to identify predictors of employment status – regression analysis to explore the relationship of a range of census variables (including type of disability) on employment status.
- c) Qualitative investigation (a small number of focus groups by disability type including those who are in work and not in work) about specific barriers and challenges they have faced relating to employment, and potential interventions.

The decision to fund any research proposal and the timing of the commissioning of individual projects will be made on a case-by-case basis. Those decisions will take into consideration factors including the need for the project, feasibility, timing, capacity to steer the work, potential for duplication with other work, affordability, value for money and how much it will benefit and inform policy making in Northern Ireland, including the delivery of the 10X Vision. It is unknown how many projects will be awarded. Due to finite budgets, DfE will need to assess the proposals against the budget and see how many can be taken forward, at this time.

In assessing any proposal(s) submitted, DfE will initially determine if it is clear that the proposal meets the following aspects:

- a) it is research⁸;
- b) relevant to DfE's remit; and
- c) the minimum information, as set out in section 4, is submitted.

If one of these elements is not met, then your proposal will not be taken forward for further evaluation. If DfE is satisfied these elements have been met, we will evaluate, equally, your proposal across the following three criterion:

1. Methodology, while considering costs.
2. Staff Experience / Expertise, while considering costs.
3. Benefit/impact to policy development in Northern Ireland.

Each criterion will be scored from 0-10, using the following categories: 0-2 Very Limited; 3-4 Quite Limited; 5-6 Reasonable; 7-8 Good and 9-10 Excellent.

These evaluation scores and the consideration factors listed above will all be factored into the decision-making process to fund any research proposal. Where it is deemed two research proposals are similar in nature and they score the same in the evaluation process, the deciding factor will be cost.

There is no set amount of funding available for each project as DfE does not want to be too prescriptive. However, by way of background, over the last few years research projects funded under the DfE 10X Research Programme tended to cost in the tens of thousands, per project, as opposed to hundreds of thousands.

Following consideration of the factors listed above, proposals will be recommended for funding, subject to budget availability. A Reserve List of highly evaluated proposals may also be formed. Reserve List projects may be funded at a later stage, should sufficient additional budget become available.

⁸ HM Treasury's Consolidated Budgeting Guidance for 2022-23 references a definition of Research and Development (R&D) under ESA10. Annex C details five criteria to help identify R&D. [Consolidated budgeting guidance 2022 to 2023 \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/103113/consolidated-budgeting-guidance-2022-to-2023.pdf)

Due to finite budgets, the Department does not commit to commissioning any research projects because of this Open Call. Funding will be entirely at the discretion of the Department. In addition to longer-term proposals, the Department particularly welcomes proposals which will be completed within the 2023-24 Financial Year (by 31 March 2024).

If you would like to be kept informed of the research work of the Department for the Economy or indeed any future calls for research proposals, please send your contact details to analyticalservices@economy-ni.gov.uk so you can be added to our mailing list.

4. Proposals

The research proposals submitted by academics or firms should include, at a minimum, the following information (*please note, DfE may seek clarification on specific proposals should more information be required*):

Proposals must not exceed 12 single sided A4 pages with a font size that is no smaller than Arial size 10. Please note, the page limit excludes Gantt Charts and Excel spreadsheets.

Project Overview

- This section should provide DfE with a clear understanding of the project being proposed including how it fits with DfE priorities and research needs.
- It should be made clear which specific research project in section 3 the proposal aligns to or how the project aligns to the key research themes, listed at the bottom of page 5.
- Outline the broad methodology and indication of data to be used in the analysis. This section should also highlight whether the organisation is seeking to obtain data, processing personal data, or utilising data publicly available.⁹
- It should be noted that any analytical work, or economic modelling, undertaken as part of the proposal must be provided to the Department at project completion.

(It is important to be aware that both specialist and non-specialist staff will be assessing this proposal and therefore use of technical terms should be fully explained in this Section).

⁹ [Data protection: The Data Protection Act - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Project Plan

- A project plan should be provided. The project plan should identify the major packages of work within the project, with well-defined milestones, interim milestones, and deliverables.
- There is no time limit on research project length, but if it continues over multiple financial years this could make it more difficult to commit to within this Open Call (depending on the level of spend), as future budgets are uncertain.
- For any proposals involving multiple project partners (Lead and Partner organisations), the proposal must be clear who the lead organisation will be and the arrangements with any partner organisation, in terms of project contributions. There will only be a single set of contract documentation in place between the Department and the lead organisation.

Staffing and Experience

- This section should identify the staff to be involved in the project, their position/grade, and their relevant experience.
- In demonstrating their experience examples must include:
 - Assignment title and client.
 - Total value of the research.
 - Start/end dates and duration of the assignment.
 - Summary of the assignment.
 - The specific role/ duties of the staff.

**Proposed
Research Cost**

- The proposal must include a breakdown of the proposed research costs, identifying the staff to be involved in the study, daily rates, and proposed number of days to be spent on the research project.
- All costs should be shown both inclusive, and exclusive of VAT.
- Payments will be made in instalments and linked to outputs and quality. Therefore, this section should note the proposed payment schedule for the total costs.
- In terms of eligibility of costs, e.g., overheads, this Open Call is more like a research grant. If the costs are reasonable and central to the production of the research, they will be permitted.

**Publication of
Research**

As noted in the 10X Research Programme, to ensure that the research has maximum impact, research findings will be published, to share the benefits with others and contribute to public knowledge.

Assurances must be provided that the organisation will adhere to accessibility guidelines, as noted at the following links - <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/dfc-accessibility-statement> and <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>

For avoidance of any ambiguity, please explicitly state within your proposal that you are content to publish.

In addition, for avoidance of any ambiguity, please explicitly state within your proposal that you are content on meeting accessibility requirements as detailed in the link above.

**Terms and
Conditions**

- We should be grateful if you can include within your proposals if you are content with the accompanying terms & conditions or if you require further clarification highlight or detail the clauses etc. within either the Commercial Conditions for Services Contract and/or Public Sector Standard Conditions of Contract of Contract for this Open Call. Clarifications relating to the terms and conditions will only be considered post the proposal evaluation process and not within the clarification period during the Open Call window to submit proposals.

5. Submission and Key Dates

Submission

If you wish to submit a research proposal for DfE to consider, please send to analyticalservices@economy-ni.gov.uk.

The deadline for submissions is 3pm on Friday 22 September 2023.

Once a proposal has been submitted no amendment can be made, nor will additional documentation or attachments be accepted. Proposals received after the deadline will not be considered as part of this Open Call.

Following the evaluation and ranking process the Department may instigate further discussions to clarify specific elements of the proposal, which may require addendums to be submitted to your proposal and pricing schedule as necessary in respect of the final agreed piece of work to be carried out. These will be considered prior to the issuing of the letter of appointment.

Clarification Period

Organisations can submit clarifications during the first 5 working days of the Open Call. The Department will endeavour to respond to each query and update the website with clarification responses on a regular basis to make them available to all interested parties.

Indicative Dates

The table below provides an overview of the proposed evaluation timescale (*please note, this is not definite and may be subject to change*).

Open call commences	21st August 2023
Clarification period	21st August – 25th August
Clarification responded	1st September
Deadline for submission	3pm on 22nd September 2023
Evaluation of proposals – Internal review	22nd September to 6th October 2023
Issue notifications of the outcome of evaluations including, where appropriate, success/non-success letters	Mid-October 2023