

Tech Northern Ireland Advocates

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Internationalisation Guide for Tech Startups Entering Northern Ireland

Understanding the Northern Ireland Tech Landscape

Northern Ireland has emerged as a thriving tech hub, with Belfast being the second fastest-growing knowledge economy in the UK. The region offers a vibrant ecosystem for tech startups, particularly in healthtech, hardware & IoT, and social & leisure technologies. Key Facts:

- Belfast ranks 11th among UK startup ecosystems
- In 2022, Northern Ireland businesses raised \$93.2M in VC funding
- The region has strengths in cyber security, telecom, AI & data analytics, IT & cloud services, fintech, govtech, and sports tech

Government Support and Funding

1. Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI)

- Offers various support programs for startups and international businesses
- Website: <https://www.investni.com/>

2. Investment Fund for Northern Ireland (IFNI)

- £70M fund to support smaller businesses across Northern Ireland
- More information: <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/finance-hub/regional-funds/>

3. Ambition to Grow Programme

- Offers up to £45,000 in funding for innovative businesses
- Details: [https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/ambition-to-grow\[2\]](https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/ambition-to-grow[2])

Startup Support and Incubators

4. Catalyst Inc

- Innovation hub providing office space, mentorship, and networking
- Website: <https://wearecatalyst.org/>

5. Innovation Ulster (IUL)

- Knowledge and technology venturing company of Ulster University
- Website: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/business/innovation>

6. QUBIS

- Commercialisation arm of Queen's University, Belfast
- Website: <https://www.qubis.co.uk/>

Networking and Business Connections

7. CEOs Connect

- Network for CEOs of high-growth-potential companies
- More information: <https://wearecatalyst.org/programmes/ceos-connect/>

8. Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce

- Offers networking, learning, and business support
- Website: <https://www.northernirelandchamber.com/>

9. East Belfast Enterprise (EBE)

- Co-working space with training and mentoring services
- Website: <https://eastbelfast.org/>

Market Entry and Customs Information

10. Trader Support Service (TSS)

- Free service to help businesses move goods to and from Northern Ireland
- Registration: <https://www.tradersupportservice.co.uk/tss>

11. Northern Ireland Customs and Trade Academy (NICTA)

- Provides guidance on customs procedures and regulations
- Website: <https://www.nicustomstradeacademy.co.uk/>

Talent Acquisition

Northern Ireland boasts a strong talent pool in technology, with two major universities:

12. Queen's University Belfast

- Known for computer science and engineering programs
- Career services: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/careers/>

13. Ulster University

- Offers various tech-related courses
- Employer engagement: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/business>

Legal and Regulatory Considerations

14. Invest NI's Guide to Doing Business in Northern Ireland

- Covers legal structures, taxation, and employment law
- Available at: <https://www.investni.com/international-business/why-northern-ireland>

15. Northern Ireland Business Info

- Official online channel for business advice and support
- Website: <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/>

Cultural Insights

Understanding local business culture is crucial. Northern Ireland has a unique blend of British and Irish influences. Networking and building personal relationships are highly valued in business dealings.

Useful Resources for Market Research

16. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

- Official statistics and economic data
- Website: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/>

17. Invest NI Sector Information

- Detailed insights into key industries
- Available at: <https://www.investni.com/international-business/our-sectors>

By leveraging these resources and understanding the local ecosystem, tech startups can effectively navigate their entry into the Northern Ireland market. The region's growing tech sector, supportive business environment, and access to talent make it an attractive destination for international expansion.

18. Digital Infrastructure

- Northern Ireland has excellent digital infrastructure, including high-speed broadband and 5G networks
- The Project Stratum initiative aims to improve broadband connectivity in rural areas

19. Brexit Considerations

- Northern Ireland post-Brexit is in a unique position, being part of the UK but following some EU rules
- Please note the Northern Ireland Protocol and its implications for businesses

20. R&D Tax Credits

- There is the availability of R&D tax credits for innovative companies in Northern Ireland
- This can be a significant financial incentive for tech startups

21. Local Tech Events

- There are key tech events and conferences in Northern Ireland, such as Digital DNA and BelTech
- These events can provide networking opportunities and insights into the local tech scene

22. Language Considerations

- While English is the primary language, note that some areas may use Irish or Ulster Scots
- This could be relevant for localisation efforts

23. Data Protection- GDPR compliance is important, as it applies in Northern Ireland

Source: contact Tracey Rob Perera