



Report on Ulster University Brexit Symposium

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Foreword

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Since the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, there have been many questions asked about what Brexit might mean for Northern Ireland. Uncertainty has surrounded much of the discourse on some issues of key strategic importance, ranging from migration and the Common Travel Area to economic development and infrastructure.

Whilst opinions may differ on the challenges and opportunities ahead, civic society is clear that the focus must now be on solutions – how best to address the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities.

As Northern Ireland's civic university, Ulster University is committed to our role in this, encouraging the innovation, leadership and vision needed to help Northern Ireland thrive, particularly given the current political fragility here and the urgency of the unique challenges we face.

My colleagues and I convened this symposium to provide a safe environment to focus on the solutions and the opportunities that present the most promising avenues for progress in the coming weeks, months and years.

More than 200 representatives from business and industry, the public sector, the voluntary and community sector and academia came together to share ideas and discuss the key actions and practical steps needed to achieve our shared aim of a flourishing Northern Ireland, benefitting all of her people.

This report outlines the key ideas generated and solutions proposed over the course of the symposium.

Like many of you, Ulster has continued to work consistently and determinedly to lobby local representatives, the UK Government and the EU to advance solutions that will support both our own sector and will help Northern Ireland as a whole. We must all seek to do so collaboratively when we have the opportunity, recognising the strength of our combined voice to have a positive impact.

We are also working to develop a programme of activity that will allow us to build on the momentum and ideas generated at the symposium. We recognise that time constraints on the day limited our opportunity for detailed discussions, particularly in the economic, political and social sessions, and our forthcoming events will help us take the ideas generated here to the next level.

I am heartened by what we have achieved so far, in the quality of the conversations and the clarity of many of the ideas discussed.

I believe they demonstrate our collective commitment to ensuring that the voice of Northern Ireland is heard during the course of the negotiations, and that our understanding of the issues is matched only by our desire to find positive resolutions.

I look forward to continuing to work alongside you in the months ahead.

Proposed Outcomes and Discussion Points Raised

During the symposium, six workshops considered themes and sectors of particular importance to Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit:

- Economic
- Political
- Social
- Business
- Infrastructure, including local government
- Health and education

These sessions included roundtable discussions and this report outlines the ideas generated and the solutions proposed during those conversations.

The key ideas emerging from across the six workshops will be explored in more detail in separate sessions in the months ahead.

More details will be provided in advance of each session.

Workshop	Proposed Outcomes	Discussion Points Raised
1. Economic	1.1 Develop a regional migration policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise different sectors have different skills needs and NI needs are different to GB • Bespoke regional migration policy to reflect the context here • Students to be excluded from any migration cap • Requires a global outlook including Asia, Africa and others, not just EU
	1.2 Develop and implement a workforce development strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support required for effective skills development • Programmes and initiatives aligned to local economic needs • Collaborative investment from employers, universities, colleges and local government to understand and address skills gaps, particularly in vocational careers – supported by education policy • A flexible approach to develop the local and migrant workforce to help propel the economy forward
	1.3 Develop social policy to support migration and workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address domestic issues to encourage and support more NI people into work • Increase both skills and aspiration • Focus on the indigenous impression of jobs that are perceived as being “for migrants” • Support employers, particularly those reliant on lower skilled workers, to: improve their marketing; increase training availability; improve career paths • Encourage employers, universities, colleges and local government to work collaboratively to invest in people • Reflect on international examples of social policy e.g. Canada

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	<p>1.4 Explore options for frictionless trade across the NI/ROI border</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Introduce rules of origin self-certification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential solution for agri-food and well-suited to manufacturing sector (less so servicing industries) • Principle of self-certification well-established (e.g. in terms of tax) • Example of South-Korea and the EU • Mindful of implications/issues with other countries, e.g. imports from South America ii. Introduce trusted trader status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorised economic traders iii. Establish an EU protocol, creating a Free Trade Area between NI and ROI
<p>2. Political</p>	<p>2.1 Return of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very strong consensus that Northern Ireland needs the devolved institutions up and running to represent NI at all levels • This includes the North-South Ministerial Council and Joint Ministerial Councils • Explore some other ways to have voices heard in the absence of an Executive e.g. Civic Panel
	<p>2.2 Enhance information channels across government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should be multi-dimensional: from UK government to devolved regions; from the devolved regions to the UK government; between the regions; and within the regions (to and from local government) • In short, we need a “listening Brexit” and a “communicating Brexit”

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	<p>2.3 Clarity on UK/ROI common interests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that the Republic of Ireland has an important role to play, not least due to Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and dual citizenship for people from Northern Ireland • Arrangements for protection of all citizens' rights in a non EU country e.g. Irish living in Northern Ireland • What are the mechanisms for communication with the Republic of Ireland – can the British-Irish Council and Joint Ministerial Councils be resourced and have the capacity for this? • Important to understand areas of common interest and common ground between UK and Republic of Ireland in order to strengthen respective but mutually supporting negotiating positions
	<p>2.4 Clarity on EU constitutional and other realities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this period of uncertainty, we need honesty about the challenges, possibilities and costs of Brexit, and the practical limits on 'taking back control' imposed by even a 'good deal' with the European Union – particularly in relation to the border: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common Travel Area - Customs - European Arrest Warrants, Courts etc. • We need clear models and scenarios so we are aware of the realistic options for key issues, post-Brexit

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	<p>2.5 Strong voice from and collaboration across civic society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic society needs to make Northern Ireland’s voice heard, not only in the absence of devolved institutions but also as a permanent contributor to a “listening Brexit” and a “communicating Brexit” • Alliances should be formed to strengthen our lobbying in Belfast, London, Dublin and Brussels
<p>3. Social</p>	<p>3.1 Creation of a Brexit forum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal grouping to hear all voices on Brexit. We need to know and understand the views and expectations on all sides. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both those who were in favour of Brexit, and those against - Seldom heard voices - Business, industry, public, voluntary sector, community representatives, and academia • Convened or supported by Ulster University • Expert contributors to provide comment on social issues, economics etc. • Re-focus away from the negative, towards transformational opportunities of Brexit. Less about the end situation being the ‘absence’ of something, focus more on what we want to put in place

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	<p>3.2 Focus on enhancing community collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns that the impact on communities is not fully understood, particularly at a practical, day-to-day level • Need to disseminate, personalise the issues, communicate and bring into every day discussions • We need greater dialogue with and capacity within communities to understand better how they feel and how Brexit will impact them • Government departments need to take more risks in encouraging community collaboration with “unusual suspects” • We need to hear directly from local communities and to develop mechanisms to do this, for example: feedback groups on a regional level that are open to all • Potential use of community planning infrastructure to enhance community engagement • Upskill young people and address economic activity, by targeting gaps in provision that can help communities respond to Brexit
	<p>3.3 Opportunities to enhance devolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put forward a positive case for areas of EU legislation that could be repatriated to devolved NI institutions, instead of ‘waiting to see what happens’ • Careful thinking around ‘taking back control’ in context of the Repeal Bill

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	3.4 Understand risks of Brexit in their totality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different interests highlight the risks that most affect them • Need map that looks across every socio-economic area • From there, NI (either devolved institutions or civic society via Brexit Forum) can look at how best to mitigate these risks, and use this as a platform to explore opportunities
	3.5 Focus on identity implications of Brexit for NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question of the “Border in the mind” and its connection to identity is key for NI • 96% increase in Irish passports and 76% in British passports: may suggest level of pragmatism regarding identity. Voting patterns in recent election suggest it is pragmatism rather than systemic • Increase in Irish passports puts emphasis on need for practical considerations for service delivery – e.g. cross border health services: will people be asked to produce passports to access? • Need to avoid two tiers of citizenship in NI re pragmatic access to certain rights
	3.6 Focus on reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across both traditional communities (unionist and nationalist) and migrant communities • Reality is some migrants are afraid, facing threats and violence, and we need to address this • Peace funding – clarity needed

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4. Business	4.1 Develop a brand proposition for Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Ireland needs a brand to help increase international trade • A need to move beyond politics into a more unified brand position that helps economic growth • Requires an outward looking international perspective • Benchmarking with other countries/regions with similar required
	4.2 Establish a coordinated all sector industry approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brexit is one change factor and should not be considered the only issue • Re-orient how businesses strengthen trading relationships with emerging economies • Overcome fragmentation and work together to build regional strengths, resources, relationships, bridge skills gaps, overcome language barriers and share in-country knowledge • Re-examine how money is allocated. Explore a more innovative approach i.e. through R&D rather than to individual firms

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	<p>4.3 Promote and encourage innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creatively consider reaching other markets • Position NI as an exporting centre • Position as a region of excellence for specific products (goods/ service/ideas) • Explore opportunities in digital – cybersecurity and digital technologies • Focus on added value product – research and innovation • Retain our best talent and thinkers • Support an entrepreneurial and risk taking approach with more interdisciplinary working and networks • Ensure new ventures are more visible • Public sector led region has been limiting for support for an innovation approach
	<p>4.4 Link to a skills development strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more Leadership and Management skills development • Enhanced role for universities in taking a lead and the development of an entrepreneurial mind-set, role of agri-business and tourism • Explore knowledge transfer partnerships potential • Support graduate start-ups through the FE/HE sector • Develop business/education connections and a more entrepreneurial approach through education • Explore apprenticeship potential to achieve greater alignment and meet regional needs • Engage the local workforce to encourage a cultural shift particularly in lower level skills

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	<p>4.5 Greater clarity and support from Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement measures that will attract and retain businesses to the region i.e. Corporation Tax reduction • Address ambition by encouraging and providing financial support for more start-ups and scale-ups • Focus on a small number of key priorities and deliver them – e.g. skills, N-S interconnector, York Street Interchange, Corporation Tax • Help develop trade priorities for different sectors and company sizes: in North America, Europe and Asia • Stimulate sustainability and innovation with large scale infrastructure projects • Cut blockages in planning and provide joined-up responses • Consider the nature, timing and tailoring of business support offered by Government; it's not a one-size fits all approach • Decode and simplify support for business owners and develop capacity of business to avail of the support available • Deliver flexible support to enable SMEs to respond nimbly to emerging opportunities • Recognise that each business is unique and may need an individual assessment and plan • Reduce business costs and provide access to relevant business support • Provide greater political and economic stability

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	<p>4.6 Develop more effective Government, Education and Industry Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More mutually supportive partnerships and constructive ongoing engagement • Address the disjoint between what education is providing and what businesses want • NI Skills Strategy is a significant policy lever to address shortages • Businesses need to help shape education/training provision • Colleges/universities need to develop provision that will meet needs • Greater role for local government to play to forge partnerships and implement policy thinking
	<p>4.7 Greater clarity needed on mobility issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of FSB members found 4 key issues that concern business: access to single market and trade, access to labour and skills, regulation • Levels of uncertainty are such that businesses cannot plan for the unknown

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5. Infrastructure	5.1 Protect and maintain the Single Electricity Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEM brings significant benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased levels of competition driving down prices - Greater levels of security of supply - Greater transparency • It is a sign of pragmatic co-operation outside of the political sphere • SEM is important for continuity of supply between two small markets in NI and ROI, both need to continue to benefit from the economies of scale SEM offers • Bilateral agreement in respect of arbitration is required, and must be common across GB • The opportunity to strengthen the interconnection with Scotland should be explored
	5.2 Create an all-island Infrastructure Fund, with contributions from the EU and the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a transitional arrangement to support continued infrastructure development • Based on EU Cohesion Policy, reflective of spatial variety • Application of the Industrial Strategy to focus on projects of priority • Something needed to compensate the potential loss of structural funds
	5.3 Benchmarking required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitiveness against rest of UK and EU countries along with investment plan to converge • Procurement capacity against the rest of the UK and move to speed up procurement

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	5.4 Protect commonality of utilities standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulation works well for electricity and gas – issues could emerge if standards diverge
	5.5 Advancement of City Deals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with all partners to develop and enhance City Deal proposals Help to develop opportunities for investment Enhance confidence in the market Drive forward competitiveness and improve infrastructure
	5.6 Research on cross border flows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need comprehensive analysis to ascertain accurate levels of cross border flows and activity – concern official figures may not paint the full picture (retail, hospitality etc) From this, better understanding is possible of needs, options and solutions
	5.7 Development/ expansion of cross border council agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to safeguard some of the important areas of cross-border cooperation (emergency planning) and explore collaboration between councils in areas such as waste management Such agreements could provide an opportunity access/benefit from European funding, and Peace funding in particular
	5.8 Analysis on powers repatriated via Repeal Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand what powers devolved to the regions could be further devolved to local government Enhance partnership arrangements between councils and NI Assembly to explore and deliver on this Impact on the devolution narrative as ‘the only show in town’ Enforceability issue

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	5.9 Develop shared services for local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared services should be explored or regional solutions developed to deliver enhanced and efficient services e.g. a regional waste management solution
	5.10 Develop a broadband solution for the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of access to suitable broadband for business and domestic customer remains in many areas Can lead to inequalities in access to services that are increasingly made available online, including by Government Limits local and global access to markets, detrimental to economic growth Broadband solution needed urgently, based on 'Fibre to Premises': business premises targeted, domestic customers connected in tandem
6. Health and Social Care	6.1 Robust information is needed urgently to understand potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In particular access to information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many current HSC staff are from the EU? Workforce plan intelligence about future workforce need and areas where international recruitment will be required? How much health is provided cross-border?
	6.2 Investment in data scientists and health economists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vital to understand the potential impact of Brexit and associated trends and projections which are crucial to support evidence based decision making
	6.3 Emphasis on collaborations and co-operation across NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inward investment is needed to build healthy communities through innovation and research

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	6.4 Maintain and enhance existing links with ROI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated cross-border health care delivery in key areas is important and collaborations need to be protected
7. Education	7.1 Greater clarity needed on mobility issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of mobility and funding from EU for the mobility of students and staff Clarity needed on parity of qualifications across the UK/EU for staff and students post-Brexit Vital both on day-to-day basis given NI border but also more broadly for encouraging international students to study here Need to protect mobility in vulnerable areas of post-primary curriculum Risk for sustainability of some subjects at GCSE/A-Level in GB where international staff fill teacher shortages. Many NI schools use GB examination board and shortages in GB could have implications for for the range of subjects that may be offered by those examination boards
	7.2 Continue to develop opportunities around student mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the value of student mobility experiences, both for the individual, their community and wider economy Programmes and opportunities required to continue and develop this: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private funding streams or Match funding for school exchange programmes

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	<p>7.3 Enhance attractiveness of NI to international staff and students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are all responsible for globally promoting how NI punches above its weight in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standard of education - Areas of world-leading research - Entrepreneurship, etc • Twinning and partnership opportunities for towns and cities to promote positive NI messages and create strong links • Universities, colleges, government, local government and local communities need to work together to co-create a compelling offer to international students and staff
	<p>7.4 Post-study work visas for university students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-year post-study work visa for international students • Intention to transition into a job at the same level as their qualification, but some flexibility to take up other job opportunities in the transitional phase. • Economic evidence and lessons from Scotland point to benefits • Support encouraged from business and industry, trade unions, students etc
	<p>7.5 Consideration of Erasmus students on an all island basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erasmus is a key programme of student and staff mobility, helping to deliver international learning and experience, value to the individual and the economy • Vital NI students able to continue to benefit from programme



Ulster University's Brexit Leadership

Brexit is the most significant issue of our generation, presenting opportunities and challenges to all parts of our society. Ulster University is home to experts whose academic leadership and world-leading research will be vital to the Brexit discussion, across a range of core themes including

- **Constitutional and political**
- **Business and the economy**
- **Healthy communities**
- **Education**

We have developed a dedicated webpage to introduce these individuals and allow you to explore their analysis and thought leadership throughout the Brexit process: ulster.ac.uk/brexit

We encourage you to visit and regularly return to this website to understand who within Ulster University has the expertise and experience in areas of importance to you.