

Northern Ireland start-up boost with new £50 million defence growth deal

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Defence tech start-ups and small businesses in Northern Ireland will benefit from a £50 million investment boost launched by the UK government today, creating highly-skilled jobs and strengthening UK national security.

- New defence investment will boost start-up companies and supply chains in Northern Ireland.
- Investment will support hundreds of highly-skilled, well-paid jobs, making defence an engine for growth.
- Northern Ireland benefits from over £270 million per year in defence spending with industry, supporting 900 jobs.

As part of today's launch, Defence Minister Luke Pollard, along with Northern Ireland Office Minister Matthew Patrick, met representatives from local industry and research academia at Belfast Met College.

They discussed the Northern Ireland Growth Deal's mission to grow the defence ecosystem, boost competitiveness, and create jobs across Northern Ireland. This comes as part of the government's Defence Industrial Strategy, which is backing UK businesses, putting the UK at the leading edge of defence innovation in NATO and ensuring this government's record uplift in defence spending delivers lasting benefits for people in every nation and region.

The new Defence Growth Deal will create a targeted programme to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups in Northern Ireland by making it easier for them to enter the defence supply chain.

SMEs will also be better able to innovate and collaborate with each other and large companies at a new Secure Innovation Hub facility, which will be established under the deal. This new facility will provide secure research and development for new businesses and start-ups, creating a level playing field with major defence firms.

The Defence Growth Deal will also focus on supporting SMEs developing technology that can be used for military and civilian purposes, ensuring that innovations benefit both UK national security and the wider economy.

Alongside the £50 million investment, the UK government is also providing additional funding for a skills initiative in Northern Ireland. Defence will work with industry, colleges and universities to develop defence-related skills such as engineering and technology, supporting vital defence industries and creating more opportunities for students to learn the skills of the future.

This will help them embark on well-paid and meaningful long-term careers in Northern Ireland that will keep the UK and our allies safe, creating jobs in local areas, in alignment with the government's wider Pride in Place programme.

This is just one part of the UK government making the largest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War, hitting 2.6% of GDP from 2027.

Luke Pollard MP, Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, said:

Northern Ireland plays a pivotal role in keeping the UK and our allies safe. In Belfast we build missiles that take down Iranian drones threatening our bases and allies in the Middle East. Belfast also builds the air defence systems that keep Ukraine in the fight against Putin's illegal war.

Defence is an engine for growth and the MOD is proud to be working with the Northern Ireland Office and the Executive to create more jobs, more opportunities for apprentices and graduates and more investment in Northern Ireland's defence industry.

Northern Ireland is already home to a significant defence industry footprint, with 900 jobs directly supported by over £271 million of defence spending with industry each year, making defence an engine for growth.

SMEs such as AI-focused Whitespace and KX are a key part of the defence supply chain in Northern Ireland, working hand-in-hand with big defence companies, producing vital kit which keeps the UK and our allies safe.

Belfast is home to major defence facilities such as Thales' factory, with which this government has supported a £1.6 billion order for 5,000 lightweight multi-role missiles (LMM) for Ukraine's air defences. This contract has helped Thales double its production in Belfast and plan to hire 300 new staff, demonstrating this government's defence dividend in action.

Northern Ireland Office Minister Matthew Patrick said:

This deal is good news for Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, and our allies - investing £50 million in our talent, our economy and our resilience.

This Defence Growth Deal has been shaped by businesses large and small - our universities, apprentices and representative bodies.

With this deal, Northern Ireland businesses enjoy a vote of confidence which will help them secure bigger and better deals.

This £50 million boost directly responds to the Strategic Defence Review's commitment to supporting the UK's defence industry's innovation and will help make defence an engine for growth by powering investment and jobs across Northern Ireland.

Joseph Reffitt, Northern Ireland Director at ADS said:

We are delighted to see the government launch its fifth and final Defence Growth Deal here in Northern Ireland. The Northern Irish defence sector already makes a substantial contribution to the local economy, supporting well-paid, highly skilled jobs right across the region. While the detail will be pivotal, we hope this deal will help build on our existing strengths by investing in the engineering capability and the workforce we are known for.

ADS has been pleased to work closely with regional partners, the Ministry of Defence and our members to help unlock Northern Ireland's full potential, and we look forward to continuing that collaboration to ensure these initiatives deliver long-term, sustainable benefits for industry and the communities we support.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northern-ireland-start-up-boost-with-new-50-million-defence-growth-deal>