



## The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor: Research Summary

Snapshot of findings from the wider report entitled: *Current Profile, Potential in Recovery & Opportunities for Cooperation* by Neale Blair, Jordana Corrigan, Eoin Magennis & Deiric Ó Broin.

### The strengths and potential of the Corridor:

- Total **population** on the Corridor is over 2million and this is growing faster than anywhere else on the island of Ireland. Since 2006 there has been a 12% increase and it is expected to reach 2.5million by 2040
  - A **younger and more diverse population** (15% born off the island) with concentration at either end
- **Buoyant labour market** in 2019 with 970,000 residents at work (rising to 1million on the eve of Covid-19) and just over 1million jobs available along the Corridor (59% in the two cities) driving commuting patterns and demand for migrants
- **Employment rates** of residents are above the island average and inactivity is less – but there are pockets of disadvantage and un/under-employment stand out
- 125,000 firms with **entrepreneurship and survival rates higher** than elsewhere on the island of Ireland (less so in NI) and more people employed in mid-sized and large businesses than elsewhere on the island
- **34% have 3<sup>rd</sup> level qualifications** higher than elsewhere and majority of those enrolled studying on the Corridor – therefore a good pipeline for the concentrations of jobs requiring graduates
- Opportunity in the initiatives and investments which will flow from the Belfast Region City Deal and the Ireland 2040 plans.

### Key sectors show a legacy of industrial strategy and emergence of new disruptors:

- Current **sectoral strengths** show the influence of an FDI pipeline (eg: Advanced Manufacturing and ICT) and prevailing industrial tradition (eg: Agri-Food)
  - Beyond FDI, the enterprise base on the Corridor has been a buoyant one: 38% of the island's businesses are located there
- Sectoral concentrations exist in **tradeable services** (ICT, Professional Services and Financial Services), Agri-Food and high tech Manufacturing and Construction
- Sectoral priorities identified for tradeable services - including cyber security (Belfast), creative industries (Dublin and Belfast), 'digital' (ABC, Louth and NMD), Agri-Food (ABC, Meath and Louth).
  - Opportunity lies in developing networks and clusters of firms and related research strengths
- **Tourism** is identified across the Corridor as a priority and, in parts, a sectoral concentration (Louth and Meath) – there are 68,000 related jobs currently and over 10 million trips were made in the Corridor in 2018

### Challenges faced:

Alongside the recent positive performance, there are challenges facing the Corridor:

- Significant impact that COVID-19 is likely to have on local labour markets.

- The extent to which the economy in the Dublin-Belfast Corridor can act as a driver to the island's economies may help dictate the speed and sustainability of the recovery.
- Brexit as a potential risk to and negative effect on cross-border (and into NI) flows of trade, people and capital
- Divergence in growth, priorities and dependencies between North and South
- Climate change which is already upon us making the case for impact mitigation (eg: flood/coastal defences) as well as low carbon transformation
- Ensuring benefits are shared right along the corridor, an enabler of the 'places in between,' as well as a connection between concentrations
- Housing provision, affordability of this for the 'adult' life cycle group, in particular, and slower population growth in Belfast city than in its neighbouring Council areas.
- In line with similar data North and South, rising dependency ratios (ratio of the young and old on the working age population) pose healthcare and employment issues for local and central government.
  - These trends pose questions for future planning, service provision and measures to deal with increasing congestion.

### **About the report**

The report has been commissioned by a local government network formed by eight Councils located in the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, who then asked staff from Ulster University and Dublin City University to research and write the profile in cooperation with the Councils. The network currently has Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Belfast City Council, Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh Borough Council, Louth County Council, Meath County Council and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council as members.

The network came together with a shared recognition of the potential benefits that could arise from such an initiative and the challenges that might face it in the coming years, not least the outcome of a UK exit from the EU. In the course of its work the COVID-19 pandemic struck and the economic trajectory has shifted significantly.

### **About the researchers:**

Deiric Ó Broin is Professor of Public Policy Practice in the School of Law and Government in DCU where he lectures in Irish politics and public policy. His research is focused on the area of local and urban governance. He also works in the areas of public participation and deliberation, civil society involvement in public policy formulation, with a particular focus on the social economy.

Dr Eoin Magennis is Senior Economist (Economic Research) in Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre. Eoin's research interests include economic policy research in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, regional and sub-regional economic development, the dynamics of trade and its firm-level drivers and impacts, economic history and the history of economic thought.