

**Smart
Region.**

A Profile of the Region

The Key Issues

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Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| 1) Introduction | 2 |
| 2) The Population | 3 |
| 2.1) The evidence | 3 |
| 2.2) The issue | 5 |
| 2.3) The proposition..... | 6 |
| 3) The Two Speed Recovery | 7 |
| 3.1) The evidence | 7 |
| 3.2) The issue | 10 |
| 3.3) The proposition..... | 10 |
| 4) Micro Business Base..... | 11 |
| 4.1) The evidence | 11 |
| 4.2) The issue | 13 |
| 4.3) The proposition..... | 14 |
| 5) Skills, gaps and mismatches | 15 |
| 5.1) The evidence | 15 |
| 5.2) The issue | 18 |
| 5.3) The proposition..... | 19 |
| 6) Conclusion | 20 |

1) Introduction

The new Fermanagh and Omagh region will cover 2,829km² and be home to 115,500 people; not only is the new region bigger, but the Council will have more devolved powers to direct planning and business support. This represents a significant opportunity for the region to take control of its assets and maximise the local economy. In order to achieve this, it is important to understand the profile of the region – the issues it faces and the opportunities it holds.

This paper is a concise exploration of four of the key challenges facing the Fermanagh and Omagh region in the next decade. The findings are evidence based and drawn from a wide range of socio-economic analysis. The four issues identified are:

- The Population;
- The Two Speed Recovery;
- Micro-Business Base; and
- Skills: gaps and mismatches.

The remainder of this paper analysis each of these issues in turn, drawing from supporting data and providing a concise and coherent narrative. The sections are split into a short introduction, summary of the evidence and an identification of why the evidence presents an issue that needs addressed. For each issue, a proposition is offered; however, it is likely that some of these suggested propositions are being undertaken – or will be undertaken – across a range of existing schemes.

As a Smart Region, the emphasis should be on big, bold and different responses to each issue, maximising the collective expertise and impact of the steering group.

2) The Population

The Fermanagh and Omagh region has traditionally been associated as a popular retirement destination. Despite this, there is little evidence in the population data – the average age in Fermanagh and Omagh was 38 years in 2013, comparable to the NI average. Similarly, the difference between the proportion of 16-74 year olds classified as retired in the region is in fact lower than the NI average (33% and 35% respectively).

However, a rapid increase in the age of the population is projected over the next decade (and beyond), which will see a new challenge for the region, or opportunity, depending on how proactive the region is about addressing it.

2.1) The evidence

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) project that there will be over 7,000 additional people aged 65 years + in Fermanagh and Omagh region by 2023 – this represents a 41% increase from current levels. In contrast, just over 1,200 additional people between 0-64 years are projected for the region. Therefore, over 4 out of every 5 additional people in the region will be aged over 65 years.

Table 1: Population growth by age band, Region & NI, 2012 - 2023

| Fermanagh and Omagh Region <i>2008 based SNPP</i> | 2012 - 2023 | |
|--|-------------|-------|
| | 000s | % |
| 0-14 yrs | 768 | 3.3% |
| 15-64 yrs | 544 | 0.7% |
| 65+ yrs | 7,013 | 41.4% |
| NI, 2008 based | | |
| 0-14 yrs | 13,048 | 3.6% |
| 15-64 yrs | 23,952 | 2.0% |
| 65+ yrs | 81,577 | 29.7% |
| NI, 2012 based | | |
| 0-14 yrs | 17,071 | 4.8% |
| 15-64 yrs | 6,152 | 0.5% |
| 65+ yrs | 80,115 | 29.4% |

Source: NISRA

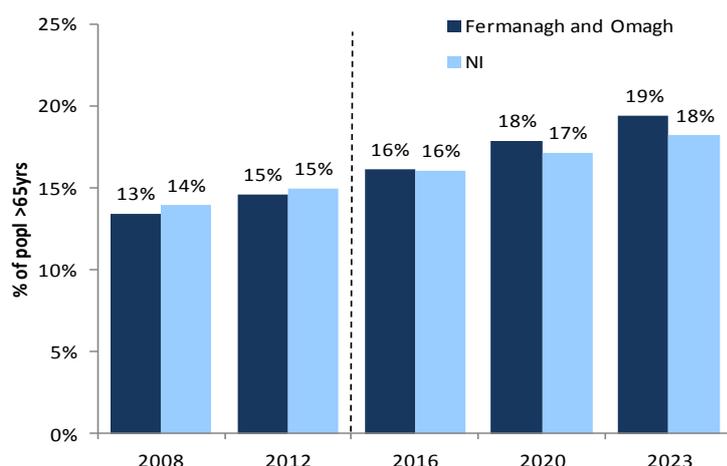
As a result of the increase in older people, 20% of the population in the region will be aged 65 years and over by 2023, compared to 15% now. Similarly, in 2013, the region has a smaller proportion of

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

older people vis-a-vis the Northern Ireland average. However, that is due to change by 2023, as outlined in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Older population (65yrs+) as % of total population, Region & NI, 2008 - 2023



Source: NISRA

The Fermanagh and Omagh region will be the most affected in NI by the increase in the over 65 population, with the 41% increase 12 percentage points ahead of the NI average and a considerable 30 percentage points ahead of Belfast, the least affected region. The results are outlined in table 2.

Table 2: Change in population aged 65 yrs +, 2014LGDs, 2012 – 2023

| | 2012 - 2023 | |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| | Ppl | % |
| Antrim and Newtownabbey | 6500 | 31% |
| Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon | 10200 | 35% |
| Belfast | 4400 | 11% |
| Causeway Coast and Glens | 7000 | 31% |
| Derry and Strabane | 7200 | 38% |
| Fermanagh and Omagh | 6900 | 41% |
| Lisburn and Castlereagh | 7700 | 26% |
| Mid and East Antrim | 6600 | 28% |
| Mid Ulster | 6800 | 37% |
| Newry, Mourne, Down | 8500 | 36% |
| North Down and Ards | 8300 | 29% |
| Northern Ireland | 80100 | 29% |

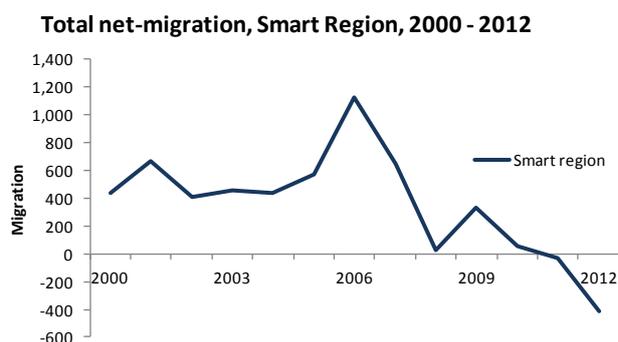
Source: NISRA

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

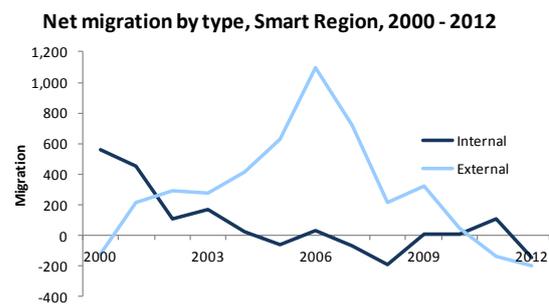
The ageing population issue is exacerbated by the return to a net outflow of people from the region, following a fourteen year period of net inward migration. The outflow of people is largely driven by the region's young people, half of whom leave to pursue higher education, with anecdotal evidence suggesting less than 1 in 3 return.

Figure 2



Source: NISRA

Figure 3



Source: NISRA

Figure 3 shows that during the boom period of inward migration to the Fermanagh and Omagh region, the net inflow was primarily as a result of a surge in migrants from outside NI. This in itself was due to the extension of the European Union, which resulted in an increase in Eastern Europeans in the region. Such a surge was due to a change in the law as opposed to the region, and thus is unlikely to occur again in the future.

This evidence suggests that the same issues were likely to have been on the policy agenda in the early 2000's, but were alleviated by strong immigration.

2.2) The issue

The ageing population is a well recognised issue in the Western World. The main concerns regarding the elderly population is the requirement for care of the elderly healthcare services. This will occur in an era where the number of working age people for every older person will fall from 4.3 to 3.2 in the region. At a regional level, the net out-flow of the region's younger people is likely to place significant pressure on family provided care, thus putting additional pressure on the central provision.

Parallel commentary has emphasised that the ageing population presents a significant economic opportunity and should be considered the 'silver economy' – a report by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), estimated that in 2011, the population aged over 50 accounted for 85% of the nation's wealth and 40% of its consumer expenditure. This is on the basis that the current (and incoming) generation of retirees are amongst the wealthiest ever. Thus, having a large and growing older population should be presented as a significant opportunity for the region. However, it is a fair

observation that few areas have been able to 'exploit' the silver economy fully, and thus the ageing population in Fermanagh and Omagh region is best viewed as both an issue and an opportunity.

A second strand to the population issue is the net outflow of the region's young people.; the region does not retain – or attract back – those who leave exacerbates the ageing population issue. There is a significant risk of Fermanagh and Omagh having a significant lack of working age people in the medium term, having a significant impact on the economic and social activity of the region. (This issue is consistent throughout this paper, and as such, the proposition is discussed in section 3.3).

2.3) The proposition

The most likely route for Fermanagh and Omagh to address the issue and create an opportunity from the ageing population is twofold. Firstly, those who are able to contribute actively to society and the economy should be encouraged to do so. Remaining in full time employment is unlikely to be the best approach to this, as it blocks the path for the upcoming generation and does little to stimulate the wealth of knowledge and wisdom the silver economy has to offer. An approach based on mentoring and specialist freelancing is likely to offer the older population the flexibility they desire whilst maximising the knowledge pool.

The second strand it to consider the approach given to elderly health care. In an era of austerity – which is not yet over – a burgeoning older population with increased health care needs are unwelcome. Efficiency measures and new approaches need to be developed and implemented. Funding is likely to be available in this pursuit. The demographic characteristics of Fermanagh and Omagh support it as central to any new R&D in this field.

Case Study: Centre of Excellence for Elderly Care

The health and life sciences sector forms one of only two priority sectors laid out in the draft operational programme for the upcoming INTERREG V funding. Given the demographic projections for the Fermanagh and Omagh region, proximity to the border and established health care facilities, this represents a significant opportunity for the region to be at the forefront of defining a new approach to elderly care. Perhaps aiming to establish a Centre of Excellence for Elderly Care should be the long term ambition.

Staffordshire and Yorkshire County Council's in England have done so (respectively). Both now host Centre's of Excellence in Dementia and Ageing Well. The models used to develop these Centres were similar – the aim was to establish state-of-the-art through life care facilities, commissioned and governed by the County Council but operated through private partners. In both instances, the private partners fed into the vision over a 6 month period.

There are 35 care homes, with a total of over 1,000 bed spaces, in the Fermanagh and Omagh region. The addition of more facilities of a similar nature, regardless of how modern, may not be the optimal approach. Instead, the focus may wish to be on providing more acute, central care for the elderly population, and making the SWAH a Centre of Excellence in Elderly Care. However, the partner led, ambitious models deployed in Yorkshire and Staffordshire County Councils are worth consideration.

3) The Two Speed Recovery

A region's economy can be measured in two different ways – the 'resident economy' and the 'workplace economy'.

The resident economy refers to the area where people live; this is typically referred to when discussing an area's employment rate (or resident employment rate). The workplace economy refers to the area where people work, and is traditionally referred to when discussing jobs. Every person contributes to both a residential and workplace economy, and at a national level, the size of each is the same. This, it is largely a sub-regional measure to define commuting patterns, employment hot-spots and residential areas.

A city centre will traditionally have a much larger workplace economy than residential economy (i.e. more people work there than live there); the opposite is true of the suburbs. In a mainly rural region, such as Fermanagh and Omagh, a significant divergence between the two would not be expected. However, the evidence presented below suggests that the Fermanagh and Omagh region has flourished as a place to live and commute out to work, but has struggled to maintain a strong workplace economy.

3.1) The evidence

The latest data indicate that 67% of those living in the region are in employment, comparable to the NI average (66%). Unemployment¹ levels – 5.1% of the working age population – are also similar to the NI average (5.4%), and although 3.1pp above 2007 levels, have not spiked to the levels witnessed elsewhere in the EU. The same is true of youth unemployment; 6.8% of those aged 18-24 in the region are unemployed, compared to 7.5% NI average, and low in comparison to the Republic of Ireland, Spain and Portugal.

The favourable employment metrics have been facilitated in part by the out-migration alluded to above – put simply, unemployed people in the region emigrate. However, out-commuting is also a significant driver of high employment rates in the region, with an estimated 22,000 people out-commuting to work on a daily basis. (Official data on the destination of out-commuters is not yet published, but Belfast and Derry~Londonderry are likely to feature prominently.)

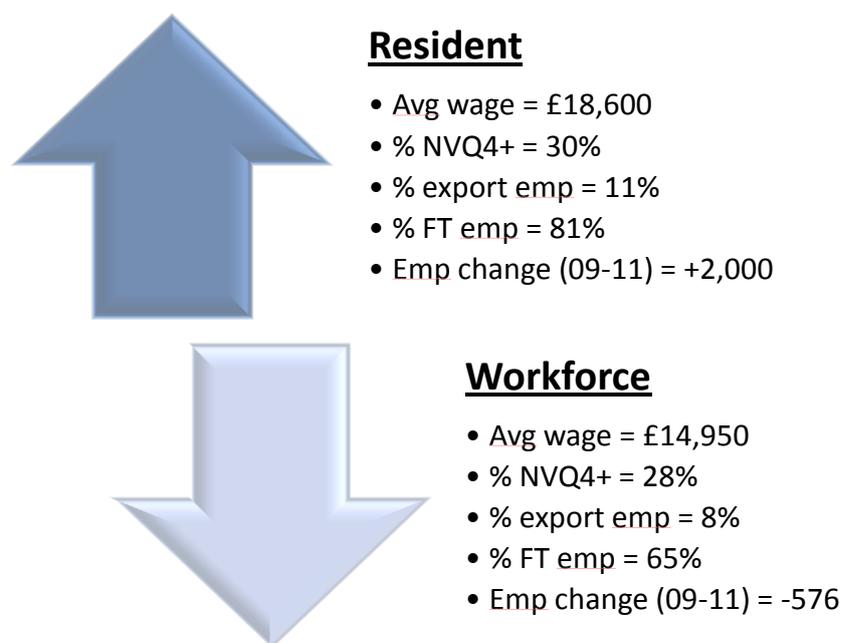
The significant increase in out-commuting has led to a disparity between those who live in the region and work elsewhere, and those who work in the region (regardless of where they live). Figure 1 below outlines a number of key metrics – out-commuters on average have higher wages, better skills and a higher proportion are in full time employment.

¹ This analysis refers to the Claimant Count unemployment measure, as is quoted throughout this article.

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

Figure 1: Summary of resident and workplace economies, Fermanagh and Omagh Region, latest data



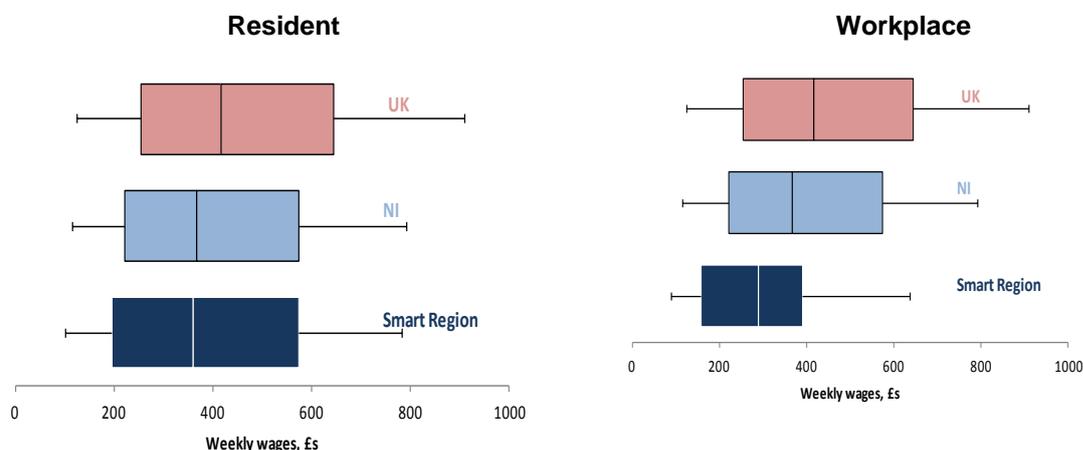
Source: Wages – ASHE; Skills – Census; Employment – Census of Employment' Resident employment - LADB

The spread of wages – a more comprehensive measure than the median wage presented above also differs. The resident wages – including out commuters – are broadly comparable to NI (figure 2), with an average wage in the region of £358 per week (£367 in NI) and 50% of all working residents earning between £194 and £574 per week (£220 and £573 in NI respectively). As a workplace, the region does not fare as strongly. The median wage –£288 per week – is some £79 per week below the NI average. Indeed, the NI median is more comparable to the upper quartile in the region, £367 per week (NI) and £389 per week (region) respectively.

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

Figure 2: Spread of wages (resident based, all jobs), Fermanagh and Omagh Region, NI & UK, 2013



Source: ASHE

Source: ASHE

This is a concern for the region, and suggests that the level of wages which can be earned from working in the region are well below those that can be earned from working elsewhere. This is likely to be as a result of the industrial mix of jobs in the region, the higher proportion of part time working and the more severe impact of the 2008 financial crises.

Census of Employment: Latest Data

In headline terms, the Fermanagh and Omagh region has 38,449 jobs, 302 more than it did in 2011. The growth has been fuelled by rises in the wholesale / retail sector (387 jobs), accommodation / food sector (113 jobs) and the admin / support sector (236 jobs). Continued job losses in the construction sector (181 jobs lost), finance industry (164 jobs lost) and education sector (141 jobs lost) have offset this. Northern Ireland in its entirety expanded by 10,262 jobs, with noticeable increases in admin / support (6314 jobs) but continued losses in public administration (2,127 jobs) and construction (3,548). Interestingly, the wholesale / retail sector contracted in employee terms in NI, but expanded in the Fermanagh and Omagh region, perhaps spurred by cross border trade in the region.

The job increases in Fermanagh and Omagh have been driven by the increase in part time employment. Over 460 new part time jobs were created, whilst full time employment fell by 159 jobs. This trend was not repeated at the Northern Ireland level, where full time employment outgrew part time employment. In the region, the health sector and accommodation / food sector both recorded net increased in part time employment and net falls in full time employment from 2011. Conversely, the retail sector created over 450 full time posts, with a decrease of 65 part time positions.

3.2) The issue

Differences between resident and workplace economies are common; the city center and suburbs are the textbook example. Many areas perform well by focussing on their residential economy by providing a high end retail experience and personal services to suit the higher wages of out-commuters.

However, a net figure of 22,000 out-commuters, in a region over 50 miles from a major urban hub, is unsustainable. It is a hard vision to sell to the younger population – ‘live in the region and commute 2 hours to work’, in light of rising fuel costs and a preference amongst young workers for living and working simultaneously (see the success of companies such as Google in promoting a campus feel for their offices).

The Fermanagh and Omagh region ‘exports’ approximately 50% of school leavers to higher education elsewhere, with anecdotal evidence suggesting as many as two-out-of-three do not return. A vision based on low paid local jobs and a heavy flow of out-commuters does not help the region retain alumni nor attract new people.

Similarly, the employment growth in the region’s workplace has been driven solely by an increase in part-time employment. Full time employment is still in decline. A lack of full time employment has negative impact on average wage levels and makes it difficult for workers in the region to feel secure in employment and prosper. It has a negative impact on consumer demand which squeezes company margins. It is part of a ‘vicious circle’ that can act to hold the Fermanagh and Omagh region back.

3.3) The proposition

Technology advancements have meant that the region’s peripheral location has become a much less significant issue and will continue to advance in the future. Similarly, it is not expected that the region can hope to attract a significant quantity of high quality services jobs locally through inward investment.

However, flexible working, through small satellite offices and hot-desking is a feasible offering for the region. Analysis undertaken using business networking site LinkedIn identifies over 1,000 regional diaspora working in Belfast, many in well paid IT professions. Complementary analysis of CarShare NI, a life sharing service, and recent extensions to the region’s Park’n’Ride infrastructure suggest significant commuting from the region to Belfast on a daily basis.

Therefore, the proposition is to identify suitable hot-desking / satellite office space in the region and sell it to large Belfast companies employing regional commuters. The offering to the employer is enhanced worker productivity through flexible working and a cost effective model for expansion.

4) Micro Business Base

There is no preferred model for the structure of an economy's businesses; a series of micro-enterprises, as is the case in the Fermanagh and Omagh region, is not a distinct disadvantage. However, the lessons of 2008, when businesses were arguably too dependent on internal markets, are still pertinent and the desire to widen the customer base and increase exports is central to the NI Executive's strategic aims in the medium to long term.

The evidence presented below outlines the scale of Fermanagh and Omagh's micro-business structure, identifies the issues and opportunities and proposes Smart Region responses.

4.1) The evidence

The firms that operate in the Fermanagh and Omagh region are on-average smaller businesses than those which operate in the rest of NI – which itself is an SME heavy economy on an international scale). The average business in the Fermanagh and Omagh region employees 4.7 people and has a turnover of £302,400; by comparison, the average NI business employs 6.7 people with a turnover of £493,900. The key metrics are summarised in table 1.

Table 1: Key business metrics, Fermanagh and Omagh Region and NI, 2012

| | Region | NI |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Employees per business | 4.7 | 6.7 |
| Turnover per business | £302,400 | £493,900 |
| Turnover per employee | £64,600 | £73,600 |
| Profitability / employee | £9,300 | £10,100 |

Source: NI ABI

The evidence shows that levels of turnover per employee are lower in the region, as is profitability per employee. Both of these metrics would be important to businesses – on a micro level – when evaluating relocation / expansion plans. The initial headline indicators may seem unattractive, but it should be noted that profitability as a % of turnover is higher in the region than the NI average.

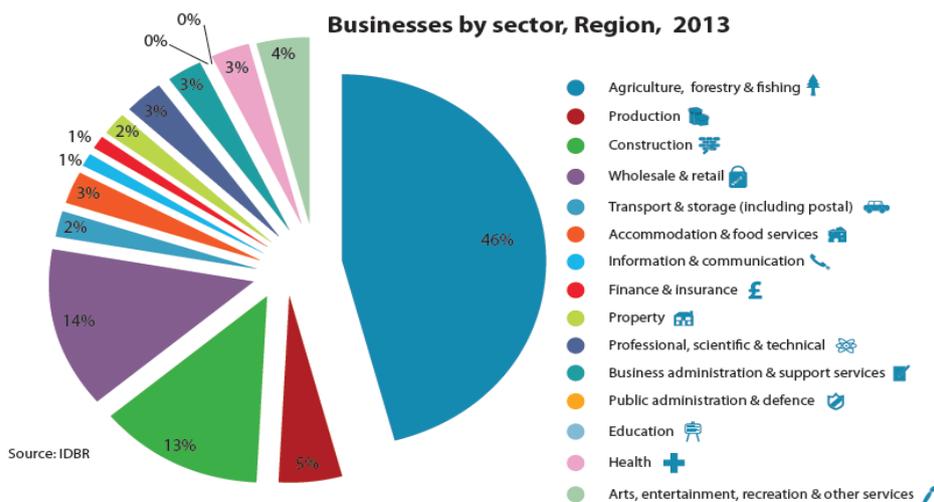
These figures are a macro accumulation of all underlying businesses in the region and are likely to vary on a business-by-business level. The underlying characteristics of businesses in the region – that they are smaller in employee and turnover terms, and are skewed towards industries with lower productivity drive these figures; 46% of all registered businesses in the region are in the agriculture

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

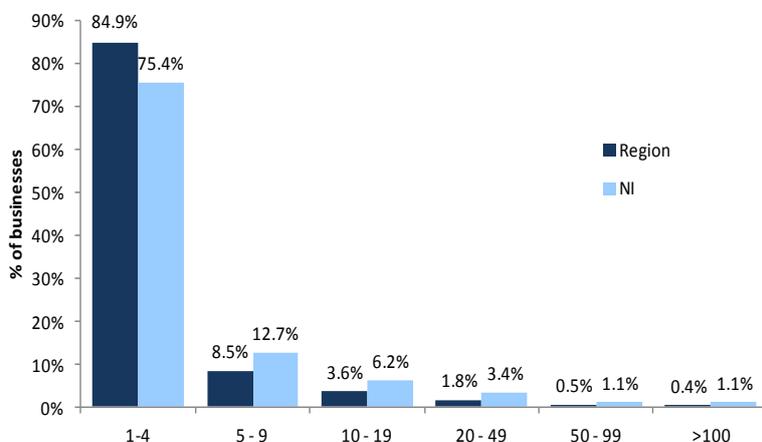
sector, a further 27% are split across the construction and retail sectors and less than 10% are in the wider professional services sector.

Figure 1: Businesses by sector, Fermanagh and Omagh Region, 2013



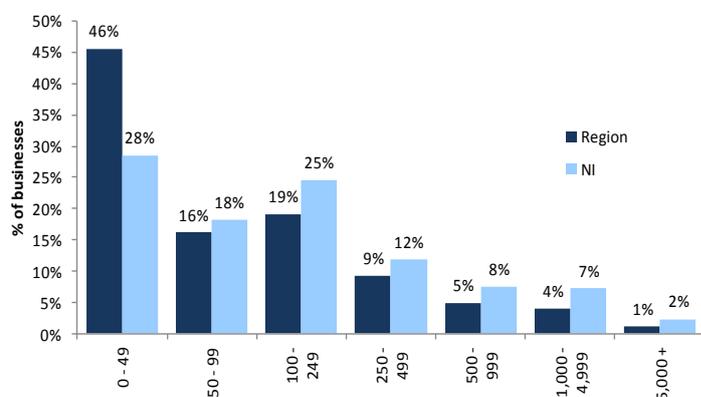
Fewer than 1 in 5 regional businesses employ more than 5 people and less than 2% employ over 20 people. Similarly, almost half of all regional businesses have a turnover of less than £50,000, compared with 28% of NI businesses.

Figure 2: Businesses by employment size band, Fermanagh and Omagh Region, 2012



Source: IDBR

Figure 2: Businesses by employment size band, Fermanagh and Omagh Region, 2012



Source: IDBR

Companies with turnover – the top line – of less than £50,000 are unlikely to be employing more than 1 person and are most likely one person entities. There is likely to be little upside potential to employ additional staff under the current structure and their main client base will be within the supply chain of larger companies and the public sector.

4.2) The issue

Smaller businesses are not necessarily lower productivity operators and the model is currently popular with the tech start-up scene. However, the current NI Programme for Government (PfG) and NI Economic Strategy put NI on a highly export orientated growth trajectory. EU wide data suggesting only 1 in 4 of micro-businesses export to other EU countries, and less than 15% export outside the EU.

Therefore, the evidence suggest there are significant challenges to making Fermanagh and Omagh an export led economy (notwithstanding the similar issues at an NI level). The lessons of 2008 – an economy based on internal activity – have taught the importance of external markets.

However, it needs to be recognised that not all small business owners are classical entrepreneurs who want rapid year-on-year growth and a stronger global position. Those who do should be provided the support to make it happen and those who do not should be nurtured by alternative mean.

Tthe likelihood is that many small companies in the region struggle to break into the public sector supply chain and have a limited client set. The initial focus should be on making companies more 'externally focussed', focussing initially on Belfast / Derry-Londonderry / Dublin based organisations and the public sector, before considering a more international approach.

4.3) The proposition

The issues and opportunities with the region's micro business base are multiple. Initial thoughts suggest that increasing the level of external sales for local companies in the region is the preferred proposition. This would include assisting the region's micro business base win work elsewhere in NI, GB, Rol and further afield, on a step-by-step basis.

This would be best served in the form of a 'procurement club' / business network that would allow companies a better chance of collaborative bids for larger projects. Tender opportunities (primarily public sector in the first instance, due to the transparent but bureaucratic nature) would be collated centrally and disseminated to local businesses. The central source – perhaps the Smart Region – would follow up by providing co-ordination support upon a mutually interesting opportunity arising.

Examples of best practice in similar schemes show that a large local project can act as a catalyst for such 'procurement clubs'. The primary aim of ensuring an optimal amount of local business is procured to local companies. Therefore, the potential A5 development, Lisanelly and the public services hub in Enniskillen could act as the regional catalyst.

Council led programmes introducing micro-businesses to procurement and exporting have been successful in the past (run by Fermanagh and Omagh council's respectively, amongst others) and the opportunity to replicate and maximise these programmes within the next round of Council projects should not be overlooked.

5) Skills, gaps and mismatches

The skills of those exiting the education system, regardless of where in the system (and including both formal qualifications and soft skills), have been an issue of discontent amongst the business community for a prolonged period. Many business leaders consider the courses taught to be of limited value in the 'real world' and are concerned about the level at which students are being narrowly trained for the exam, as opposed to wider learning.

The Young report into enterprise in education has shed light on this, formally acknowledging that the education system is designed to produce people to work within the structure of a large company. The economy is no longer driven solely by large companies, with Young 2014² citing at the outset that *only a few years ago, the definition of a small firm was one employing fewer than 500 people; today, 95.5% of firms by number in this country employ fewer than 10*. Young's key recommendation is that there is more emphasis on entrepreneurial spirit in schools, enabling students to work for themselves.

This issue is likely to be pertinent in the Fermanagh and Omagh region, with a lack of large employers and an emphasis on micro businesses. Similarly, the Fermanagh and Omagh region still has a critical mass of 'traditional industries, whose skills are no longer in vogue, but are still important in order to ensure the continued success of those industries.

The evidence below focuses on those with degree level skills in the Fermanagh and Omagh region – it identifies what industries they are working in locally, and further analysis identifies what subject areas those graduates have studied.

5.1) The evidence

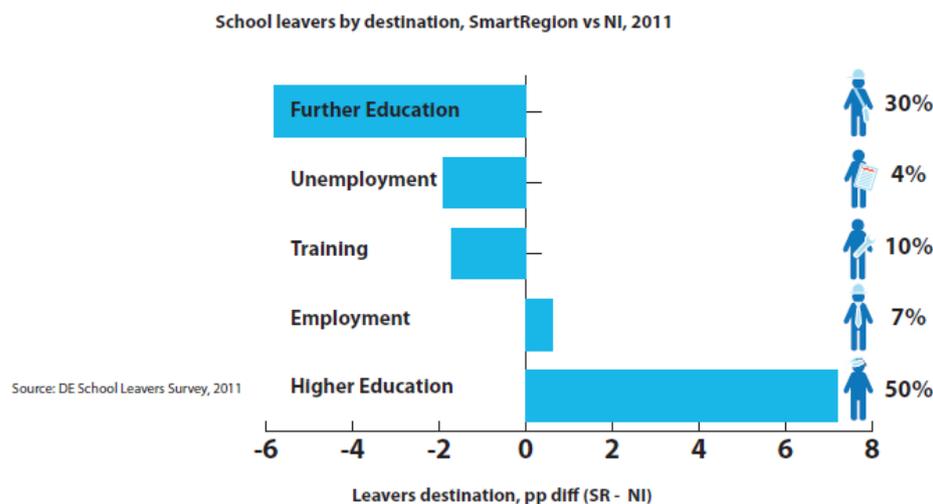
The Fermanagh and Omagh region 'exports' a considerable portion of its school leavers, with 50% of all school leavers from the region going on to higher education (figure 1) – of which there is limited provision in the region. This performance is 7 percentage points than the NI average, and should be applauded; however, it is likely that many of these young people do not return, and thus the skills are lost from the region.

² Lord Young, June 2014: *Enterprise for all: the relevance of Enterprise in Education*

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

Figure 1: School leavers by destination, South West region vs NI, 2011



Reattracting the young people who leave the region to pursue higher education – once they've completed their studies and/or following postgraduate experience – is central to the Fermanagh and Omagh region's success, and is noted throughout this key issues paper. Creating high value added jobs, in internationally popular sectors is the best approach to doing this.

The data suggest the largest employers of graduates in the region are the education and health sectors, accounting for over 50% of all graduates who work in the region. This would be a common feature with labour markets, but the skill requirements of health and education are well known and unlikely to grow rapidly in the next decade (in their traditional forms at least). Over half of those employed in the professional services sector are graduates, although with 460 people, the size is much smaller. These results are summarised in table 1.

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

Table 1: Graduate employment by sector, Fermanagh and Omagh region, 2011/12

| | Jobs | % total |
|------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Agriculture | 9 | 8% |
| Mining And Quarrying | 30 | 14% |
| Manufacturing | 804 | 18% |
| Electricity, Gas | 14 | 27% |
| Water Supply; Sewerage | 66 | 18% |
| Construction | 371 | 14% |
| Wholesale And Retail Trade | 1377 | 19% |
| Transportation And Storage | 128 | 11% |
| Accommodation And Food Services | 269 | 11% |
| Information And Communication | 221 | 38% |
| Financial And Insurance Activities | 312 | 30% |
| Real Estate Activities | 105 | 36% |
| Professional, Scientific | 468 | 53% |
| Admin And Support Services | 108 | 16% |
| Public Admin | 892 | 32% |
| Education | 2401 | 53% |
| Human Health And Social Work | 3216 | 43% |
| Arts, Entertainment | 189 | 27% |
| Other Service Activities | 125 | 27% |
| Total | 11104 | 29% |

Source: Census 2011; HESA

Table 1 is a sub-set of a dataset which outlines the workforce in each sector by the formal skills level held. This is a useful tool, as it allows a comparison of the skill needs of particular sectors. This allows policy makers to examine the likely future skill needs and ensure that interventions are in place to meet the demand. It also demonstrates that personnel cannot easily jump between certain sectors. For example, an increase of 100 jobs in professional services is likely to require 52 graduates; this cannot be offset by a loss of 100 jobs in manufacturing, where less than 20 of the jobs lost would be of graduate level.

LinkedIn undertook a survey to identify the most in demand skills in 2013; tech skills such as programming languages, social media and algorithm design and big data skills accounted for 21 of the 25 most sought after skills. Whilst this represents only a sub-set of the jobs market (and is likely to be skewed towards those in the wider tech industry) it does bare thinking about. How does this compare with the in demand skills in Fermanagh and Omagh? And how do the region's young people view it? Table 2 below summarises the primary subject of graduates working in the Fermanagh and Omagh economy.

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

Table 2: Graduate employment by subject, Fermanagh and Omagh region, 2011/12

| | Jobs | % total |
|---|--------------|---------|
| (1) Medicine & dentistry | 750 | 7% |
| (2) Subjects allied to medicine | 1910 | 17% |
| (3) Biological sciences | 630 | 6% |
| (4) Veterinary science | 10 | 0% |
| (5) Agriculture & related subjects | 120 | 1% |
| (6) Physical sciences | 310 | 3% |
| (7) Mathematical sciences | 80 | 1% |
| (8) Computer science | 360 | 3% |
| (9) Engineering & technology | 550 | 5% |
| (A) Architecture, building & planning | 550 | 5% |
| (B) Social studies | 1070 | 10% |
| (C) Law | 430 | 4% |
| (D) Business & administrative studies | 1310 | 12% |
| (E) Mass communications & documentation | 220 | 2% |
| (F) Languages | 360 | 3% |
| (G) Historical & philosophical studies | 270 | 2% |
| (H) Creative arts & design | 380 | 3% |
| (I) Education | 1740 | 16% |
| (J) Combined | 60 | 1% |
| Total | 11110 | |

Source: Census 2011; HESA

Medicine and subjects allied to medicine account for over 25% of all graduates working in the region, which is consistent with the acute hospital and large health sector. Similarly, education qualifications account for 16% of graduates. Computer science, mathematical science and engineering, which combined could be considered the best proxy for the LinkedIn global skills, account for less than 1,000 graduates (or 9%).

Unfortunately a comprehensive analysis of other NVQ levels is not possible, but at a graduate level, the evidence suggests a marked difference between in demand skills internationally and those in demand locally.

5.2) The issue

The above-average performance in the Fermanagh and Omagh region's young people getting into higher education is an excellent achievement and definite selling point of the region. It should be

A Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh Region

The Key Issues

embraced. The challenge is ensuring the region is an attractive place for skilled regional alumni to return too. As noted previously, a vision based on high out commuting and the attractive surroundings is not enough. Anecdotal evidence (and there is no formal data on the subject) suggests many who leave the region feel it is not viable to return come due to a lack of career prospects. Sometimes, this view is misinformed, but the emphasis must be on ensuring there is a suitable mass of attractive jobs in the region and promoting them.

At present, a lot of the global in demand skills (tech and big data) are present in the region, but in small numbers and in the form of many small specialised companies. There are few large employers of desirable skilled people, and attracting inward investment in this regard is unlikely. Therefore, the region's young people need to embrace entrepreneurship, alongside the core skills, if they are to succeed in the region.

5.3) The proposition

Lord Young's report strongly emphasises the need to put enterprise at the heart of education. This should be embraced in the region, to counteract the small business structure (a long term characteristic that is unlikely to change) and embrace the opportunities global connectivity has offered in the 21st Century. There are schemes in place which seek to address this (Young Enterprise), but they are largely viewed as extra-curricular activities and not central to education. This ethos should be reevaluated. The significant changes occurring in the secondary education sector in the region represent an opportunity to consider how Fermanagh and Omagh leads the way in putting enterprise at the heart of local education.

Undergraduate placements are becoming a key part of university education. These can often be vital in the long term career outcomes of students. Therefore, it is in the region's best interest to encourage more placements across a range of subjects offered in the region and ensure they are well marketed.

6) Conclusion

This paper has summarised four key issues facing the Fermanagh and Omagh region over the next decade. The likelihood is that these issues have sufficiently broad to have many sub-issues within them, and indeed the myriad of improvements that could be made in the region is likely to be more extensive, as could be said of anywhere.

However, the titles used in this paper were chosen to try and focus the issues where possible, in order to increase the ease of formulating interventions. Although only four have been presented, the issue of (re)connecting with the region's diaspora – whether a long time departed or recent migrants - runs as a consistent across three of the four issues. Thus, it could be considered a fifth issue in its own right.

Similarly, the ongoing decline in the number of full time employment opportunities in the Fermanagh and Omagh region – when NI has shown improvements – is still a concern. It is discussed within section 2, but could be considered a sixth issue in its own right due to the overlap with attracting back diaspora and assisting business development.

Rural deprivation, difficult to measure, is not explicitly addressed in this paper, but it too could be considered an important issue. Indeed, issues such as an ageing population, lack of employment and declining wages are likely to be catalysts in rural deprivation, and as such, efforts to address the former are likely to have positive benefits for the latter.

In conclusion, whilst the four issues cited in this paper are not exhaustive, significant collective efforts, underpinned by a big, bold and different approach should go some way to increasing economic, social and environmental prosperity in the Fermanagh and Omagh region.