



**Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee**

From the Chair
Simon Hoare MP

Rt Hon. Chris Heaton-Harris MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

By email

23 February 2023

Dear Chris,

**Government Response to the report by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on
Investment in Northern Ireland**

Thank you for the Government's response to my Committee's recent report on Investment in Northern Ireland. We were pleased to see that Ministers have in train work to ensure that some of the issues raised in our report, such as on the allocation of levelling up funds, are being dealt with. We will keep a watching brief on the Government's replies to various other conclusions and recommendations, including on skills funding and trade support, and return to them either in writing or at evidence sessions with you and your colleagues in due course.

I wish to raise two recommendations with you here, however. First, at paragraph 38 of our report, we noted that the Government's NDNA package included business-focused commitments, such as "supporting the delivery of the Northern Ireland International Trade plan." We then asked for an update on the delivery of this plan. The Government's response did not address this request. Could you please give us an update on the delivery of that plan?

Secondly, at paragraph 60 of our report, we noted,

"the dissatisfaction towards the apprenticeship levy in Northern Ireland, where businesses do not see an identifiable return on their contributions."

We then said:

"The Government must work with the Executive to ensure that the money which businesses contribute to the apprenticeship levy is ringfenced, so it is used for its intended purpose."

The Government's response did not address this recommendation, either. Could you therefore set out the Government's position on the levy? We acknowledge that responsibility for it is a devolved matter, but given the current position of the institutions and the fact that the levy is ringfenced in other parts of the UK, my colleagues and I would be grateful to hear the Government's policy on it in relation to Northern Ireland. It really was a dominant issue raised with us across business sectors and not just a 'lone voice'.

Simon Hoare MP