



PROGRAMME: NI SME BUSINESS CONFERENCE & EXPO 2026

DATE: Tuesday 17th November 2026 **VENUE:** Canal Court Hotel, Newry
TIME: 8:30am - 2:40pm **COST:** FREE TO ATTEND

- 8:30am** **Registration, Breakfast, Networking & Exhibition Area**
- 9:00am** **Conference Welcome**
MC, Deborah Loughran, Managing Director, King Communication
- 9:05am** **Welcome Address & Conference Overview**
Conor Patterson, President, Newry Chamber
- 9:10am** **Sponsors Welcome**
Cllr Glyn Hanna, Chairperson, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- 9:15am** **The Current Landscape for SMEs in Northern Ireland**
Roger Pollen, Head of FSB Northern Ireland
- 9:30am** **Accessing Emerging Talent**
Karl Webb, Business Engagement & Employability Manager,
William J Clinton Leadership Institute at Queen's University Belfast
- 9:40am** **Presentation: Demystifying AI - Challenges & Opportunities for SMEs**
Tadhg Hickey, Head of AI & Digital Ethics Policy, Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC)
- 10:00am** **Sales & Marketing:**

Presentation: Consumers & AI - Exploring Trust, Fears & Changing Behaviours in the Age of AI
Joe Birch, Senior Analyst, Mintel
- 10:10am** **Panel Q&A**
 - Joe Birch, Senior Analyst, Mintel
 - Sara McCracken, Founder, The PR Club
 - Kieran Swail, Tourism Innovation Specialist, Southern Regional College
 - Neil Cole, Co-Founder, OCCO Coffee
- 10:45am** **Interactive Roundtable Discussion**
- 10:55am** **Slido Feedback Session**



NEWRY
CHAMBER
SINCE 1820



Comhairle Ceantair
**an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin**
Newry, Mourne
and Down
District Council



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST



Ulster
University



Competition & Markets Authority



11:00am	Tea, Coffee, Networking & Exhibition Area
11:25am	Finance & The Economy: Presentation by BCF Lending Gareth Graham, CEO, BCF Lending
11:35am	Panel Q&A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gareth Graham, CEO, BCF Lending • Anna Desmond, Head of Policy, FSB Northern Ireland • Amanda Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, NMDDC • Clare McGee, CEO, AwakeHub
12:10pm	Interactive Roundtable Discussion
12:20pm	Slido Feedback Session
12:25pm	Presentation by the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) Representative of the CMA
12:45pm	Fireside Chat with Representative of the CMA
1:00pm	Lunch, Networking & Exhibition Area
1:50pm	Skills, Recruitment & Innovation: Presentation by Ulster University Economic Policy Centre Gareth Hetherington, Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre
2:00pm	Panel Q&A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gareth Hetherington, Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre • Tracy Rice, Assistant Director of Business & Economic Engagement, Southern Regional College • Michelle McKeivitt, Company Secretary, McGuinness Mechanical Engineering • Patrick Cunningham, Contracts Director, Water Solutions Ireland
2:25pm	Interactive Roundtable Discussion
2:35pm	Slido Feedback Session
2:40pm	Depart



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