

Invest NI appoints seven new board members as CEO hunt continues

Invest NI have appointed seven new board members as the search for a new chief executive continues.

Dominic Darby, Ciaran Mulgrew, Dawn McLaughlin, Patrick O’Gorman, Julie-Ann O’Hare, Scott Ritchie, and Melanie Dawson took up their three-year roles on 30th June.

In a statement, the investment agency said the new board members bring a “broad range of skills and knowledge to the role”, for which they will be paid £12,768 a year.

They will replace outgoing board members Deborah Lange, Mark Nodder, Dr Mark Sweeney, Padraig Canavan, and Judith Totten, who were given a two-month extension of their term on the board to accommodate the search process. It is not clear if any other board members will be stepping down.

“Invest NI plays a crucial role in helping to transform Northern Ireland into a globally competitive economy working for everyone and I welcome these new appointments to the Board,” Economy Minister Gordon Lyons said. “The wealth of knowledge, skills and experience that I know they will bring will be invaluable as Invest NI continues to work to attract foreign investment and support our local businesses to create jobs, innovate and grow their exports through my Department’s vision to deliver a decade of innovation through the 10X Economy.

“I would like to wish them every success in their work supporting the Invest NI Chair and Chief Executive.”

Rose Mary Stalker is the current chair of the Invest NI board

but the agency remains without a chief executive following the resignation of Kevin Holland in 2021 after two years at the helm.

The new board members take up their position at a time when the agency has paused new offers of finance to companies due to a directive from the Department for the Economy as it struggles with a tightening budget up until 2025. Although no official figures are yet available, anecdotal evidence suggests the move has stymied the flow of inward investment to Northern Ireland.

In terms of experience, the new board members have a broad background of experience.

Dominic Darby has over 20 years of experience in food retailing and manufacturing both in GB and Northern Ireland. His previous roles include Head of Food Technology and Head of Innovation at Marks and Spencer in London and at Finnebrogue in Northern Ireland. In his current role as owner of Bread & Butter Consulting, Dominic works with a range of SME and FMCG food business across NI, ROI and GB markets to support them in developing innovation and business growth strategies.

Ciaran Mulgrew has been Managing Director and owner operator of Niche Drinks Co. Ltd. For the past 25 years, an alcoholic drinks manufacturer and marketer based on Derry's Waterside. He led a management buyout of St. Brendan's Irish Cream Liqueur Co. Ltd from Kerry Group plc in 2006 to create Niche and in 2021 completed the sale of the business to MGP Luxco, a U.S. based plc.

Dawn McLaughlin is a Fellow of Chartered Accountants Ireland having trained and qualified with PwC. In 2005 she established Dawn McLaughlin & Co, a practice located in the North West City Region. For the past 37 years Dawn has specialised in advising start-up companies and small to medium size enterprises throughout the UK and Ireland.

Patrick O’Gorman has 20 years of experience in real estate development and investment, working with institutional and private investors from many different countries across the world. Having started his career in Northern Ireland and then London, Patrick qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 2005. He then relocated to Warsaw, Poland to become the Head of Capital Markets at CBRE for Central & Eastern Europe. Since 2013, Patrick has been an owner of Bywater Properties investing and developing in real estate projects across the UK.

Julie-Ann O’Hare has worked for 28 years in the Northern Ireland corporate banking sector. Her career at Bank of Ireland spanned a period of strong economic growth as well as one of significant downturn in the economy during the global financial crisis. In 2017, Julie-Ann moved to private industry working with the UK and Ireland’s largest diagnostic company, Randox Laboratories Limited.

Scott Ritchie has extensive experience in Business Start Up and high growth Scale Up companies having worked in several executive positions in the Global Telecoms & IT sectors. He founded BSO Network Solutions in London during the credit crunch of 2008 specialising in low latency trading infrastructure and helped to develop High Frequency Trading Platforms for a number of banks trading global capital & commodities markets. He continues to have an interest and investments in the burgeoning FinTech sector. Having returned to Northern Ireland after 20 years working overseas, Scott invested in the local telecoms market to develop a UK wide telecoms company Total Mobile, which he exited in 2018.

Melanie Dawson began her career in construction in 2004, later choosing to specialise in BIM (building information modelling), digital construction and transformation for the last 10 years. Melanie worked for a number of leading construction and consulting firms operating across Northern Ireland, GB and Ireland before choosing to establish her own digital construction consultancy business in August 2020,

Origin7 Ltd. Melanie is a Fellow of the Institute of Civil Engineers and also works with the Strategic Investment Board for Northern Ireland as an associate advisor, where she is remunerated with £336 a day and is a non-executive board member of BuildData Group who provide construction software and consulting.