

Budget 2006

**What the Budget
means for
Northern Ireland**

March 2006



HM TREASURY

Northern Ireland

Budget 2006



A strong and strengthening economy: Investing in Britain's future

The Government's economic objective is to build a strong economy and a fair society, where there is opportunity and security for all. The Budget sets out how the Government is working to achieve this goal, building on a platform of stability and sustained growth, to ensure the UK can continue to succeed in the global economy. This leaflet outlines what the Budget means for Northern Ireland.

Maintaining a stable economy

In 2005 the world economy was affected by the sustained rise in global oil prices. While many emerging markets continued to grow strongly, growth was slower in some advanced economies, including the major European countries to which the UK exports. The Government's economic reforms have helped the UK to maintain macroeconomic stability and continue to grow through this challenging period. The Budget projections show that:

- **the economy is expected to grow** by 2 to 2 ½ per cent in 2006, picking up to 2 ¾ - 3 ¼ per cent in 2007 and 2008, as forecast in the Pre-Budget Report;
- **inflation is set to remain low and stable;** and
- **the public finances remain sound** and the Government is meeting its fiscal rules. Borrowing is forecast to be £37 billion in 2005-06 and debt is lower than in the US, Japan, Italy, France and Germany.

Devolving decision making

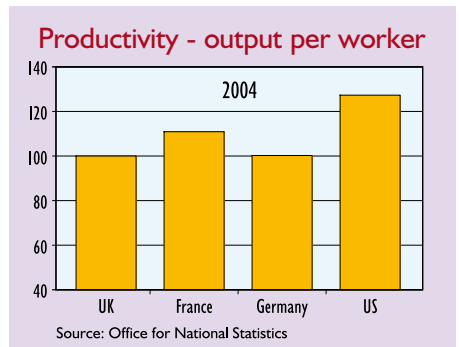
The Government believes that the best way to improve the productivity of the countries and regions of the UK and to overcome regional disparities in economic performance is to allow each country and region the freedom and flexibility to exploit local sources of growth.

The Government is promoting economic growth, full employment and prosperity for all the people of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland departments are working with their business economic partner bodies to encourage economic development in Northern Ireland, supporting employment, entrepreneurship, innovation, skills and regeneration. The Government has published its Economic Vision paper, focusing particularly on Northern Ireland's private sector.

Productivity and enterprise in a flexible economy

The UK has high employment levels but the amount of output produced per worker – productivity – has historically been lower than in other major economies. The UK's relative performance has been improving in recent years, with productivity now the same as Germany and moving closer to France.

A flexible, enterprising and high-skilled economy with risk-based regulation, will help deliver faster productivity growth and ensure the UK is well-placed to prosper in the global economy. The Government recognises there are significant regional differences in productivity. In 2004, Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in Northern Ireland was 20 per cent below the UK average. Budget announcements include:



- **a package of measures to enhance the UK's position as a leading location for inward investment;**
- **extending the small and medium-sized enterprise research and development tax credit for firms with between 250 and 500 employees.** This will build on £116 million of research and development

investment already carried out by firms in Northern Ireland;

- **advancing the ten year Science and Innovation Framework**, including further measures to create a world class environment for health research, and to enhance the supply of skilled scientists;
- **measures to improve the efficiency of the property investment market** through the introduction of Real Estate Investment Trusts; and
- **further plans to reduce the regulatory burden on business**, including new commitments to reduce the time that businesses spend filling in tax forms and dealing with tax audits and inspections.

Employment opportunity for all

The Government's long-term goal is employment opportunity for all. It aims to promote a dynamic and flexible labour market in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Employment in Northern Ireland has risen by 11.3 per cent between 1997 and 2003 and unemployment has fallen by 44.8 per cent.

The Government has introduced reforms to improve work incentives and provide support for those on low incomes. Introduced in April 2003, the Working Tax

Credit helps to make work pay for people on low incomes. The adult rate of the Minimum Wage will rise to £5.35 from October 2006, affecting 20,000 people in Northern Ireland.



Building a fairer society

The Government's aim is to build a fairer society in which everyone can contribute to and share in rising national prosperity. A flexible and dynamic economy must go hand-in-hand with a fair society so that everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential. The Government is committed to tackling child and pensioner poverty, providing support for families with children and ensuring security for all in old age. It is also creating a modern and fair tax system which raises sufficient revenue for public services and ensures that everyone pays their fair share of tax.

The Child Tax Credit was introduced in April 2003 to support families with children, help to tackle child poverty, and ensure continuity of income for people moving into work. By December 2005, around 140,400 families in Northern Ireland were benefiting from the Tax Credit system. The Pension Credit, introduced in October 2003, provides extra help for low and modest income pensioners and rewards those who have saved for retirement.

Budget 2006 announces further steps to promote a fairer society:

- **a commitment to increase the child element of the Child Tax Credit at least in line with average earnings to the end of the Parliament;**
- **further payments into Child Trust Fund accounts at age 7** of £250 for all children, with £500 for children from lower-income families, affecting 20,000 children every year in Northern Ireland;
- **an increase in the starting threshold for stamp duty on property to £125,000** to help first-time buyers;
- **an increase in the inheritance tax threshold to £312,000 in 2008-09 and £325,000 in 2009-10;**
- **taking forward the ten year strategy for Childcare**, providing further help for working parents with their childcare costs; and
- **further reforms to modernise the tax system**, and a number of measures to clamp down on **tax fraud and avoidance**.

High quality public services

The Government is determined to secure value for money for the taxpayer and has set out plans for public service efficiency savings of over £21 billion by 2007-08, including through a reduction of more than 80,000 civil service posts. This will increase resources for front-line services. The Budget announces:

- **an additional £26 million for Northern Ireland departments** as a consequence of Budget spending measures; and
- **further funding to support the most talented athletes** to prepare for the 2012 Olympics.

The Budget also sets out plans for the Government's second Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007. This will include a national debate on the challenges and priorities for the UK's public services over the coming decade.

Protecting the environment

The Government believes that economic prosperity must be achieved while protecting the environment to ensure a better quality of life for current and future generations. In particular the Government is committed to playing a leading role in tackling the global challenge of climate change. It is also committed to improving the local environment in the UK's towns, cities and rural areas and to promoting an efficient and environmentally sustainable transport system. Budget 2006 announces:

- the Climate Change Levy for natural gas has been extended for a further five years in Northern Ireland to encourage the development of the gas market and the use of natural gas as a substitute for other less environmentally friendly fuels;
- **measures to encourage energy efficiency in the business sector including an increase in line with inflation of the climate change levy, deferred to April 2007;**
- **reforms to vehicle excise duty** to introduce a new zero rate for the small number of cars with the very lowest carbon emissions and a new top band for the most polluting new cars;

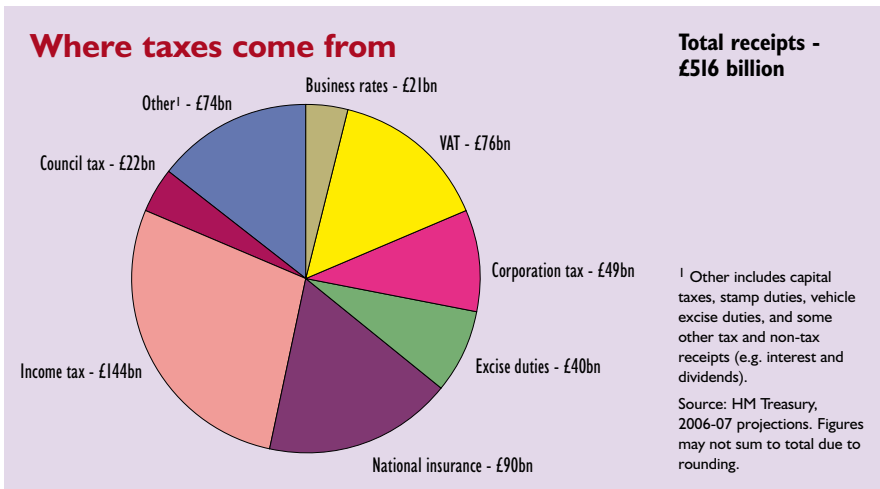
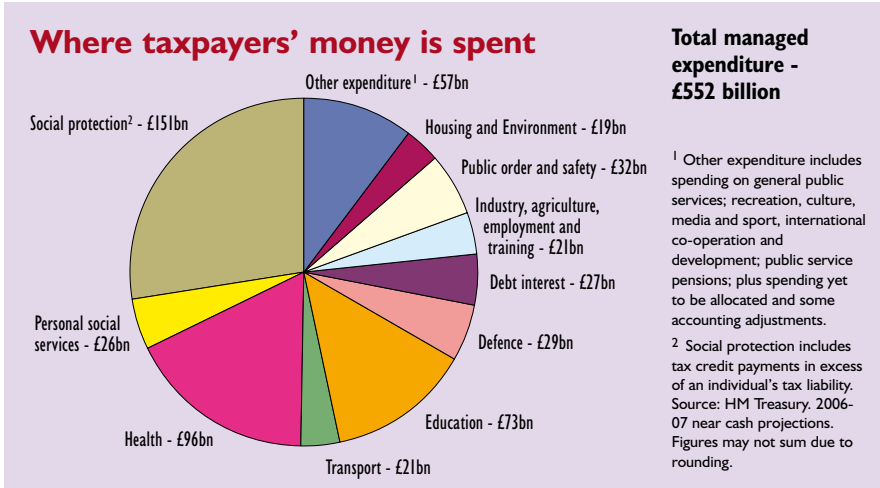
- **an increase in line with inflation of fuel duty rates from 1 September 2006; and**
- **a freeze in the aggregates levy and air passenger duty.**

Household income

- A single earner family on half male average earnings - £15,800 - and with two children will be £3,950 a year better off compared to under the 1997-98 tax and benefit system.
- As a result of personal tax and benefit measures introduced since 1997, by October 2006, households in Northern Ireland will be, on average, £1,250 a year better off in real terms.

Where taxpayers' money is spent

Total public spending is expected to be around £552 billion for the coming year, around £9,200 for every man, woman and child in the UK. It is set to rise to £583 billion in 2007-08 and projected to rise to £610 billion in 2008-09.



To order further copies of this leaflet or an alternative format, please telephone:

020 7270 4558

For more information on Budget 2006 visit the Treasury's website at:

hm-treasury.gov.uk