

Ministers face crunch talks online

THREE Stormont executive ministers and the new head of Invest NI are putting themselves up for live internet discussions from next week with the north's business community on dealing with the recession.

They will use the Institute of Director's (IoD) web-based initiative NlCrunchtalk.com in hour-long sessions to answer questions about how their policies are benefiting the economy.

Employment minister Sir Reg Empey is first up next Thursday followed by Sammy Wilson, minister for the environment, on May 7; Conor Murphy, minister for regional development, on May 19; and Alistair Hamilton, chief executive of Invest NI, on June 26.

"Neither the ministers nor Alistair Hamilton have previously used this interactive technology to engage with



■ INTERACTING: From left, Sir Reg Empey, Alistair Hamilton, Conor Murphy and Sammy Wilson, who will be discussing government policies and the recession live online

business people," IoD Northern Ireland chairwoman Joanne Stuart said.

"The Nlcrunchtalk website is proving a popular on-line forum for busy people to debate and comment on local issues, including the work of the executive and government agencies in helping companies cope with the ef-

fects of this downturn.

"Following the success our initial on-line discussion with social development minister Margaret Ritchie, other ministers has expressed an interest in this form of direct engagement with the business audience and we're delighted to be able to host

the discussions.

"It means directors and others can raise what they see as the key issues for their organisations directly with those responsible for important policy areas and get answers on the spot."

Nlcrunchtalk.com was launched last year as an on-line forum for business people, providing news on economic measures, updates on assembly and executive business and enabling registered members to debate the problems associated with the downturn and the credit crunch.

"We want other ministers to take part and are currently talking to their departments about appropriate dates. The response from the executive so far has been very supportive and I believe ministers see this as an innovative and useful example of democracy in action," Ms Stuart said.

Crunch-busting online sessions

THREE Executive ministers and the new head of Invest NI are to become the latest public figures to take part in live online discussions with the local business community about dealing with the recession.

The group including Sir Reg Empey and Invest NI chief Alistair Hamilton have agreed to participate in the Institute of Director's web-based initiative - NICrunchtalk.com - for hour-long sessions to answer questions on how their policies are benefiting the economy.

Employment Minister Sir Reg will be first up on April 30, followed by Environment Minister Sammy Wilson on May 7. Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy will take questions on May 19 and Mr Hamilton will be online on June 26.

The site was launched as a forum for business people, providing news on economic measures, updates on business issues and enabling registered members to debate the problems.