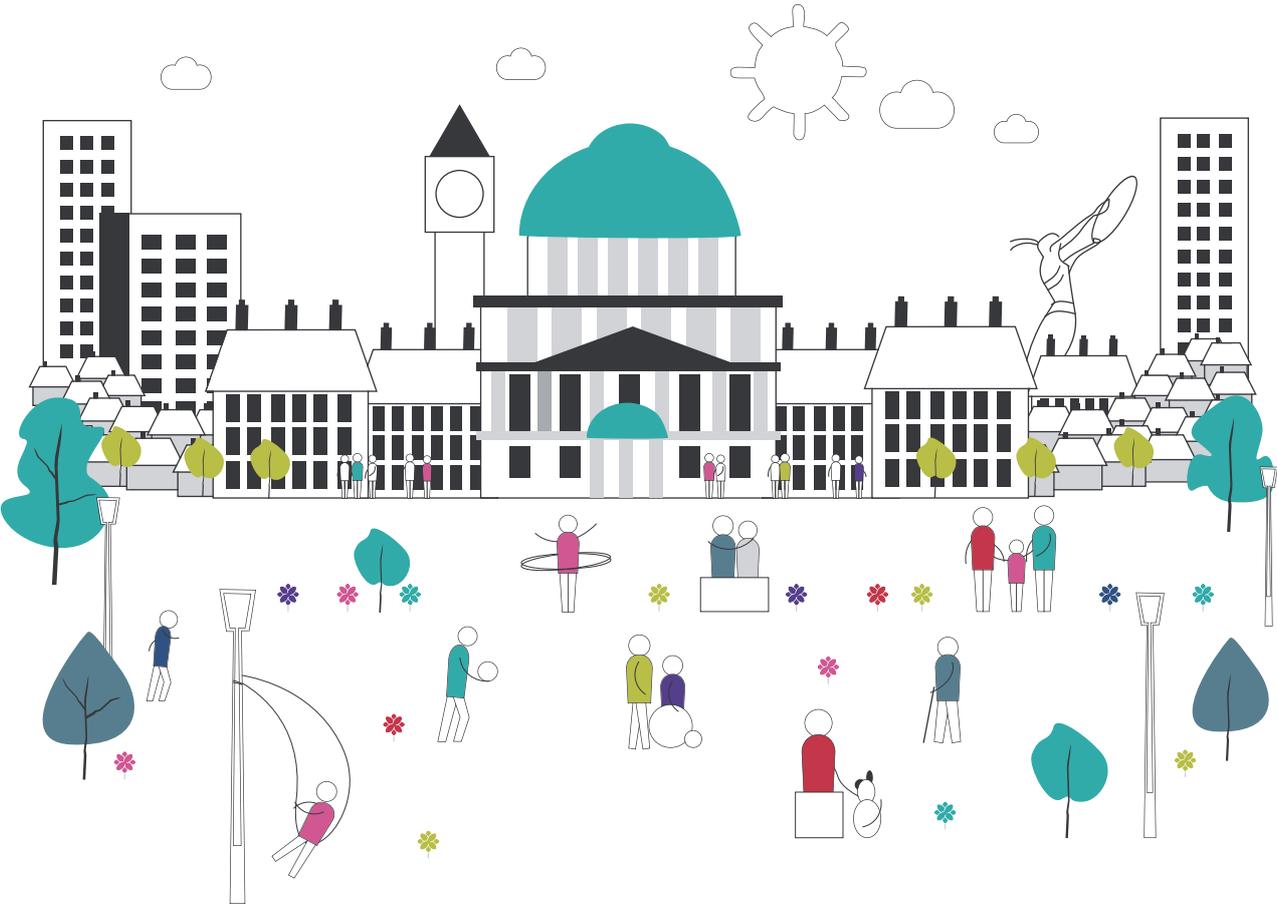


Belfast a Learning City

A Learning Charter for Belfast



Putting people at the heart of learning

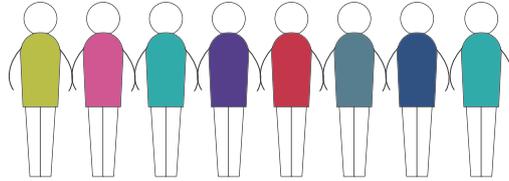


**Making life better,
together**
Belfast Strategic Partnership

Focusing on Life Inequalities



Belfast a Learning City

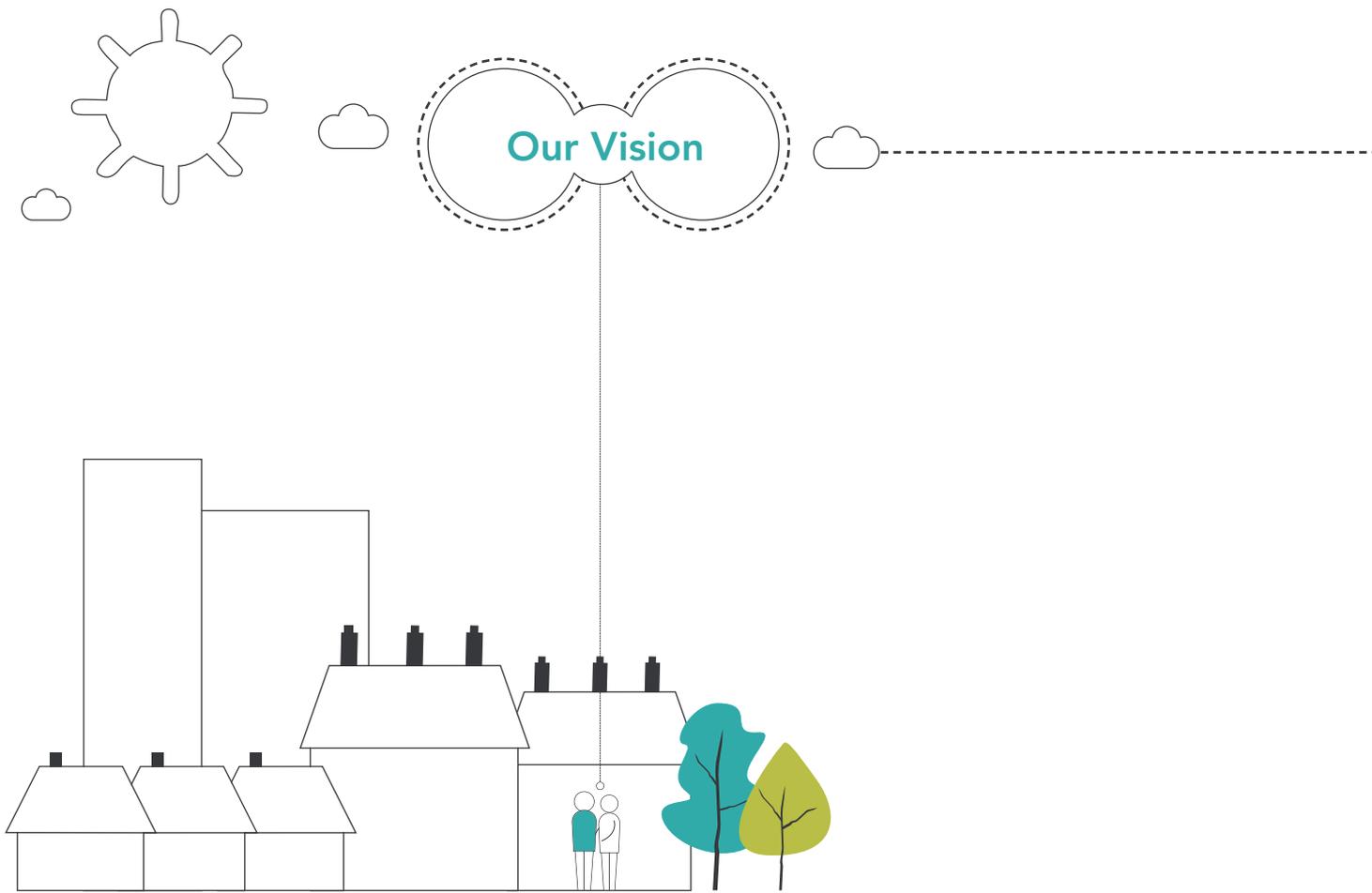


A Learning Charter for Belfast
Putting people at the heart of learning



**Making life better,
together**
Belfast Strategic Partnership

Focusing on Life Inequalities



Belfast is a city where learning is valued in all its forms and promoted as a force for improved personal, social, civic and economic change in the city.

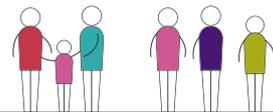
All citizens of Belfast have equal access to Lifelong Learning opportunities, creating conditions for a better quality of life for everyone in the city.



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"...all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective."



Foreword by Belfast Strategic Partnership Co-Chairs

As Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) Co-Chairs we are delighted to launch this strategy document 'Belfast a Learning City, produced by the BSP's Lifelong Learning Thematic Group.

We believe Lifelong Learning plays a powerful role in creating a more equal, just and inclusive society and we endorse the vision of Belfast as a Learning City for all citizens.

Learning is much more than a route to employment, and it is significant that this strategy is built on the EU definition of learning which is:

"...all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective."

Lifelong Learning can transform cities and citizens in many ways. Cities with a strong learning imperative have proven to be more successful in economic, social and cultural terms. Learning helps harness and foster a stronger sense of belonging for citizens in Belfast, and builds community cohesion. It fosters ownership and loyalty to the city itself.

We endorse the vision of Belfast as a Learning City for citizens of all ages and from all social and cultural backgrounds. We wish to raise the aspirations of citizens and in particular those of our citizens who face multiple barriers in accessing learning, whether these are caused by poor health, lack of confidence, childcare access, poor support networks, or through poverty, racism, prejudice and discrimination. Lifelong Learning needs to be tailored to the needs of all.

In raising aspirations, by removing barriers and increasing opportunities for learning we will also build and strengthen resilience within the city, a key goal across all BSP work.

We welcome the development of the Learning Charter which underpins the aspirations and actions needed to develop Belfast as a Learning City.

We will ask our partners in BSP to sign up to this Charter and thereby commit to a set of guiding principles and actions which will establish Belfast as a city with a strong and vibrant culture of learning.

We will build on the partnerships that exist across the city, and we will harness our collective knowledge, experience, skills, creativity and resources to achieve our vision.

Everyone will have a part to play.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eddie Rooney'.

Dr Eddie Rooney

Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Agency
Co-Chair, Belfast Strategic Partnership



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Wylie'.

Suzanne Wylie

Chief Executive Officer
Belfast City Council
Co-Chair, Belfast Strategic Partnership



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael McBride'.

Dr Michael McBride

Chief Executive Officer
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Co-Chair, Belfast Strategic Partnership

Introduction

Lifelong Learning Thematic Group

It is my pleasure on behalf of the Belfast Strategic Partnership's (BSP's) Lifelong Learning Thematic Group to introduce 'Belfast a Learning City' in which we set out our vision of Belfast where learning is used as a positive force to expand and enhance life chances for all citizens of all ages in Belfast.

We believe that Belfast already has the key elements to become a centre of learning excellence and this strategy and BSP have a crucial role to play in creating the conditions needed to make this a reality.

We recognise the importance of addressing economic disadvantage through learning developments both in accessing the labour market and as a mechanism for progression at the workplace, but equally we champion learning as a tool for life to increase citizens confidence, resilience and sense of belonging, and to strengthen community cohesion across the city. A BSP 'Have Your Say Belfast' 2012 survey indicated that 23% of respondents identified the need to have greater levels of confidence in order to help them feel better about themselves.

There are significant challenges to the implementation of this strategy, we know that there are many good examples of quality learning opportunities across the city and we know that a significant proportion of the Belfast population is not reaping the rewards of what Belfast's learning environment has to offer; there are deep and persistent inequalities in the city and many areas have experienced high levels of poverty and stubborn deprivation with little or no change over the last number of decades.

From work carried out by the Lifelong Learning Thematic Group and other BSP thematic areas, we also know that:

- There is a commitment by central government to Lifelong Learning across seven government departments and 20 separate strategies, all contained in the current Programme for Government but no single focus to harness those efforts and align them to Lifelong Learning objectives and targets for the city.
- There is a wide range of programmes and initiatives in operation across Belfast but no shared outcomes. Also, inconsistencies in the collection of monitoring information make it impossible to conclusively map Lifelong Learning provision, uptake of services and therefore to measure collective impact across the city.
- Almost a fifth of Belfast residents have no qualifications and projections indicate that 50% of future jobs will require degree level or higher qualifications, yet many graduates are currently under-employed in low level jobs. This skills mismatch needs to be addressed for Belfast both to remain a key economic driver for the region and to reduce inequality across the city.

Based on our work and research, we believe that we can better address the needs of Belfast citizens and deliver better outcomes for the city through a targeted, focused and collaborative approach to Lifelong Learning.

A key demonstration of this approach will be the establishment of the Learning Charter for Belfast, which will be a working testament to planning agreed approaches across the city involving all key stakeholders.

We also call for a new strategic alliance to be formed to agree shared outcomes and establish a 'Belfast Works' approach as a key example of how the Learning Charter can work in practice. This new approach will entail a targeted citywide employability and personal support programme for those groups experiencing multiple barriers in accessing the labour market.

We believe this new strategic and joined up approach will positively impact upon the health inequalities that are being experienced by a significant proportion of the Belfast population.

'Belfast a Learning City' can shape a positive proactive agenda for change in tackling inequality across the city and can act as a catalyst across central government lines and demonstrably shine as an example of strategic collaborative planning for the region and wider afield.

We encourage you all to help shape 'Belfast a Learning City' and sign up to the Learning Charter. Share this with your colleagues, friends and other organisations, who can help build a better future for Belfast. Your active support is invaluable.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Thematic Group members for their dedication and commitment to the work of the Lifelong Learning strand of the Belfast Strategic Partnership and look forward to your continued involvement.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Power". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Danny Power

Chairperson
Belfast Strategic Partnership
Lifelong Learning Thematic Group

Lifelong Learning Thematic Group

Over a two year period we have identified four key areas of work as our focus to ensuring we realise the vision of 'Belfast a Learning City'.

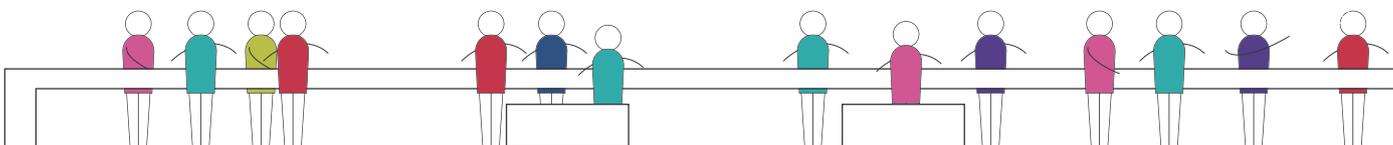
key areas of work

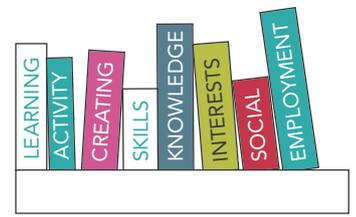
To develop a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Learning in Belfast with underpinning values, ethics and principles.

To use the Strategic Framework to develop the Learning Charter for Belfast, which sets out the objectives and related actions needed to establish Belfast as a Learning City.

To develop 'Belfast Works' as a key demonstration of how the Learning Charter can work in practice - a targeted citywide employability and personal support programme for those groups experiencing multiple barriers in accessing the labour market.

To develop a Communications Plan with clear, consistent and positive messages, which will support and promote Belfast as a Learning City and highlight the importance of Lifelong Learning for all citizens of Belfast.





A Strategic Framework for Lifelong Learning in Belfast

We have developed a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Learning in Belfast based on the EU definition of Lifelong Learning which is



This EU definition also provides us with the following values, ethics and principles that underpin the Strategic Framework:

- Valuing all forms of learning
- Creating a learning culture
- Facilitating access to learning opportunities
- Acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications
- Striving for excellence
- Partnership working
- Insight into the demand for learning
- Adequate resourcing.

"...all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective."



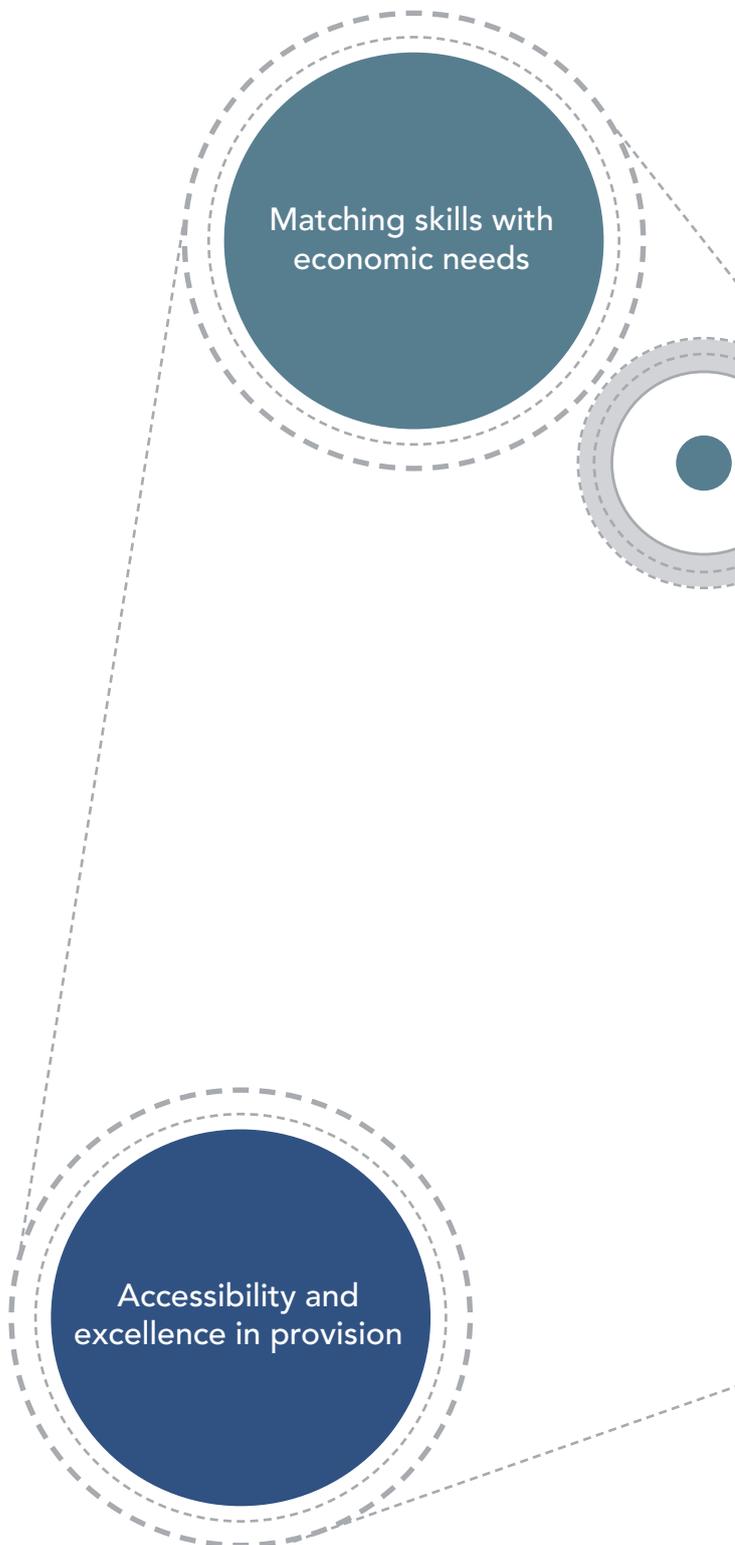
Strategic Objectives

- 1 To create a learning culture for the city of Belfast that recognises and values all forms of learning
- 2 To develop an inclusive, innovative and strategic approach to Lifelong Learning through partnership working, which maximises the reach and impact of all available resources
- 3 To promote collaborative working between key stakeholders to ensure equality of access to Lifelong Learning opportunities and to inform excellence in the design and development of Lifelong Learning provision
- 4 To realign current and future skills provision with Northern Ireland's economic needs.

These objectives form the pillars of the Learning Charter, set out below, and are the key drivers for 'Belfast a Learning City'.

Changing the way we work together

Our partners in BSP have endorsed 'Belfast a Learning City' and have committed to its vision and guiding principles. All partners are needed to make the vision a reality, both individually through organisational activities, and collectively through enhanced cooperation and collaboration, **"...changing the way we work together"** as outlined in the BSP mission. A demonstration of this commitment will be signing up to the Learning Charter for Belfast.



Matching skills with economic needs

Accessibility and excellence in provision



The Learning Charter for Belfast

This Learning Charter has been drawn up to ensure that all organisations involved in delivering Lifelong Learning across the city can sign up to a set of guiding principles and related actions to establish Belfast as a Learning City.

Through collaboration, all organisations in the city which provide opportunities for learning can maximise the investment they make and promote Belfast as a Learning City for all.

The Learning Charter sets out the basis for this collaboration, with a set of key principles and related actions which underpin a learning culture, and we ask organisations to pledge their commitment to the key principles and related actions set out below.

The Learning Charter will provide an opportunity to create a binding agreement for key partners and providers across Belfast, with clear principles for provision, engagement, access, and commitment to:

Creating clear pathways for entry and progression routes for learners

Creating easier access for learners at all levels and across all ages

Promoting best practice in Lifelong Learning, fostering connectivity, debate and knowledge sharing

Influencing policy and practice

Addressing economic disadvantage through advocating for the Living Wage and creation of real jobs.

We are committed to signing up to the following guiding principles and related actions.

1 Creating a learning culture for the city of Belfast that recognises and values all forms of learning

- Ensuring learning is for all citizens of all age groups, with equality of access and availability across the city
- Creating and adopting a common brand and messaging around learning in the city
- Recognising and promoting all forms of learning within our organisations
- Developing and supporting local learning ambassadors
- Disseminating information and good practice case studies to increase effective learning
- Developing a set of shared frameworks on pathways to learning
- Promoting resilience through Lifelong Learning.

2 Developing an inclusive, innovative and strategic approach to Lifelong Learning through partnership working which maximises the reach and impact of all available resources

- Developing and participating in a Belfast Learning City Forum which values mutual respect and meaningful collaboration
- Developing and updating website information on Lifelong Learning opportunities in Belfast
- Using available research and highlighting any gaps
- Promoting where technology can enhance Lifelong Learning
- Sharing research and other evidence in a central e-library for Belfast.

3 Promoting collaborative working between key stakeholders that ensures equality of access to Lifelong Learning opportunities and informs excellence in the design and development of Lifelong Learning provision

- Identifying, developing and working towards shared quality standards
- Increasing diversity among learners, promoting inclusion
- Ensuring that support for transition stages for learners is built into learning provision
- Creating listening and reflection loops with learners to shape and enhance our services
- Engaging with learners to increase and refine responses to their needs
- Promoting best practice in Lifelong Learning
- Fostering connectivity, debate and knowledge sharing.

4 Realigning current and future skills with Northern Ireland's economic needs

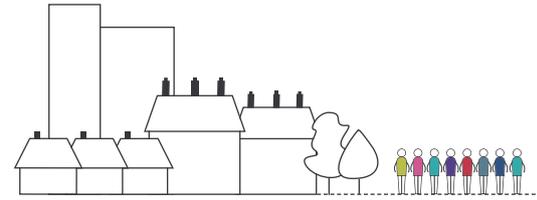
- Contributing effectively to the economic and social success of the city
- Listening to employers on their needs for recruitment and in work support
- Addressing the needs of those with no or low skills or qualifications
- Assisting the under-employed to achieve their potential
- Sharing targets and outcomes
- Connecting with and influencing government and the private sector on the specific needs of Belfast
- Promoting continued workplace learning and upskilling
- Connecting with and influencing educators on current and future Northern Ireland economic needs
- Advocating for the Living Wage and the creation of real jobs.

Signed	Organisation/ On behalf of	Date
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I/We endorse and commit to the above and herewith will undertake to actively participate in helping to make Belfast a Learning City for all.



Belfast Works – a Key Demonstration of the Learning Charter in Practice



We aim to develop a new and innovative approach to addressing the employability and skills needs of those groups experiencing multiple barriers in accessing the labour market in Belfast, within a supportive non-threatening context.

The Lifelong Learning Thematic Group considered the Glasgow Works model as a potential model for application in Belfast. The group investigated the development of Glasgow Works to gain an overview and an analysis of its strategic and operational structures and key lessons for possible application in Belfast.

The key learning summary from Glasgow Works highlighted:

- A new step change approach to funding, coordinating and prioritising is essential
- This approach is not just about employment but pathways for those in priority groups (e.g. Black and Minority Ethnic groups, over 50s, young people, long-term unemployed)
- An emphasis on Lifelong Learning, skills and personal circumstances with a more flexible, coordinated and person centred approach
- City targets are essential along with subdivision to area targets and specific group targets
- Robust central monitoring and tracking
- Coordination, buy-in and collaboration across sectors and agencies and from strategic to local delivery
- A key concentration on health
- A specific concentration on engagement with employers.

There will be four distinct elements:

- Direct employment
- Placements provided
- A continuum of distinct entry points and progression routes
- Social and personal support programmes / interventions.

We aim to secure commitment for:

- Belfast City Council to lead on an Integrated Economic Strategy, and an Employability and Skills Strategy for Belfast, and to incorporate the Belfast Works component within these strategies
- BSP partners to provide placements and employment opportunities for the specific target groups in the Belfast Works initiative
- Ensuring that target groups are involved in developing the Belfast Works initiative in Belfast
- A new partnership between health and employability services.

Four Distinct Elements

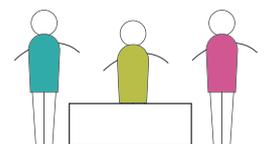
Direct
employment

Placements
provided

A continuum
of distinct entry
points and
progression
routes

Social and
personal support
programmes /
interventions

"My teacher was like a mentor to me. She gave me confidence to do something different and taught me the importance of not limiting my aspirations, no matter where you come from."



A Communications Plan

We aim to develop a Communications Plan with clear, consistent and positive messages, which will support and promote 'Belfast a Learning City' and highlight the importance of Lifelong Learning for all citizens of Belfast.

The plan will support us to:

- Raise awareness of 'Belfast a Learning City' and the Learning Charter with all stakeholder groups
- Communicate and promote positive coverage of Lifelong Learning information on a regular basis
- Communicate and promote Lifelong Learning developments to the Northern Ireland Assembly and all relevant Departments.

Key messages for Lifelong Learning:

Addressing life inequalities: the importance of ensuring access to Lifelong Learning opportunities for all citizens of Belfast and at all life stages. The need for BSP to act as a champion for addressing barriers and to lobby for change.

Economic: the prospects for the economic future of Belfast are at a crucial juncture. Without the much-needed investment and crucial work carried out by Lifelong Learning, another generation could be lost in Belfast, and by implication to Northern Ireland. This would also result in a huge impact on the wider Belfast and Northern Ireland economies, which can ill-afford to let an area of this size and population fail economically.

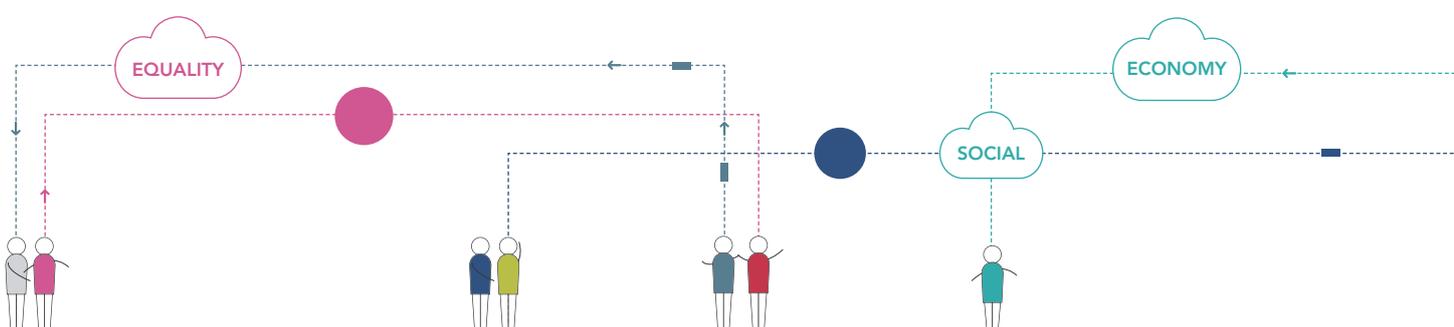
Long-term dividends from investment: relatively small investment now will result in considerable savings to the public purse in the medium to long-term. We emphasise the 'value for money' argument and the economic imperative to do things differently, particularly in relation to skills development.

Social Inclusion: Belfast bore a heavy burden of violence and social and economic deprivation in the Troubles. Legacies of economic disadvantage, social exclusion and marginalised groups and communities need to be addressed.

Increase Emotional Resilience and improve quality of life: the importance of understanding and valuing learning which provides tools for life, supports personal growth, self confidence, self-esteem and strengthens personal and social support networks. Emotional Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises that may have occurred in the past, present or into the future.

Programme for Government: many of the priorities laid out in the Northern Ireland Assembly's Programme for Government can be addressed through 'Belfast a Learning City' and the Learning Charter.

A tool for social change: the transformative power of Lifelong Learning for individual citizens and communities cannot be overestimated. It will also promote active and inclusive citizenship.



Research

In order to add to what we know about Lifelong Learning in Belfast, we will need to take forward the following areas of research:

Ongoing work in identifying the key gaps and needs in Lifelong Learning, and mechanisms for monitoring progress, in areas such as:

- The barriers and multiple barriers experienced by those groups/communities with a poor uptake of Lifelong Learning opportunities
- Best practice examples of overcoming these barriers
- The current and future work 'lean' for skills and employment needs in Belfast
- The current and future support needs of those experiencing multiple barriers in accessing the labour market in Belfast.

We will work with a wide range of government departments who have a portfolio for Lifelong Learning. We will also work with local community based providers to ensure provision is appropriate to the needs of our target groups, and to lobby for resources and support for community based provision.

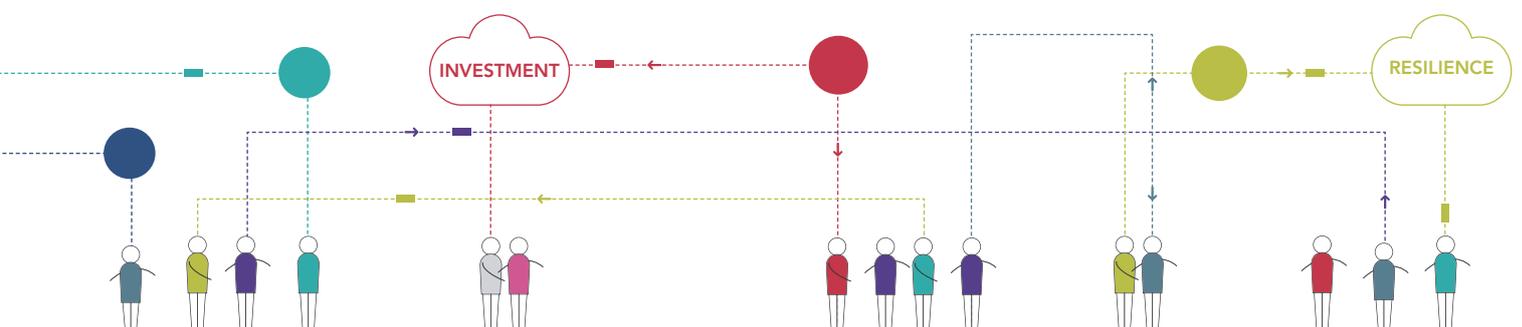
"Taking part is helping me fight my depression."

Making a Difference

We will know we are making a difference by measuring the following improvements:

- More people feeling that they are treated with respect and dignity in education, employment, skills and personal development environments
- Increased uptake and retention rates for targeted initiatives, with more visible access and progression services
- Increased feelings of a locus of control in learning environments by more disadvantaged and marginalised groups
- A reduction in the current levels of worklessness among specific target groups in Belfast
- Increased feelings of belonging for citizens within local communities and in Belfast as a city
- Increased Emotional Resilience for citizens of Belfast.

"I have complex physical and mental health problems but since I joined the project I've been able to look outside myself, help others, be creative and have a better social life!"



Leadership and Governance

Leadership and governance arrangements for 'Belfast a Learning City' will be provided by Belfast Strategic Partnership.

The Lifelong Learning Thematic Group will coordinate related actions against specific timescales with agreed resources.

Its members are drawn from the following organisations:

- Ashton Community Trust
- Belfast City Council
- Belfast Education and Library Board
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Department for Employment and Learning
- Department for Social Development
- Gems NI
- Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership
- North Belfast Partnership Board
- Queen's University Belfast
- The Frank Gillen Centre

The Belfast Health Development Unit provides support to the Lifelong Learning Thematic Group through a Lead Officer and additional support as needed.

The membership of the Lifelong Learning Thematic Group is reviewed on an annual basis, in line with the Terms of Reference for the group.

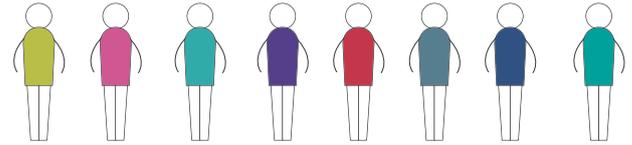


"After I retired I took up several classes, which helped my personal development. Thanks to computer classes I'm one up on my grandchildren when it comes to computers!"

Links with Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) Thematic Areas and Cross-Cutting Themes

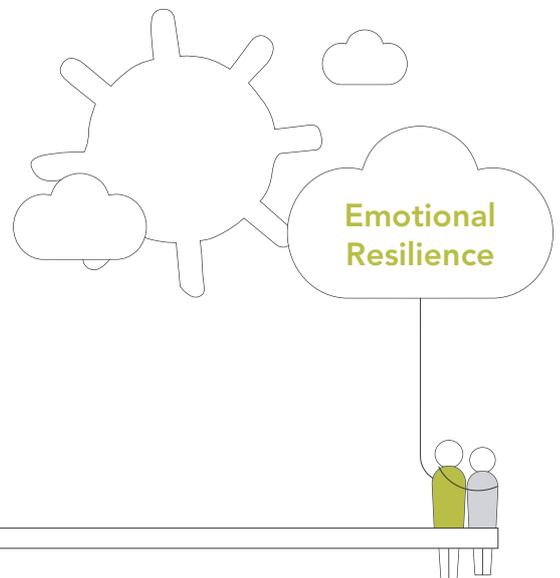
The (BSP) has identified Emotional Resilience as the thread that connects all of its areas of work. Emotional Resilience is defined as an ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. To support this approach we have identified how 'Belfast a Learning City' supports and enhances Emotional Resilience, and how it links with other BSP areas of work:

- 'Belfast a Learning City' promotes the importance of learning as a tool for life and highlights how learning can be used to improve the quality of life for marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups in Belfast thus supporting the BSP Emotional Resilience Strategy.
- 'Belfast a Learning City' promotes a person centred approach to learning and this will take into account individual and family support needs to ensure maximum engagement in learning situations. Elements of Belfast Works will include building confidence and self-esteem. This approach supports the BSP Emotional Resilience Strategy.
- 'Belfast a Learning City' puts people at the heart of learning and sets out to create accessible, welcoming, respectful and supportive learning environments. This approach will support the BSP Emotional Resilience Strategy by increasing learners' sense of ownership, responsibility, enjoyment and sense of control in their learning process.
- 'Belfast a Learning City' is Age-friendly and for all life stages; it will link with the Age – friendly Belfast Plan to ensure we work to meet the needs of older people as a specific target group.



- 'Belfast a Learning City' promotes the need for more opportunities for disadvantaged marginalised groups to participate in Lifelong Learning opportunities. Therefore it will contribute to enhancing community capacity, civic participation and social inclusion agendas.
- 'Belfast a Learning City' will lobby to ensure the Living Wage is part of the Belfast Works initiative and therefore supports the BSP agenda to tackle poverty.
- The 'Belfast Works' approach includes a citywide strategy, which will offer participants opportunities to travel to different areas of the city. This supports the vision and aim of the Belfast Active Travel Action Plan to connect people and places across the city in a realistic, affordable and more accessible manner for all.

"Flexibility on stopping and starting when I had my first child helped me when I might have given up on a career."



Belfast a Learning City

Engaging with people as active partners in learning

Harnessing learners' assets and life experiences in the learning environment

Listening and acting on learners' feedback and experiences

Respecting the different ways of learning

Supporting learning in safe, accessible learning environments

Maintaining learners' optimum levels of physical, emotional and mental wellbeing



Including learners' views in our plans

Providing high quality and responsive services

Respecting the different cultures within our society

Providing opportunities for learners to shape our services

Helping partners understand learners' needs

Supporting learners with the challenges of formal learning





Appendices

Appendix 1: Belfast Strategic Partnership

Belfast Strategic Partnership

The Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) was established by the Public Health Agency (PHA), Belfast City Council (BCC) and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) to provide a collaborative approach in addressing life inequalities in Belfast.

The BSP is led by the three Chief Executive Officers and has representation from a wide range of organisations, including the community, statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

The aim of the BSP is ***“to champion and lead the case for tackling life inequalities across all communities in the Belfast area.”***

Belfast Health Development Unit

The Belfast Health Development Unit (BH DU) supports and drives the work of the BSP and will support the delivery of the Framework for Action.

Vision

‘All people and communities in Belfast can confidently expect to have access to the opportunities and resources they need to live longer, healthier lives.’

Mission

‘To reduce life inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of people in Belfast by changing the way we work together. We do this by jointly harnessing the enthusiasm, efficiency and experience of our stakeholders to seek health and wellbeing gains in ways that we cannot do by working alone.’

Purpose

- To shape the future health and wellbeing priorities for Belfast
- To foster and take advantage of strategic opportunities to achieve better health outcomes
- To work together on areas where we can achieve the most impact
- To inform and influence future policy development
- To focus on the prevention of ill-health
- To develop and deliver an overarching health and wellbeing action plan for the city.

Key Principles

To successfully reduce inequality and address the wider determinants of health we must:

- Maximise our combined impact by working better together
- Be accountable to others based on the results of our work
- Base our decisions and actions on evidence and learning from others
- Be open to innovative approaches and be prepared to work differently
- Encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders and strengthen relationships
- Build on the success of existing partnerships and programmes of work
- Engage with communities and seek to contribute to Community Planning
- Make effective use of our collective resources through better joint planning and priority setting
- Drive Equity in Health and Wellbeing through all of our policies
- Share our learning to change the way the public sector works.

Appendix 2: Belfast Strategic Partnership - Central Priority

The central priority of the Belfast Strategic Partnership is to strengthen the emotional wellbeing and resilience of individuals and communities in Belfast. Emotional Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises that may have occurred in the past, present or into the future.

Belfast Works is one of Belfast Strategic Partnership's Key Demonstration Projects, contributing to the building of Emotional Resilience. See Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: Key demonstration projects - contribution to Emotional Resilience





**Making life better,
together**

Belfast Strategic Partnership

Focusing on Life Inequalities

The Belfast Strategic Partnership is committed to making information as accessible as possible and to promoting meaningful engagement. Requests for this publication in another format or language will be considered.

**For further information on
this publication please contact:**

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Putting people at the heart of learning

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