

Belfast a Learning City

'No one left behind'

Using lifelong learning to create an inclusive and equitable city



Context and rationale

Reducing the deep, persistent, long standing and stubborn inequalities that exist across Belfast is too great a challenge for any single agency, or Government Department, to tackle alone.

Developing a learning city plan that delivers fair and equal access to learning opportunities for everyone, of all ages and backgrounds, has the potential to harness our collective knowledge, skills, experience and resources to tackle inequalities and deliver a better city for all.

Learning connects across communities and sectors; it has the potential to transform lives for the better, offering opportunities to enhance quality of life and create economic prosperity for all. There are many excellent learning opportunities in Belfast but not everyone can avail of them – many people face barriers to accessing opportunities including, poor health, lack of confidence, lack of childcare, poor support networks, poverty, racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Belfast has joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities with a focus on using learning to tackle inequalities.

Our vision

"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 people in Belfast have equal access to lifelong learning opportunities, creating conditions for a better quality of life for everyone in the city."

We want a city that puts people at the heart of learning and where communities are actively engaged as the foundation of a lifelong learning society.

Background

Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) is a multi-sectoral partnership which was created in 2011 as an exemplar of key agencies in Belfast working together to tackle inequalities.

The aim of the BSP is "to champion and lead the case for tackling life inequalities across the Belfast area".

The BSP is led by the three Chief Executive Officers from the Public Health Agency, Belfast City Council and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Lifelong Learning (LLL) is one of the key thematic areas of the BSP.

Achievements and work to date

Since 2012, we have:

- Collectively agreed a definition of Lifelong Learning for Belfast
- Carried out a scoping exercise of 'learning activity' in Belfast
- Commissioned research and input to Belfast's ten-year Employment and Skills Framework
- Developed a common language and shared understanding through the creation of a Lifelong Learning framework 'Belfast a Learning City' and the 'Learning Charter for Belfast'
- Demonstrated by doing – establishment of the annual Belfast Festival of Learning
- Begun work on an inclusive learning city plan which maximises the impact of our collective efforts in tackling inequalities and works towards inclusive growth and sustainability
- Developed external relationships with other learning cities and become a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities



Foundations of a learning city plan

The foundation of the learning city plan is the Learning Charter for Belfast which has four core guiding principles:

- Creating a learning culture that values and promotes all forms of learning
- Partnership working for best reach and impact of all available resources
- Collaborative working to ensure equality of access and excellence in provision
- Matching skills with economic needs

The values and ethos of collaboration and co-operation are central to the Learning Charter, and a joint approach to shaping services around the changing needs of people throughout their life course.

We have honed four key messages on learning, they are;

Learning through education

'Learning is the foundation for a healthy life. Our schools, colleges, universities, community education and training organisations provide us with the opportunities to shape our future.'

Learning for and in work

'Learning creates routes to work. It generates opportunities, develops our careers and strengthens our communities and city.'

Learning to live together

'Learning brings us together. It develops respect and understanding about and within our communities.'

Learning for life

'Learning changes our lives for the better. Every day presents opportunities to learn for ourselves, teaching us the skills to deal with life's challenges. Learning can happen anywhere.'

Engagement and ownership

We will:

- Develop public awareness around learning as tools for tackling inequalities and improving quality of life
- Involve key decision makers in the development of the learning city plan.
- Engage with learners and communities as active partners
- Co-plan and co-deliver on a learning city plan which focuses on tackling inequalities.



Conclusion

Our vision of a learning city offers a unique opportunity to collectively tackle seemingly endemic and intractable problems arising from inequalities.

For those citizens experiencing inequality of access at present, nothing will change until we develop a learning city approach that offers equality of opportunity for all, across the life course, and across all areas of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

We will use a meaningful top down and an engaged bottom up approach to ensure citizens and communities are actively engaged as the foundation of a lifelong learning society, an approach that encapsulates the spirit of our vision of a learning city which leaves no-one behind.

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**Making life better,
together**

Belfast Strategic Partnership