belfast met

BANK OF AMERICA



Belfast Digital Skills & Employabilty Programme

Impact Report 2025/26

Introduction



For almost 120 years, Belfast Met has played a vital role in the education, skills and career journeys of generations of learners, while contributing to the social and economic development of Northern Ireland.

Central to this mission is our commitment to helping people develop the knowledge, confidence and opportunities they need to succeed, while ensuring employers can access the talent required to thrive. The Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme is a powerful example of what can be achieved when education, industry and community organisations unite behind a shared goal.

We are grateful to Bank of America for its investment, vision and ongoing support. We also thank the employers and partner organisations whose expertise, time and commitment have been fundamental to the programme's success. Together, they have demonstrated the impact effective collaboration can have in creating meaningful opportunities and responding to the evolving needs of our economy.

Delivered through our Centre for Digital Innovation and Technology (CDIT), developed through the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD), the programme has opened pathways for individuals who may otherwise face barriers to education and employment. It has supported a diverse range of learners, including women returning to work, newcomers to Northern Ireland, neurodivergent learners and young people not currently in education, employment or training.

Participants have gained valuable technical and employability skills, expanded their networks and, importantly, developed the confidence to take their next steps into further learning or work. Their achievements reflect the programme's commitment to social inclusion, widening participation and helping people realise their potential.

The benefits extend beyond individual participants. Through strong employer engagement, the programme is helping to build a diverse pipeline of talent equipped for opportunities in digital technology, cyber security, data analytics, software development and the creative industries.

This report highlights the programme's impact. The stories featured reflect not only the determination and ambition of participants, but also the dedication of the staff from the College and from our supporting partners who have supported them throughout their journey.

Initiatives such as this are central to our ambition to create a more inclusive, innovative and prosperous future for Belfast and the wider region. I am immensely proud of what has been achieved and look forward to seeing the programme continue to open doors, nurture talent and transform lives.

Damian Duffy
Principal and Chief Executive
Belfast Metropolitan College

Foreword



At Bank of America, we believe that investing in people and skills is essential to building stronger communities and supporting long-term economic growth. We are committed to helping create pathways to opportunity, particularly for those who may face barriers to education, training or employment.

Digital skills are increasingly important to the future success of individuals, businesses and economies. Across the UK and around the world, access to these skills can help unlock opportunity, improve social mobility and equip people to thrive in a rapidly changing workforce.

Belfast and Northern Ireland have established themselves as dynamic centres of innovation, talent and entrepreneurship. The region's growing technology sector, strong educational institutions and skilled workforce make it an exciting place to invest and support. We have been proud to work alongside organisations that share our commitment to helping people realise their potential.

Partnerships are central to creating lasting impact. The Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme brings together business, education and community organisations to help people develop relevant skills, gain confidence and access new opportunities. Belfast Met plays a vital role in this ecosystem, connecting learners with industry, supporting progression and helping ensure that training remains closely aligned to the needs of employers.

The programme's focus on supporting underrepresented groups is particularly important. By creating inclusive pathways into digital careers for groups including women returning to work, neurodivergent learners, and young people outside education and employment, it is helping broaden access to opportunity and strengthen the region's future talent pipeline.

At Bank of America, we are proud to support initiatives such as the Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme. By working together, we can help equip people with the skills and confidence they need to succeed, while contributing to inclusive growth and a more resilient economy for Northern Ireland.

Fernando Vicario
Chief Executive Officer of Merrill Lynch International and Country Executive for UK

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Who We Are

Skills that open doors

Belfast Metropolitan College is Northern Ireland's largest and longest established further and higher education college, supporting more than 12,000 learners and achieving a 95% student satisfaction rate (2024/25).

Our vision is to become a world-class college that nurtures the talent and ambition of Belfast and beyond. We provide the skills that broaden opportunity, narrow inequality and help create an economy that works for everyone.

Delivered by Belfast Met through the Centre for Digital Innovation and Technology (CDIT) collaborative framework and funded by Bank of America, the Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme creates opportunities for people who are underrepresented in the digital economy.

30
Fully funded Digital Skills Academies

600
Learners supported

3 YRS
Creating pathways to opportunity

Digital skills are critical to Northern Ireland's future. By equipping learners with the skills employers need now and in the years ahead, the programme is helping to address skills gaps, widen access to employment and support a more productive, innovative and inclusive economy.

The Programme's Academies focus on people, some of whom may face additional barriers to learning and employment, including women returning to the workforce, new migrants, neurodivergent learners and young people not currently in education, employment or training.



Working alongside employers and trusted community partners, each Academy combines industry recognised qualifications, practical experience and personalised support helping learners build their skills and confidence as well as connecting them with professional networks.

Belfast Met - New skills. New connections. New possibilities.

Shaped by Employers. Designed for Careers.

Employer insight is embedded throughout our Academies, ensuring learners develop relevant skills, understand the workplace and connect with real opportunities.

SHAPED BY INDUSTRY

Employers tell us what skills they need. Their insight shapes every Academy, keeping learning relevant to real roles and industry demand.

RECOGNISED BY INDUSTRY

Learners gain industry recognised qualifications that demonstrate their skills and give employers confidence in their potential.

FOCUSED ON REAL CAREERS

Each Academy connects learning to real roles, workplace expectations and the skills needed to succeed.

CONNECTED TO OPPORTUNITY

Masterclasses, site visits, placements, coaching and mentoring connect learners directly with employers and the world of work.

Employer insight shapes the entire learner journey.

Connected by Design

Learners, community partners and employers working together to create lasting opportunities.

COMMUNITY
- Learners
- Community partners
- Outreach and support

BELFAST MET ACADEMIES
- Learning
- Experience
- Personalised support

EMPLOYERS
- Industry insight
- Workplace experience
- Opportunity

CONNECTED DELIVERY

Belfast Met, employers and community partners work together throughout the Academy journey.

LEARNER FOCUSED

Academies respond to learners' digital, employability and personal development needs.

INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN

Specialist community partners help us reach, engage with and support underrepresented learners.

SHAPED TOGETHER

Learner, employer and partner feedback continually strengthens each Academy.

REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE

Masterclasses, site visits, placements and coaching bring learning to life.

SUPPORT THAT CONTINUES

Mentoring, outreach, learning events and networking help learners take their next step.

Together, we turn potential into progress.

Our Academies

Different pathways. One shared goal: opportunity.

Each Digital Skills Academy offers a distinct pathway, connecting technical learning with practical experience and clear opportunities for progression. Delivered by Belfast Met and specialist partners, each Academy involves employer input to support learners in developing industry-relevant digital and employability skills.



DATA ANALYTICS

Data Analytics Academies help learners develop practical skills in Microsoft Excel, Power BI and AI Fundamentals, with input from firms like Aflac, EY, Perforce Software and Stormharvester. Soft skills for communication and collaborative success are also central to the academies, which run from eight to 18 weeks.

Technical Skills: Excel • Power BI • AI Fundamentals
Learner Benefits: Recognised qualifications, industry insight and pathways into data-focused careers for adult returners and neurodivergent learners aged 18+. **Qualifications:** Microsoft Excel Associate • NCFE Level 2 & 3 Data Analytics • OCN Level 1 Employability • IBM Digital Badges



DIGITAL MARKETING

This eight-week programme combines practical digital marketing training with one-to-one mentoring, confidence-building workshops, CV development and interview preparation. The academy is enhanced by employer engagement sessions from organisations including Vanrath recruitment, BBC and Deloitte.

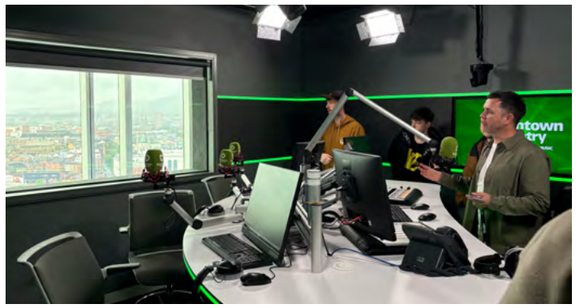
Technical Skills: Digital Marketing • Content Creation • Online Promotion **Learner Benefits:** Supports women returning to work by rebuilding confidence and strengthening employability skills. **Qualifications:** OCN Level 2 Marketing



SOFTWARE FUNDAMENTALS

This 10-week Academy introduces software development, Python, SQL, website development and digital applications. Learners apply their technical knowledge through practical activities, masterclasses from software industry partners such as Pytilia, while receiving tailored mentoring and job-search support.

Technical Skills: Python • SQL • Web Development • Digital Applications **Learner Benefits:** Practical coding experience and pathways into the technology sector for career changers and adult returners. **Qualifications:** Level 3 City & Guilds Certification in Software Development using SQL and Web Fundamentals



CREATIVE & DIGITAL

Delivered over eight weeks, Creative & Digital academies cover digital media production and digital technologies through hands-on projects and employer engagement. In the Digital Film Production Academy, learners also gain experience using professional equipment to produce a short film and visit leading media and broadcasting organisations such as Cool FM, UTV and Stellify Media.

Technical Skills: Storytelling • Scriptwriting • Filming • Production • Website Design • PowerPoint • Digital Portfolios • Digital Communication **Learner Benefits:** Supports young people and new migrants in developing technical skills, confidence and progression opportunities. **Qualifications:** OCN Level 3 Award in Professional and Technical Media Production Practices • OCN Level 1 Award in Vocational Skills



TRAIN THE TRAINER: MASTERING THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM

This Academy develops advanced digital teaching skills for modern learning environments in partnership with Stranmillis University College. Practical training in creative digital tools, STEAM and interactive learning helps educators integrate technology confidently into everyday lessons and share their learning with others.

Technical Skills: Digital Teaching Tools • Cyber Security • AI • Interactive Learning **Learner Benefits:** Accredited professional development for Student Teachers leading to greater confidence integrating technology into teaching. **Qualifications:** Google Educator and Adobe Qualifications **Delivery Partner:** Stranmillis University College



CYBER SECURITY

Cyber Security-focused Academies help learners develop technical skills in IT support, networking, troubleshooting and cyber security fundamentals. Through project-based learning, participants apply their knowledge while strengthening their problem solving, communication, leadership and critical thinking skills.

Technical Skills: IT Support • Networking • Troubleshooting • Cyber Security **Learner Benefits:** Practical experience, Cyber career awareness and industry-recognised certification. **Qualifications:** CompTIA A+ Certification



ESSENTIAL DIGITAL SKILLS

This Academy model develops essential digital and workplace skills, including online safety, email, presentations, social media, spreadsheets and word processing. Learners also build confidence, strengthen their communication skills and prepare for employment through personal branding and interview workshops. This is supported with input from companies such as BPerfect and Honeycomb recruitment.

Technical Skills: Email • Word Processing • Spreadsheets • Presentations **Learner Benefits:** Improved workplace confidence for Women Returning to work, digital capability and job readiness. **Qualifications:** OCN Level 1 Qualification in IT Applications



Our Learners

Talent is everywhere. Opportunity should be too.

Every learner brings talent, ambition and potential. Our Academies support people who may face barriers to participation and progression, helping them develop the skills, confidence and connections needed to take their next step.

Learners include women returning to learning or work, young people outside education, employment or training, disabled and neurodivergent learners, lifelong learners seeking to reskill, and newcomers to Northern Ireland.

Our people at a glance

43%
From areas experiencing the greatest disadvantage
Based on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017

16%
Aged 16–18

29%
From Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds

12%
From newcomer communities, including asylum seekers and refugees

33%
Aged 19–25

22%
Have a declared disability

54%
FEMALE

What learners told us

- **96%** Would recommend their Academy to a friend or family member
- **94%** Learned new digital skills
- **90%** Better understand careers that use digital skills
- **87%** Improved their communication skills
- **86%** Improved their teamwork skills

Skills gained. Confidence built. Futures unlocked

Real people. Real progress.



Yulia Davydenko
Digital Marketing Academy

"This Academy put opportunities in front of me and gave me the confidence to pursue them.

"Sometimes it can feel difficult to break into a network when you're a little bit on the outside, whether you're new to the place you live, returning to work after time away or facing another barrier.

"Having employment and these new connections has helped me so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to build my career in Northern Ireland."



Russell Coates
Data Analytics Academy

"The programme opened the door to a permanent role with EY.

"I secured a year-long placement with EY through the Programme, which led to a permanent role. When I began the course, I had no idea where it might lead.

"The practical skills, guidance and exposure to a real career were hugely beneficial. Joining EY has allowed me to keep developing and apply what I learned in a supportive, forward-looking environment."



Megha Makwana
Digital Marketing Academy

"I gained a new qualification, rebuilt my confidence and began to see doors opening into a new career."

"Stepping away from employment for several years made returning to work challenging, but completing the eight-week Academy helped me gain a new qualification and rebuild my confidence.

"With two young girls, it is wonderful to feel that they can look up to their mum as someone with real career potential."



Ian Parkhill
Train the Trainer: Mastering the Digital Classroom

"The Academy brought theory into a practical, hands-on setting."

"As ICT teachers, we must keep learning so that we are ready to answer the ever changing questions our pupils will have.

"Connecting with industry specialists highlighted how quickly technology evolves and why teachers need to keep their finger on the pulse."

Our Network

Strong partnerships. Shared ambition.

The success of our Academies depends on the direct input and support of a network of leading NI employers, charities, community groups and educators. Their wide-ranging contributions include providing work placements and mentorship opportunities to recruiting course participants and supporting day-to-day curriculum delivery.

Our employer network:

Aflac · Allstate Northern Ireland · AMS · Bank of America · beBettor · BPerfect Cosmetics · BBC · Belfast Chamber · ConnectWise · Deloitte · EOS IT Solutions · EY · FinTrU · Graham · honeycomb · kainos · Liberty · Loquerion Security · Microsoft · Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry · perforce · pytilia · Staffline · Stormharvester · Thales · Vanrath Strategic Recruitment · Version 1 · yellow zest

Our delivery, education and community partners:

Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre · Belfast City Council · Belfast Region City Deal · CineMagic · Dress for Success Northern Ireland · fit The Tech Talent Pipeline · Catapult Digital · NOW · Queen's University Belfast · The Open University · Shankill Shared Women's Centre · Specialisterne Northern Ireland · Stranmillis University College · Ulster University · Women in Business

We welcome new employers and partners joining our network, which continues to grow year on year.



Jo McGinley
Social Value Director at EY Northern Ireland

"EY's involvement in the Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme has delivered huge benefits for us as an organisation. Its unique and holistic environment, with input not just from technical experts and educators but also from the team at Specialisterne, who come with incredible insights into nurturing neurodivergent talent, has been wonderful to see in action.

"Programme participants develop a strong grounding in the skills we as employers need, and in turn, we've been given some game-changing insights into how we can make our workplaces truly inclusive and nurturing in order to draw the very best from all our people. Most importantly, we've been given access to some phenomenal talent we haven't always had."



Neil Sinclair
Director at Pytilia

"Placements through these Digital Skills Academies are a win for the individual, who get hands-on experience to back up what they're learning with the education provider, and it's a win for the education provider because that loop is working the other way, in that what they learn in the classroom is reinforced with us. There's a win for local government because the talent pool is increasing, and of course there's a win for ourselves."



Juliana Germinio
Founder, Yellow Zest

"I've been involved directly with the Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme and not only is it playing an important role in opening doors and creating opportunities for its learners, from an employer's perspective, it's supporting a pipeline of new talent.

"People are coming out with a solid grounding in the digital skills which businesses are crying out for, as well as strong industry contacts, confidence and a drive to progress."

Achievement and Progression

As of September 2026

400
participants enrolled in 24 academies

80%
Positive progression rate

14%
Apprenticeships/ training programmes

41%
Employment

19%
Further Education

6%
Higher Education

Employers

As an employer, you can help support participants to break down the barriers they face by engaging with Belfast Met on the Digital Skills Academies. There are many ways you can become involved, for example:

- Hosting work experience placements.
- Providing an employer led project.
- Delivering industry masterclasses.
- Providing career guidance.
- Aligning pathways to employment for participants.

To enhance your reputation as a socially responsible and inclusive employer and support the next generation of talent, join the Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme as an employer via the form below:



For more information visit:
belfastmet.ac.uk/support-for-business/digitalskills
or contact: **digitalskills@belfastmet.ac.uk**

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