



Belfast Metropolitan College
College Development Plan 2025/26

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1. Executive Summary

Article 20 of the Further Education Order (Northern Ireland) 1997 mandates that all Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland produce and publish a Development Plan. This plan must outline the College's objectives, outcomes, and performance measures in alignment with broader government policies and spending priorities. Consequently, this annual College Development Plan details Belfast Met's operational targets for 2025/26, ensuring the progression of the College's Strategic Plan and demonstrating our contribution to the Minister's priorities.

The College is committed to supporting the delivery of the Department's Business Plan for 2025/26 in alignment with the Minister's Economic Vision, emphasising the importance of investing in the right skills, in the right places. As an example, the College took the lead on supporting the development of a collaborative PEACE Plus bid in May 2025 which aligned with DfE's business plan priority 2024/25 to enhance All-Island Skills Ecosystem. Additionally, we are dedicated to supporting the Minister's new proposals for school leavers with special educational needs and the publication of the Review of Post School Education, Skills and Training Provision, which aligns with the Programme for Government's commitment to better support children and young people with Special Educational Needs.

Our draft Strategic Plan, endorsed by our Governing Body in June 2025, and presented to the Minister for approval, serves as the College's primary strategic planning document, outlining our overall vision and ambitions while setting a bold direction for the future of our institution, our learners, and our communities.



This plan is the key document providing the curriculum and organisation transformation framework which is essential to the delivery of our College Development Plan. The Strategic Plan 2025/26 – 2027/28 sets an ambitious path for the future of our college to deliver a College of Choice, to be a Partner of Choice and to be Powered by People. With over a century of service to Belfast and Northern Ireland, our Plan builds on our legacy of resilience, innovation, and commitment to excellence in education and skills development. We hope to launch this new plan early in the 2025/26 academic year.

Our new Vision, Purpose, Values and Strategic Objectives are as outlined below.

- **Our Vision:** Together, we will be the College of Choice and the Partner of Choice for Communities and Learners, driven by our passion and Powered by Our People.
- **Our Purpose:** To develop the skills, knowledge and innovation of learners, employers and communities, aligned to the NI economic and social priorities.
- **Our Values:** Four values define who we are and guide every action we take, driving our commitment to creating a supportive, ambitious, and high-achieving environment for our learners, partners, and community. Our values are Collaboration, Ambition, Respect and Excellence.
- **Our Strategic Objectives:** Three strategic objectives set the foundation for achieving Belfast Met's vision of excellence in further and higher education across Northern Ireland. These objectives are carefully crafted to address the needs of our learners, staff, and stakeholders, while aligning with regional and national priorities. They include:

Objective 1 – College of Choice

To be the 'College of Choice', we will offer innovative, high-performing programmes that provide an outstanding development experience and meet the evolving needs of learners, employers, and society.

Objective 2 – Partner of Choice

To be a 'Partner of Choice', we will continue to develop and deliver excellent service, innovative solutions, and impactful outcomes in partnership with employers, industry, and other stakeholders.

Objective 3 – Powered by People

To be 'Powered by People', we will recruit talented people and invest in our existing staff, building a resilient and ambitious culture underpinned by a strong commitment to workforce learning and growth. This will help build a high-performing, inclusive, and future-ready College.

As we embark on delivering the ambitions expressed in our new Strategic Plan, Belfast Met looks forward to playing a pivotal role in advancing the Department for the

Economy (DfE) and the Minister's economic vision, which is centred on four key objectives: increasing good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity, and reducing carbon emissions. Our Strategic Plan and future College Development Plans continue to be aligned to ensure that our outcomes contribute to the performance indicators that enhance the delivery of the economic plan. Additionally, we continue to address the persistent challenges related to educational attainment, deprivation, and unprecedented levels of economic inactivity.

At a high level, Belfast Met currently forecasts 12,383 individuals to be enrolled at the College in 2025/26. This compares to 12,111¹ individuals currently in 2024/25 against a target of 12,032. These enrolment targets are in line with our recent performance.

In delivering our objectives and priorities, the College will ensure that it does so in line with the governance framework outlined within our Partnership Agreement.

This Plan was reviewed and endorsed by the Governing Body in June 2025. Governors will hold the College to account for the performance metrics included in the final CDP. In parallel, the Department will also hold the College to account for delivery against these metrics, as part of its oversight and sponsorship responsibilities. Governors will receive regular updates on progress against CDP targets during 2025/26 through the current Curriculum Quality and Excellence Committee and Governing Body (GB) meeting cycle which considers both the CDP targets and performance against targets. This regular monitoring and reporting will ensure that the College remains on track to achieve its strategic objectives and can make informed decisions based on real-time data.

¹ Source: Historical CDR PowerBi report, refreshed 21/08/2025

2. Strategic Context

Programme for Government 2024-2027: Doing What Matters Most

Grow a Globally Competitive Economy

Proposed Action: Through a series of multi-million-pound committed investments, we will make this a more vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, invest and visit. Central to every part of our plan for a globally competitive and sustainable economy will be employers and workers. Supporting them to build the skills needed both now, and in the future, will be vital if we are to harness our economic potential.

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Proposed Action: We will work to transform the Education system to provide high quality, efficient and sustainable services for children with SEN and disability. Systemic transformation will take time and will require significant investment but it is vital that we respond meaningfully to make sure our education system works for all learners.

Minister's Economic Vision

The College is a key delivery partner in taking forward the Minister's priorities set out in his Economic Vision to:

- Increase the proportion of working-age people in **Good Jobs**;
- Promote a more **Regionally Balanced** economy;
- **Raise Productivity** of businesses; and
- **Reduce Carbon Emissions** in the transition to a greener and more sustainable economy.

Strategies / Priorities

- The Department's [Business Plan for 2025/26](#) in support of the Minister's Economic Vision
- The Minister's [announcement](#) on new proposals to support school leavers with special educational needs and the publication of the [Review of Post School Education, Skills and Training Provision, and associated legislative protections for Young People with Special Educational Needs – Summary Report](#)
- [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland](#)
- [Trade and Investment Strategic Priorities](#)
- [Climate Change Act \(NI\) 2022](#) and [The Climate Change \(Reporting Bodies\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2024](#)
- FE Transformation
- [Developing a More Strategic Approach to 14-19 Education and Training - a Framework to Transform 14-19 Education and Training Provision](#)
- [Skills Barometer 2023 - 2033](#)
- [DfE Sectoral Action Plans](#)

- [DfE Sub Regional Economic Plans](#)
- [DfE Digital Skills Action Plan 2024 - 2034](#)
- [Tourism Vision & Action Plan – 10 Year Plan](#)

3. Financial Performance / Position

2025/26 Forecast Position

The tables below set out the College **resource and capital requirements** of **£53,452k** for 2025/26.

PROGRAMME / ACTIVITY					
A	B	C	D	E	F
Further Education	Higher Education	Apprenticeships/ Traineeships	Business Development	Social Inclusion	Other
EL - Level 3 (not under B – F)	Level 4+	Programmes up to Level 3 including AppsNI; Traineeships; Skills Programmes	InnovateUs; Skills Focus; Assured Skills Academies; Step Up; Cyberfirst; Community Programmes International Programmes	Access; Essential Skills; ESOL; NI Prisons Service; VEP; Skill Up; Multiply	Self-funded recreational courses; FastTrack tutorials; ILM certificates; adhoc full cost recovery courses.
Direct Teaching Costs - Pay	8,727	5,406	3,989	267	1,668
Direct Teaching Costs - Non Pay	387	240	177	261	74
Non-Direct Costs*	19,627	12,159	8,972	601	3,750
Total Delivery Cost	28,741	17,805	13,138	1,129	5,492
Non-Grant in Aid Income	1,093	5,356	2,410	1010	5,063
Net Requirement	27,648	12,449	10,728	119	429
					1,533

* Includes total support service/non-front-line activity overheads apportioned based on delivery hours.

TOTAL RESOURCE REQUIREMENT (£000's)	52,905
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Capital Expenditure – Major capital projects	
Capital Expenditure – Minor Works	500
Capital Expenditure – PFI additions	147
Capital Receipts - Riddell	100
Net DfE Capital Requirement (£000's)	547
City Deals Capital Expenditure	

Reform to Save Reporting

The staff numbers included in the table are based on the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) average staff numbers (including those covered via Agency/Temporary) over the relevant financial year. Funded posts are not paid for from the DfE Budget Allocation and vary from year-to-year dependent on the timeframe of the projects they relate to. They should therefore be excluded from the baseline staff numbers (FTE). A robust approach to staffing levels control has been embedded by the College which is reported to the Executive Leadership Team and to the Governing Body via the HR Committee. This is clearly evidenced by the position provided in the following table.

Staff Type	Actual 31st July 2023	RtS Leavers	Actual 31st July 2024	Actual 31st March 2025	Actual 31st July 2025
Teaching	362	27.4	376	337	331
Non Teaching	477	51.4	402	371	380
Total	839	78.8	778	708	710
Externally funded posts	(40)		(35)	(40)	(40)
Vacant Posts	168		178	95	209
DfE Funded Posts	967		921	763	879

4. 2025/26 College Planned Delivery

The College takes into account the College profile and Sub-regional Operating Context to prioritise resource utilisation to areas of greatest need, aligned to the Strategic Context.

a. College Profile for 2025/26

Our College & Role Today

Belfast Met has been a distinguished centre of learning in our city region for over 100 years. Established in 1906 by the forward-thinking Belfast Corporation, we have a rich history marked by resilience and relevance. Originally created to meet the City's industrial needs, we have played a vital role in fostering the innovation, creativity, and technical skills that have driven Belfast's prosperity. As we approach our 120th anniversary in 2026, we continue to shape our legacy with a focus on relevance, adaptability, and embracing the potential of the future.

As Northern Ireland's largest Further and Higher Education college, we serve over 12,000 learners annually, responding to the changing demographic profile of the city. With state-of-the-art campuses across the city and a commitment to providing skills-focused education, our college plays a central role in preparing learners for the evolving demands of the workforce, supporting economic growth, and fostering innovation across industries. Despite recent constraints in parts of our estate and challenges in recruiting specialist staff, we remain dedicated to supporting growth areas in the curriculum and managing learner numbers effectively.

We recognise the key role we play in supporting the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Minister's economic vision, which focuses on increasing good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity, and reducing carbon emissions. Our College Development Plan is aligned to contribute to these objectives, addressing challenges such as educational attainment, deprivation, and economic inactivity, whilst also helping to accelerate decarbonisation efforts with a Net Zero Carbon Skills Action Plan. By working with Belfast City Council as a strategic partner, we support the education, skills, and employability agenda across the City Region, fostering economic growth while addressing social inequalities and environmental sustainability.

Our Campuses

Our diverse learner community reflects our commitment to accessible education and skills training for individuals from all backgrounds and career stages. We have several campuses across Belfast, each catering to different academic and vocational needs.

Titanic Quarter Campus: Located in the iconic Titanic Quarter, this flagship campus offers cutting-edge facilities for IT, media, science, hospitality, and tourism courses. It is renowned for its modern, eco-friendly design.

Millfield Campus: Situated near Belfast city centre, Millfield Campus provides a wide variety of courses, including health and social care, engineering, science, and construction. It features excellent facilities for practical training, such as science labs and workshops.

E3 Springvale Campus: Located on Springfield Road, this campus focuses on enterprise, employability, and economic development. It is designed for collaboration with businesses and community organisations, offering courses in business, IT, and digital media.

Castlereagh Campus: Located in East Belfast, the Castlereagh Campus offers courses in motor vehicle maintenance, aviation, engineering as well as IT and Cyber. It is equipped with workshops and specialist facilities to support practical training. Work is ongoing to develop a Strategic Outline Case (SoC) to support the re-development of Castlereagh which is an older campus in the College Estate.

Girdwood Community Hub: Located in North Belfast, this campus provides community-focused courses and outreach programmes, making education accessible to local communities and supporting inclusive growth.

Over the past 15 years, in response to reducing enrolments, we have transitioned to a model where each campus specialises in specific curriculum areas. This approach, driven by financial pressures, ensures that learners have access to industry-standard facilities tailored to their fields of study, consolidating and strengthening our provision.

Our Learners

Our learner profile has become increasingly diverse in recent years, reflecting the increasing diversity of Belfast as a whole, and highlighting that we are a modern and inclusive College which attracts learners from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. For example:

- 37% of our learners are aged 26 years & over in 2024/25
- 13% are from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups
- 10% identify as LGBTQ
- 27% live in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland
- 11% self-report having a disability

By continuing to analyse the demographic characteristics of our learners, we can effectively tailor our educational offerings to meet their needs and support their success. Our 2024/25 learner profile and an example of just one of the learner profile trends analyses we have conducted recently can be found in **Annex 1**.

The College aims to provide high-quality education and support student success by offering relevant and innovative programmes. This includes ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of students and the local community.

Belfast Met's ambition is to increase student enrolments and retention rates by creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. In terms of the underpinning rationale agreed with our Governing Body and reflected in our Strategic Plan we see some of the growth in college enrolments moving forward being built in

partnership with other organisations. The College has tested this approach in recent years through the Step Up programme and Bank of America Digital Skills programme and has delivered good results, expanded our reach and provided access to a more flexible resource which can be adjusted depending on budget pressures. The College has been working with the CDP procurement team to develop a new Partnership Framework across a range of areas. Overall, Belfast Met's FE provision aims to recover from past declines, leverage strategic innovations, and build strong partnerships to ensure sustained growth and success in attracting and retaining learners.

Furthermore, Belfast Met's HE provision aims to meet growing demand, enhance visibility through strategic initiatives such as the UCAS pilot, and strengthen partnerships with leading universities to provide a relevant and high-quality curriculum. Belfast Met is engaging with Queen's University Belfast to strengthen existing partnership and collaboration in electronic engineering / engineering and health and social care. On 17 October 2025, Belfast Met and Queen's will sign an updated Memorandum Agreement to secure the partnership.

Additionally, Belfast Met's ambition is to empower individuals, strengthen communities, and drive economic and social progress in Northern Ireland through impactful and sustainable partnerships. As a "Partner of Choice," the College recognises that strong partnerships are essential for extending its reach, supporting workforce development, and fostering community growth to enhance local economic development. Whether working with local businesses to develop a highly skilled workforce, partnering with community organisations to expand educational access, or engaging with industry leaders to drive economic progress, Belfast Met aims to be a key anchor institution that stakeholders turn to for expertise, reliability, and results.

Overall, the CDP performance metrics are carefully crafted to support the College's strategic direction, providing a clear roadmap for achieving the objectives set by the Governing Body while remaining flexible and responsive to new opportunities.

Further detail regarding trends in our student numbers are captured under the following section '**Our College Trends**'.

Our Staff

To realise our vision and ambition to be the College of Choice and the Partner of Choice for communities and learners, driven by our passion and "Powered by People", we need the best workforce.

Our staffing headcount as at the end of April 2025 (Quarter 3), including all academic and support contracts, was 941. 61% of college staff are employed on a full-time basis. A high-level overview of our staffing headcount is provided in **Annex 1**.

Our Achievements

In the 2024/25 academic year our staff and students achieved much to be proud of securing a multitude of regional, national, and international awards across the full breadth of our activities. Below are just some of these awards and achievements:

- We celebrated the achievements of our Higher Education students at the highlight event of our academic calendar – our annual Graduation ceremony. The College welcomed over 800 guests through the doors of the iconic Titanic Belfast on 19th November 2024, with several staff awards also presented on the day.
- Learners from across the College excelled at several awards and competitions including the SkillPLUMB UK competition, the NI Housing Executive's Artes Apprenticeship Awards, the World VFX Day Art Competition, and the Irish Print Awards.
- Our Centre for Supported Learning won the OCN NI Learning Endeavour Award in the OCN NI Provider of the Year category in June 2024.
- Highlighting our commitment to be Sustainable by Nature, we were Highly Commended in the Outstanding Commitment to ESG category at the 2025 Belfast Telegraph Business Awards and were named a finalist in the Business Eye Sustainability & ESG Awards 2025.

We continually work to improve our learner's experience at Belfast Met. As a result, learners who choose to study with us value their experience highly, which is evidenced through consistently strong survey findings. As with previous years, our Learner Satisfaction Survey results were excellent across the board in 2025, and we achieved an overall satisfaction rate of 95%. These results are a testament to the talent and continued hard work of our staff, and their dedication to our learners. A full overview of our 2025 Learner Satisfaction Survey Findings can be found in **Annex 1**.

Our retention rate stood at 92% overall in 2023/24, which was a 1% improvement from 2022/23. Whilst our success rate remained consistent at 78%, our achievement rate dipped slightly, dropping 1% from 2022/23 to stand at 85% overall. As always, we will strive to support our learners to ensure they have all the tools and opportunities required to succeed and achieve their target qualification. A full breakdown of our Retention, Achievement and Success rates can be found in **Annex 1**.

For a full overview on how we delivered against our 2023/24 priorities, please review our [2023/24 Impact Report](#)², which outlines our performance against ten key performance indicators in detail. Our 2024/25 Impact Report will be finalised and published once final year outcomes are known in Autumn 2025.

² Belfast Met: Our Impact 2023/24

Our College Trends

At Belfast Met, we continually monitor trends in our enrolment and learner figures to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our community and adapting to changes in the educational landscape. Over the past five years, our enrolment and learner numbers have fluctuated, reflecting the uncertain political and economic landscape we've been working within across this period.

HE Enrolments

The academic year 2024/25 had been very much about a consolidation of our provision and ensuring that we were set up to develop and deliver against our initial MaSN allocation of 1,158, however due to increase in demand, Belfast Met sought additional MaSN to meet the demands with additional circa 73 FT HE places.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, Belfast Met has experienced an overall increase in applications for 2025/26. The College has also participated in a pilot programme with our HE programmes published through UCAS for September 2025. The College was keen to engage in this pilot to maximise exposure of HE in FE pathways to potential learners. HE courses in the UCAS pilot have witnessed an increase in applications from 875 in 2024/25 (Direct Applications only) to 1,008 in 2025/26 (Direct + UCAS Applications) which represents an increase of 15%. Based on these figures, 10% of all 2025 HE applications to courses involved in the pilot are UCAS applications.

We are currently working with QUB on the final stages of our renewed Memorandum of Understanding that was first signed in 2019 as part of our City Deal collaboration, and we continue to have ongoing engagement with OU and UU about enhancing our curriculum, and our strategic partnerships.

The curriculum build for 2025/26 for full time HE provision has been amended to 1,205 full time HE places, in line with budget allocation (reduced from 1,309). We also anticipate 703 individuals on part time core funded programmes of study and 460 Higher Level Apprentices.

FE Trends

In terms of FE trends, we had observed a notable drop in learner and enrolment numbers during the 2020/21 academic year, likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was followed by a period of recovery and growth, peaking in 2022/23 with the highest learner (12,579) and enrolment figures (23,749) recorded across the five-year period. Despite a small decline in learners and enrolments in 2023/24, we remain optimistic about the future as we continue to adapt and innovate to attract and retain learners. A full breakdown of our five-year learner and enrolment trends, along with provisional figures for the 2024/25 academic year can be found in **Annex 1**.

In terms of other developments this year to support recruitment we merged our Marketing and Admissions Team to ensure that our engagement activities translate through from expression of interest and participation in our Open Days to application and uptake. This approach has also been supported by the onboarding of a new College CRM system.

Our flagship Open Day on Saturday 25th January 2025 had over 2,000 individual registrations on Eventbrite for tickets which gave us a steady flow of potential learners coming through to the Group Talks, one to one information sessions and Curriculum Presentations. Our website received over 27,000 views on the day.

We are also continuing to work on developing our partnership approach across the Belfast Lifelong Learning City and hope that this approach can also help us to expand our enrolments moving forward. Given some of the reduced funding levels, as a result of budget pressures, we have only projected fairly model growth for the year ahead.

b. Sub-regional Operating Context

Population Profile

Given that Belfast Met is the only Further Education College in the Belfast City Region, we respond to the opportunities afforded by economic growth and increasing diversity, whilst also dealing with the challenges of areas that have some of the highest levels of poverty, economic inactivity, and deep-rooted social problems in the country. In shaping our new Strategic Plan, we have given careful consideration to our external operating context. In the tables below, we provide an overview of the positives and challenges associated with our sub-regional operating context using key local data related to the population of Belfast.

Population Profile: Positives	
<i>Growing Population</i>	Belfast's population has grown by 3.5% since 2011 and is currently estimated at 345,500 (accounting for 18% of NI's total population). This highlights the city's significance as an urban centre – showing further opportunities for expanding education to meet increasing demand. ³
<i>Increasing Diversity</i>	Belfast is the most ethnically diverse Local Government District in Northern Ireland, with 7% of residents belonging to minority ethnic groups, and 10% born outside the UK and Ireland. Increasing diversity in Belfast will enrich the local culture, drive economic growth through innovation, and strengthen global connections. ⁴
<i>Youthful Age Profile</i>	With 37% of its population aged 15-39, Belfast has a younger working-age population than the Northern Ireland average (31%), offering significant potential for economic growth if effectively harnessed. ⁵
Population Profile: Challenges	

³ NISRA (2022). Census 2021: Main Statistics for Northern Ireland (Demography & Households)

⁴ NISRA (2022). Census 2021: Main Statistics for Northern Ireland (Country of Birth)

⁵ NISRA (2022). Census 2021: Main Statistics for Northern Ireland

<i>Deprivation</i>	41% of Belfast is considered a Quintile 1 area (i.e. the top 20% most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland). This equates to over 140,000 people living in the highest levels of deprivation in the city. It is estimated that 53% of young people in Belfast live in the most deprived areas, which is more than double the NI average (25%). ⁶
<i>Health</i>	27% of Belfast residents report having a long-term health problem or disability, which is above the NI average of 24.3%. Poor health can limit workforce participation and reduce overall economic productivity, meaning interventions are necessary to improve overall wellbeing in the city. ⁷
<i>Educational Attainment</i>	72% of 2022/23 Belfast school leavers achieved 5+ GCSEs (incl. English & Maths), which was the lowest amongst all LGDs. Additionally, Belfast saw more of its 2022/23 school leavers entering unemployment (6.1%) and less entering further education, employment or training in comparison to the NI averages. ⁸
<i>No Qualifications</i>	15.6% of Belfast's working age population have no qualifications, which is above the NI average (13%). Belfast West constituency area has the highest proportion of individuals with no qualifications in the country, highlighting the need for effective interventions in these areas. A full breakdown of the stark contrasts in the qualification levels across Belfast can be found in Annex 1. ⁹
<i>Economic Inactivity</i>	Almost one third (32.1%) of the working age population in Belfast are economically inactive, which is considerably above the NI average (26.3%). ¹⁰ This is the second highest rate within local government districts across NI and suggests that efforts are needed to enhance workforce skills and to support pathways into employment.

Considering that approximately 50% of our learners each year reside in Belfast LGD, we are aware of the crucial role we play in providing accessible education and skill development opportunities to a broad spectrum of students from a wide range of backgrounds.

Industry Profile

The industry profile of Belfast is unique and differs to that of wider Northern Ireland. In essence, Belfast is more skills intensive than the rest of Northern Ireland, has a greater diversity of industrial sectors, and has a high concentration of jobs in sectors

⁶ Education Authority (2022). Youth Service: Local Assessment of Need

⁷ Health Survey (NI): First Results 2022/23

⁸ Department of Education (2024). Qualifications and Destinations of NI School Leavers 2022/23

⁹ DfE Research Bulletin: Qualifications and Skills Overview (2024)

¹⁰ UUEPC (2024). Economic Inactivity: Who, what, where, why?

forecast to experience rapid growth in years to come. As Belfast's only FE College, we recognise our role in helping to meet its demand for highly skilled workers over the coming decade and are leading on the sectoral conversations on a region wide basis in respect of anticipated innovations and curriculum developments in a number of key areas.

We keep ourselves informed on current and projected skills and jobs demands in Belfast and across Northern Ireland as a whole and are committed to leveraging these insights further to enhance our educational offerings and support services. Our recent procurement of Lightcast labour market analytics platform will play a crucial role in this effort. This advanced tool will help the College identify emerging labour market and skills trends, enabling us to develop our curriculum accordingly. By closely monitoring these trends and utilising cutting-edge analytics, Belfast Met will continue to adapt and thrive, ensuring that we provide the best possible educational experience for our learners. We are excited about the future and confident that our proactive approach will help us navigate any challenges and seize new opportunities for growth and development.

Belfast as an Economic Hub ^{11 12 13}

Belfast is the economic powerhouse of Northern Ireland, hosting 30% of the country's total jobs and 14% of all registered businesses.

Belfast has one of fastest growing tech sectors in the UK & has been named one of the world's top 15 Digital Economies of the future.

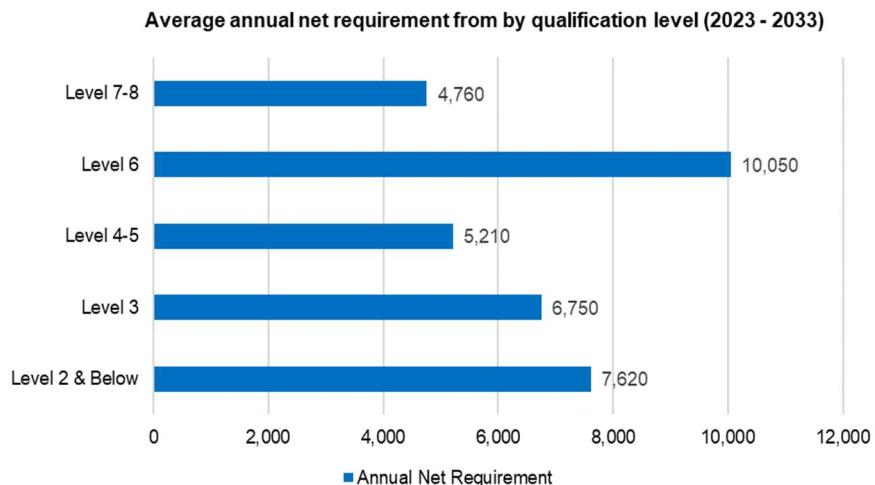
Belfast is a hub for high productivity sectors, accounting for over 60% of total NI jobs in IT and finance and insurance sectors.

Belfast has the highest median annual earnings of all Local Government Districts (£35,811 per year vs. NI average of £32,900).

¹¹ NISRA (2024). Inter-Departmental Business Register

¹² UUEPC (2019). Sub-Regional Skills Barometer

¹³ NISRA (2023). Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings



For Belfast Met, these statistics signify a tremendous opportunity to align our educational offering with the City's economic strengths, so that we can equip our students with the skills needed to thrive in these high-demand industries. Moreover, Belfast's role as the economic powerhouse of NI and higher earnings potential makes Belfast an attractive destination for both local and non-local students seeking quality education and promising career prospects.

Future Skills Needs of NI

The most recent release of the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer from Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) provides insights into the qualifications new workers in Northern Ireland will need across the period 2023 – 2033. Projections suggest an average demand of 34,000 individuals to enter the Northern Ireland labour market on an annual basis across this period, and that 43% of these individuals will require at least degree level qualifications (RQF Level 6 or above). This figure has increased from 37% in the first iteration of the Skills Barometer, providing clear evidence that employers in Northern Ireland have a demand for individuals at the higher end of the qualification spectrum.¹⁴

A recent report from Matrix, Northern Ireland's Science Industry Panel, provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolving skills landscape in Northern Ireland, and projects the following skills to be in-demand up to 2035:

Digital Literacy	AI & Machine Learning
As technology becomes increasingly integral across sectors, proficiency in digital tools and platforms is seen as essential for the NI workforce.	Growth of AI technologies will necessitate skills in AI development, data science, and machine learning to drive innovation and maintain competitiveness.

¹⁴ UUEPC (2025). Skills Barometer: 2023-2033.

Green Technologies	Manufacturing & Engineering
A shift towards a greener economy will require expertise in renewable energy, sustainability practices, and environmental management.	With advancements in automation & smart manufacturing, skills in robotics, 3D printing, and systems integration will be increasingly in demand.
Cybersecurity & Data Protection	Financial Analytics
As digital transformation accelerates, safeguarding data systems will require specialised knowledge in cybersecurity protocols and ethical hacking.	With Northern Ireland's emerging position in Fintech, skills in financial modelling, blockchain, and digital payment systems are highlighted as key growth areas.

Current Skills Mismatch in Belfast¹⁵

Skilled Workforce: Belfast's workforce is weighted towards the higher end of the skills spectrum relative to Northern Ireland as a whole; **44%** of people working in Belfast are qualified to Level 4+, compared to **34%** in NI.



Skills Mismatch: in comparison to its workforce, just **28%** of Belfast's residents are qualified to Level 4+. In comparison, **23%** of Belfast's residents have no qualifications, compared to just **9%** of its workforce.



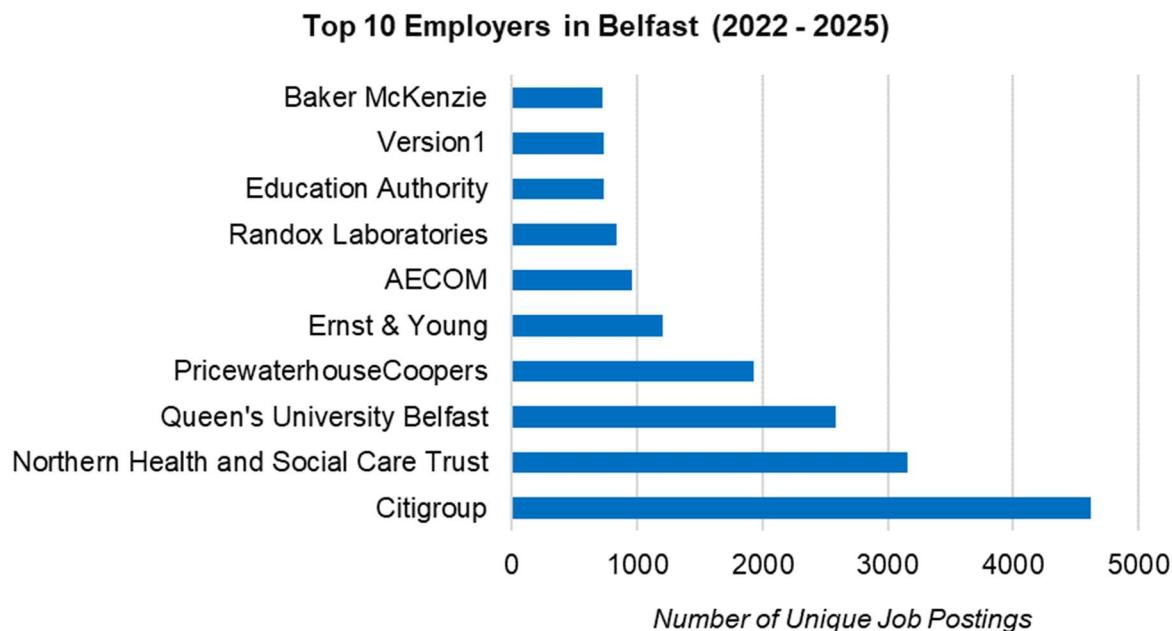
A mismatch between residents' skills and the skills required to enter the Belfast labour market can act as a significant barrier and reduce employment opportunities for those at the bottom of the skills spectrum. Given that 40-50% of our learners reside in Belfast, ***we have an important role to play in addressing this challenge.***

¹⁵ UUEPC (2019). Sub-Regional Skills Barometer

Jobs & Skills Demands in Belfast

We recognise that it is crucial for Belfast Met to stay updated on future skills needs for Northern Ireland to ensure that our educational offerings remain relevant and aligned with the evolving job market. By anticipating and addressing these needs, we can better prepare our students for high-demand careers, thereby enhancing their employability and contributing to the region's economic growth.

As a start, we need to understand who the major employers are within the City. According to Lightcast data, the following companies were the top employers in Belfast across the period March 2022 – March 2025:



Source: Lightcast (2025)

We can also use Lightcast's labour market data to identify the top industries and occupations within Belfast across the last three years:

Top 10 Industries in Belfast (2022 – 2025)	
#1	Financial Service Activities
#2	Education
#3	Legal & Accounting Activities
#4	Computer Programming & Consultancy
#5	Architectural & Engineering Activities
#6	Head Office & Management Consultancy Activities
#7	Human Health Activities
#8	Retail Trade

#9 Public Administration & Defence

#10 Other Professional, Scientific & Technical Industries

Top 10 Occupations in Belfast (2022 – 2025)

#1 Programmers & Software Development Professionals

#2 Sales Related Occupations

#3 Care Workers & Home Carers

#4 Chartered & Certified Accountants

#5 Finance & Investment Analysts

#6 Management Consultants & Business Analysts

#7 Customer Service Occupations

#8 Project Support Officers

#9 Higher Education Teaching Professionals

#10 Bookkeepers, Payroll Managers & Wage Clerks

Source: *Lightcast (2025)*

Note: analysis only included job postings which had a minimum education requirement.

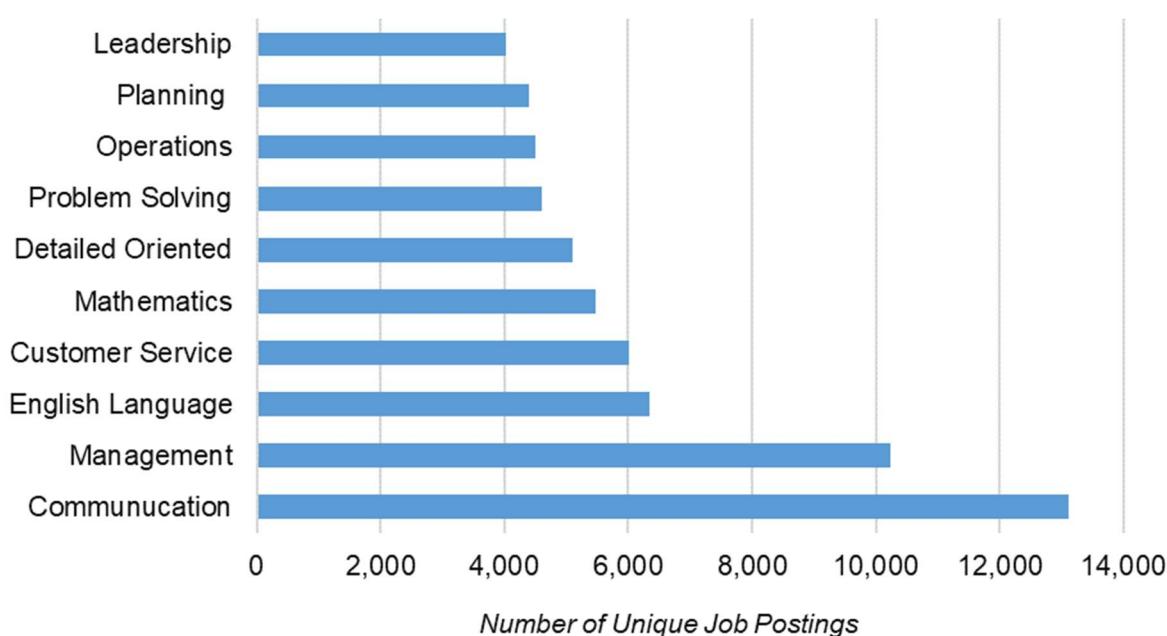
Finally, we can also identify in-demand specialised and common skills that employers in Belfast have been looking for over the last three-year period:

Top 10 In-Demand Specialised Skills in Belfast (2022 - 2025)



Source: Lightcast (2025)

Top 10 In-Demand Common Skills (2022 - 2025)



Source: Lightcast (2025)

As a forward-thinking institution, we will continue to leverage insights provided by Lightcast's labour market analytics and align our curriculum offering accordingly. In doing so, we will ensure our learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure employment, meet employer needs for today and the future, and support economic growth of the region.

c. College Engagement/Collaboration

In order to improve the College reach in tackling disadvantage Belfast Met has a strategic objective in its Strategic Plan to be a 'Partner of Choice'. Subsequently, we have developed partnership delivery models with a range of community and social enterprise partners across the city, over the years, to complement some of the Council led activities in skills and employability and these efforts will continue into the future.

Belfast Met is an active partner in a range development and planning groups in the city including Community Planning, Learning City, Innovation City Belfast, International Working Group and Labour Market Partnership. The College is a co-chair of the Economy Board of the Community Planning Partnership. We have commenced engagement with Belfast City Council in the development of a new Local Economic Partnership (LEP). Conversations continue with the senior leadership team in the Council to develop a closer working partnership between the College and Council which could be underpinned with a Service Level Agreement.

In terms of Belfast Region City Deal, Belfast Met leads on the co-ordination of the work of the Employability and Skills Board and is working across both the Council and other University and College partners to shape a pipeline of skills opportunities which sit alongside BRCD and will be fed into the Local Economic Partnership Planning process

Working with QUB we are currently planning to expand on our existing MoU which was signed four years ago to build a stronger partnership looking at opportunities in digital, advanced manufacturing and health care. In addition to this, the College is leading on the CDIT Partnership with Queen's University and Stranmillis. The Centre for Digital Innovation and Technologies has enabled collaboration to promote pathways into the Digital Sector, enhancing the learner experience through project-based learning and skilling up teachers on the classroom of the future.

Belfast Met is currently the lead Further Education (FE) college for two Curriculum Hubs: Tourism & Hospitality and Digital ICT. These Curriculum Hubs exemplify Belfast Met's leadership in aligning FE provision with regional economic needs and sectoral priorities. Our plans for 2025/26 remain ambitious and are summarised below:

Hospitality & Tourism Hub:

Curriculum Review & Development (2025/26)

Introduce a New Level 2 Traineeship in Hospitality

Launch a one-year delivery model to enhance entry-level pathways into the sector.

Initiate Review of Level 2 Bakery Traineeship (FDQ)

Begin the CCEA 9-Step Quality Assurance process in preparation for September 2026 delivery.

Develop a New Level 3 Hospitality Qualification

Collaborate with NCFE to create an A-Level equivalent qualification to replace Pearson/BTEC, targeting rollout in September 2026.

Review Full-Time Level 3 Curriculum

Conduct a comprehensive review of Hospitality and Tourism programmes to ensure alignment with industry needs.

Apprenticeship Pathway Review

In partnership with sector stakeholders, evaluate qualifications and progression routes for Levels 2 and 3 Apprenticeships.

Review Sector Partnership Membership

Reassess current membership to ensure continued relevance and strategic alignment.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Develop and Fund CPD Plan for 2025/26

Secure Department for the Economy (DfE) funding and implement targeted training for Hospitality and Tourism lecturers.

Host a Sector-Wide Tourism Conference

Partner with Tourism NI to deliver a conference in September 2025 focused on sustainability and “green” tourism.

Enhance Culinary Training for Lecturers

Secure sponsorship from the British Association of Shooting & Conservation and the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts to deliver specialist culinary skills training for chef lecturers.

Communication & Industry Skills Engagement

Represent FE Sector on Key Skills Groups

Actively participate in the NI Hospitality & Tourism Skills Group and its Skills Sub-Group, contributing to policy via the Minister of the Economy’s Tourism Partnership Board.

Deliver Targeted Training Interventions

Continue to support sector employers in attracting, retaining, and upskilling staff through bespoke training programmes.

Develop Responsive Short Courses

Introduce new offerings such as Get into Housekeeping and Know Your Wines to meet evolving industry demands.

Collaborate with Tourism NI on Entry-Level Programmes

Deliver Get into Tourism and Being Big Hearted in Hospitality & Tourism to attract new entrants and raise customer service standards.

Upskill Marginalised Groups through Tour Guiding

Partner with Artsekta to deliver two Level 2 Tour Guiding courses for refugees, asylum seekers, and the long-term unemployed.

Explore Emerging Skills Needs

Maintain a proactive approach to identifying and addressing new training opportunities throughout the academic year.

Digital IT Hub

Curriculum Review & Development

Traineeship Delivery Review

Evaluate current Traineeship delivery models in light of the ETI Report, with a focus on comparing work placement approaches.

New Apprenticeship in Data Science

Design and implement a new Level 3 Apprenticeship programme in Data Science to meet emerging industry demand.

Update IT User Apprenticeships

Refresh and modernise the content of Level 2 and Level 3 IT User Apprenticeships to ensure relevance and progression.

Foundation Degree in Computing

Review and enhance delivery processes for the FD in Computing to improve learner outcomes and operational efficiency.

Cross-Hub Curriculum Collaboration

Work with other Curriculum Hubs to co-develop new programmes, with potential focus areas including Cyber Security and Artificial Intelligence.

Sector Partnership Engagement

Reassess employer engagement strategies and plan for the Sector Partnership Conference on 7 November 2025, followed by a strategic review meeting.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Identify CPD priorities for 2025/26 and submit funding bids to the Department for the Economy (DfE).

AI Subgroup Training

Deliver targeted staff development in Artificial Intelligence through the AI Subgroup.

Computing Staff Development

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for computing lecturers to stay current with industry trends.

Creative & Digital Media CPD

Support staff in Creative and Digital Media with tailored development activities.

Sector Conferences

Host an AI-focused conference in January 2026 and a Cyber Security conference in May 2026 to share best practices and innovations.

Bring IT On

Continue to support the Bring IT On initiative across all six FE colleges to promote digital careers and skills.

Communication – Cross-College & Industry Engagement

Develop a framework to enable effective repurposing and sharing of teaching and learning resources across colleges.

Resource Development

Identify and curate additional resources to support digital curriculum delivery.

Employer Engagement Promotion

Enhance the visibility of FE colleges to employers by showcasing the breadth of services and support available.

School Engagement Strategy

Strengthen outreach to schools to promote FE pathways and digital career opportunities.

Bring IT On – Regional Support

Continue to deliver Bring IT On activities across all six colleges, supporting regional digital skills development.

Additional Strategic Action

Joint Hub Initiatives

Identify and pursue opportunities for collaborative activity across Curriculum Hubs to maximise impact and innovation.

Sectoral Partnerships

Sectoral Partnership for Hospitality & Tourism:

The Sectoral Partnership (SP) for Hospitality & Tourism has made significant strides in its initiatives. The workplan has been completed, agreed upon by SP members, and submitted to the Department for the Economy (DfE).

Key achievements include the review of the Hospitality Traineeship qualification with OCN NI, ensuring it meets the needs of both learners and employers. The qualification received sector endorsement through the CCEA 9 Step QA process, establishing clear progression pathways to Level 3 and integrating the Level 2 Hospitality qualification into the apprenticeship framework. This new qualification and its one-year delivery model will be ready by September 2025.

Additionally, the first stage of the CCEA 9 Step QA process was completed for the Level 2 Traineeship in Bakery, with further development planned for September 2025 and delivery set for September 2026. A comprehensive review of all Hospitality & Tourism Apprenticeship Frameworks, Pathways, and Qualifications for both Level 2 and 3 will occur in the next academic year, aiming for completion by June 2026. This review will consider sector needs and emerging trends such as Green Skills, AI, and legislative requirements.

Preparations are underway for Apprenticeship Week from 2nd to 6th February 2026. The Secretariat and Chair will meet with Hospitality Ulster and Tourism NI in mid-August to agree on a collaborative approach to promote apprenticeships at all levels through various marketing initiatives and key events.

The SP is also continuously reviewing its membership to invite new members from the hospitality and tourism sector, particularly targeting private training organisations that are currently underrepresented. This ongoing effort ensures diverse input into the development of apprenticeship qualifications, frameworks, and pathways.

The secretariat continues to drive sustained across the partnership to support the development and review of curriculum qualifications.

Sectoral Partnership for Digital Marketing:

Sales and Digital Marketing Sectoral Partnership – Progress Update

The Sectoral Partnership has completed the initial stages (G1A form), confirming the need for an Apprenticeship qualification in Digital Marketing.

Work is now focused on identifying key stakeholders and defining the skills and knowledge required to prepare apprentices for employment in the sector.

A key priority for 2025/26 is to establish these skills and knowledge areas through focus groups with practitioners from a range of industries across NI.

The secretariat continues to drive sustained across the partnership to support the development and review of curriculum qualifications.

ICT Sectoral Partnership

Over the 2024/25 academic year, three qualifications were identified as requiring update / development:

- Level 2 IT User Framework (Update)
- Level 3 IT User Framework (Update)
- Level 3 Data Science Framework (New)

The G1A is complete for all three frameworks. DfE Sectoral Partnership Branch has now contacted Skills Development Scotland to begin the process of appointing a Development Partner. A number of National Occupational Standards (NOS) reviews also occurred over the 2025/26 academic year. There was some debate about the different apprenticeship models and provision in the different UK regions.

Over 2024/25 a number of reports were published including Software & Cyber Sectoral Action Plan (June 2024), the DfE Digital Skills Action Plan (September 2024), BRC Digital Skills Assessment (March 2025) and the Green Skills Action Plan (May 2025).

The ICT Sectoral Partnership membership continually review the publication to determine what action point are relevant.

The Workplan for 2025/26 has been approved, including the continued Framework reviews. Additionally, we are looking to refresh the membership, the aim is to hold a half-day conference before the next Sectoral Partnership meeting in November with the aim of inviting industry to the conference and see if they will stay for the meeting. We will be looking at AI, digital skills for business and green skills when reviewing the Apprenticeship Frameworks and curriculum provision.

This work involves looking at how we can support companies meeting their Net Zero targets, e.g. Data Analytics for Emission Tracking (new Data Analysis Framework), sustainable software development, innovation & green solutions along with working practices (enabling remote working and virtualisation).

The secretariat continues to drive sustained across the partnership to support the development and review of curriculum qualifications.

School Engagement

Separately, Belfast Met has several collaborative initiatives with post primary schools aimed at enhancing educational opportunities and supporting student transitions. These include Marketing and Careers engagement with careers teachers in post-primary sector and providing inclusive learning support to prospective students with needs in this area. The College is also represented on the Area Planning Locality Group (East), convened by EA, a forum which brings together all post primary sectors to review data and demographics relating to education planning. The College experience in Belfast in respect of the opportunity to deliver on the expanded entitlement framework has been that the local Schools are of sufficient size or have the capacity to work in consortia to meet their own needs. In this regard the Schools Partnership programmes delivered by Belfast Met are very limited and we do not anticipate any growth given the reducing funding attached to this programme.

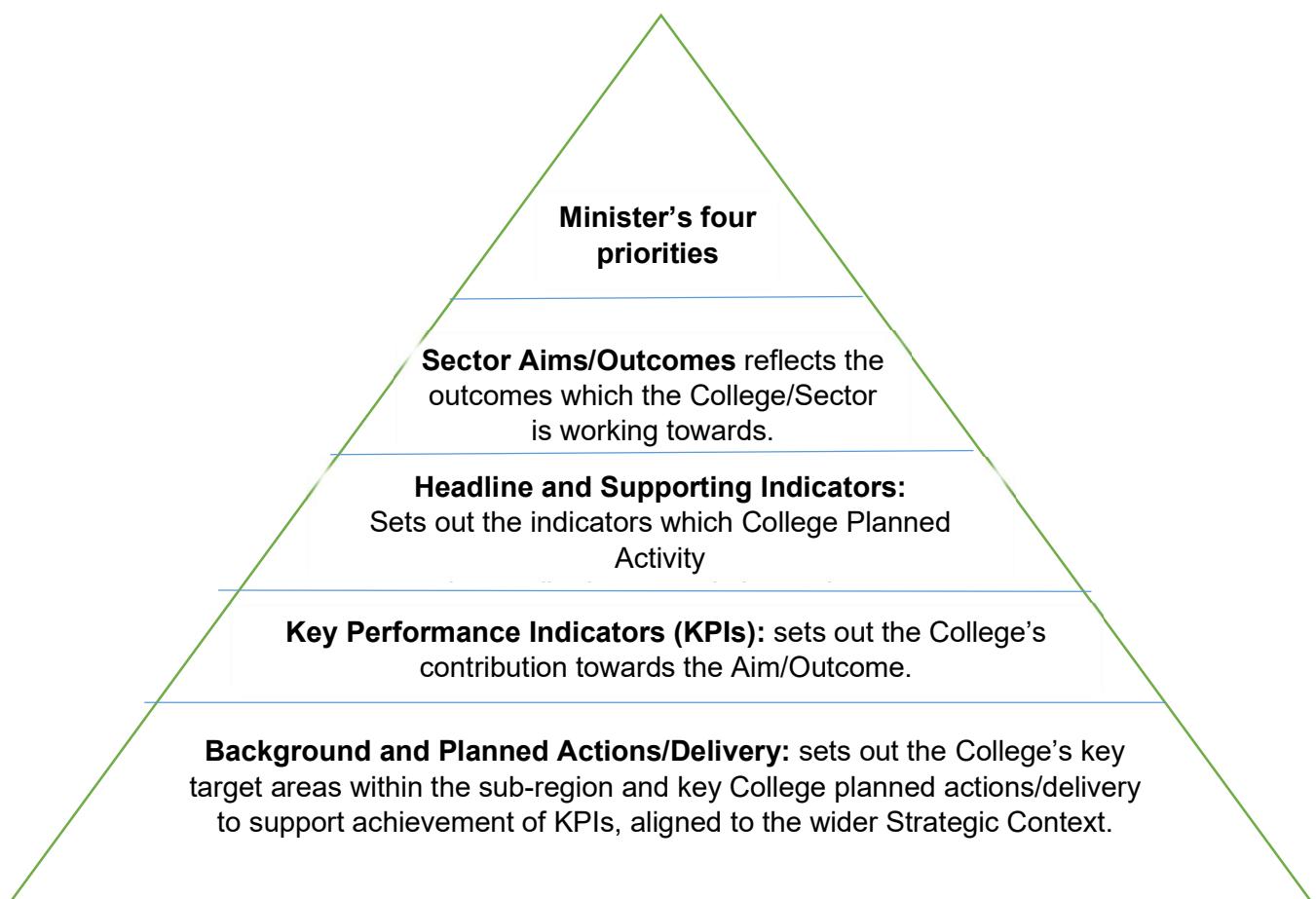
Learner-Centred Engagement Approach

Regardless of the stakeholder involved, the learner remains central to all engagement activities. Our commitment is to ensure that learner needs are continuously aligned with their educational environment. To support this, both formal and informal mechanisms are used to gather and respond to student feedback on a regular basis, including:

- Participation in the National Student Survey.
- Insights from the Learner Satisfaction Survey.
- Dialogue through Staff-Student Consultative Committees.
- Ongoing anecdotal feedback gathered via class discussions and email correspondence upon course completion.

d. 2025/26 Planned Activity

The College Planned Delivery has been set out to show the College contributes to the Minister's four priorities as follows:



In-year College Development Plan Progress Reports tracking '**how well**' the College is performing will be provided to the Department for the Economy. The Department for the Economy will publish reports on performance against Headline and Supporting Indicators to show if actions are 'moving the dial' on the Minister's priorities i.e. '**anyone is better off**', along with progress reports on the Department's Delivery Plan 2024/25.

The below table provides a summary of the Aims/Outcomes and associated KPIs included in the proceeding tables.

Aim/Outcome	KPI
1 To increase regional business productivity/growth through the delivery of tailored/bespoke training programmes.	1.1 To deliver 110 innovation-based projects in SMEs in 2025/26 financial year. 102 ¹⁶ delivered in 2024/25 financial year.
	1.2 To deliver of 190 tailored training programmes in 2025/26 financial year. 150 delivered in 2024/25 financial year.
	1.3 To support 662 ¹⁷ individuals via Skill Up in the 2025/26 financial year. 469 individuals supported in 2024/25.
2 To upskill/reskill individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure employment, meet employer needs for today and the future and support economic growth of the region.	2.1 To enrol 12,383 individuals in the 2025/26 academic year. The total number of individuals enrolled in the College in 2023/24 was 12,365 ¹⁸ .
	2.2 To equip 220 individuals participating in international programmes with key employability skills necessary through participation in Turing and Skills Competitions in the 2025/26 academic year.
	2.3 To support 7,154 individuals who are furthest away from the labour market and with low or no formal qualifications in the 2025/26 academic year.
	2.4 To maintain the retention rate within the College at 92% in 2025/26 academic year (92% in 2023/24).

¹⁶ InnovateUs 66, Connected 26, Innovation Voucher 10.

¹⁷ 443 individuals in the academic year.

¹⁸ 12,365 is from the published FE sector activity report (table 6). This number includes students who did not reach the 1st November threshold. These students are however excluded from the CDR script and therefore are not captured when providing progress through CDP Progress Reports etc.

		2.5	To increase the achievement rate within the College from 85% in 2023/24 to 86% in 2025/26 academic year.
		2.6	To enrol 5,021 individuals in the 2025/26 academic year, who are between 25 and 64 years old to participate in education and training.
3	To address the skills needs of the future workforce in green industries through upskilling and reskilling individuals in support of a net zero economy in Northern Ireland.	3.1	To train 6% of college staff in delivery of green sustainable skills in the 2025/26 academic year.
		3.2	2,246 individuals participating on green/sustainable courses in the 2025/26 academic year.
4	To deliver against the Public Body reporting duties of the Climate Change legislation delivering an energy efficient and sustainable estate.	4.1	To establish the key actions to improve/maintain energy efficiency in the College in the 2025/26 academic year.
5	To contribute to improved regional balance and development of good jobs through the delivery of skills solutions which underpin City and Growth Deals.	5.1	By June 2026, Belfast Met will lead the BRCD Skills and Employability Pillar by developing three separate proposals to address skills and employability needs aligned to Digital Skills and will support the case for aligning BRCD investments with Enhanced Investment Zones

Raise Productivity/Promote Regional Balance	
Aim/Outcome - 1	To increase regional business productivity/growth through the delivery of tailored/bespoke training programmes.
Draft Headline Indicator	Output per hour worked Regional Employment Rate
Draft Supporting Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative active businesses (including number of Innovation Recognitions) Business Support offered by colleges to businesses
Background	<p>By focusing on strategic planning, skills development, and regional collaboration, Belfast Met effectively supports the delivery of the Minister's Economic Vision, contributing to increased productivity and balanced regional development.</p> <p>One of our strategic priorities as outlined in our Strategic Plan is to be a 'Partner of Choice'. As a 'Partner of Choice', we will continue to deliver excellent service, innovative solutions, and impactful outcomes in partnership with employers, industry, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>At Belfast Met, we recognise that strong partnerships are essential to driving innovation, workforce development, and community growth. As a Partner of Choice, we will continue to commit to fostering meaningful collaborations that create real impact. Whether working with local businesses to develop a highly skilled workforce, partnering with community organisations to expand educational access, or engaging with industry leaders to drive economic progress, we will be a key anchor institution that stakeholders turn to for expertise, reliability, and results.</p> <p>Our commitment to excellence, responsiveness, and shared success sets us apart as a valued partner. We strive to understand the evolving needs of employers, educators, and communities, ensuring that our programmes and initiatives align with real-world demands.</p>

	Through innovative solutions, customised training, and collaborative projects, we will continue to build lasting relationships that strengthen our region and enhance opportunities for learners, professionals, and organisations.
KPI 1.1	To deliver 110 innovation-based projects in SMEs in 2025/26 financial year. 102 delivered in 2024/25 financial year.
Planned Activity:	
With an available budget of £277,000 for InnovateUs.	Complete 60 projects.
With an available budget of £102,536 for Connected5.	Complete 36 Innovation Projects
Support companies to secure funding from the Connected Competitive Fund project and deliver their projects.	Complete 2 Connected Competitive Fund Projects
Support companies to secure funding from Invest NI and deliver their Innovation Voucher project.	Complete 12 Innovation Voucher projects

KPI 1.2	To deliver of 190 tailored training programmes in 2025/26 financial year. 150 delivered in 2024/25 financial year.
Planned Activity:	
With an available budget of £250,000 for Skills Focus	Support 160 projects
SME Productivity Booster	Support 14 businesses
DfE Assured Skills Academies ¹⁹	<p>Deliver 8 Assured Skills Academies</p> <p>Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EY x2 • Napier AI • Deloitte x 2 • Version 1 • Collaborative x2
Tailored industry short courses aligned to emerging skills areas such as digital and sustainability	Deliver 8 short courses
KPI 1.3	To support 662²⁰ individuals via Skill Up²¹ in the 2025/26 financial year. 469 individuals supported in 2024/25.
Planned Activity:	
	With a Skill Up budget of £300k, we will deliver 52 courses to 662 participants who will be enrolled by 31 March 2026.

¹⁹ Academies are demand led and we are estimating, based on engagement with the Department, that these are likely to be delivered.

²⁰ ²⁰ 443 individuals in the academic year.

²¹ Targets aligned with LOO for Skill Up received on 19 June 2025.

Good Jobs/Promote Regional Balance/Raise Productivity	
Aim/Outcome - 2	To upskill/reskill individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure employment, meet employer needs for today and the future and support economic growth of the region.
Headline Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good jobs measure based on earning, permanent contracts and guaranteed hours. Regional Employment Rate Output per hour worked
Supporting Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work Quality Indicators Proportion leaving NI HEIs with narrow STEM qualifications Qualifications by Level of Study Economic Inactivity Rate
Background	<p>Belfast Met's Strategic Plan highlights the College's commitment to providing skills-focused education. This is central to preparing learners for the evolving demands of the workforce, supporting economic growth, and fostering innovation across industries. As a 'College of Choice', we offer innovative, high-performing programmes that provide an outstanding development experience and meet the evolving needs of learners, employers, and society.</p> <p>Belfast Met is committed to promoting opportunity, choice, and excellence across all areas of its provision — from Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE). Central to this commitment is the belief that education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of background, circumstance, or mode of study.</p> <p>By June 2026, Belfast Met will host a number of college-wide open days/events to attract and inform potential learners about the educational opportunities available. Additionally, the College will facilitate a series of internal recruitment forum events to foster engagement between marketing and curriculum staff, helping to identify key target groups for courses.</p>

The College is proud to be open and welcoming to people from all walks of life. Whether a learner is pursuing a vocational qualification, an apprenticeship, or a degree-level programme, they will find a supportive and inclusive environment at Belfast Met. This ethos is embedded in the College's Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP).

Widening participation is not simply a matter of social justice — it is an economic imperative. If Northern Ireland is to remain competitive in the face of global challenges, it must harness the talents of all its people. Belfast Met is steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that no student is denied the opportunity to progress in their education because of their personal circumstances or socio-economic background.

Over the next three years, the College will continue to expand its reach, enhance social mobility, build community capacity, and contribute to a fairer society.

In the face of increasingly complex global challenges, Belfast Met remains dedicated to its widening participation goals — particularly to increasing uptake among those students who are most able, yet least likely, to access higher education. This is achieved through targeted outreach, inclusive curriculum design, and tailored personal support interventions that help students reach and fulfil their potential.

Many young people and adults with the academic potential to enter Higher Education do not currently apply to study at the College. This may be due to a range of barriers, including:

- lack of aspiration;
- adverse personal circumstances;
- limited family income;
- insufficient information;
- no family experience of higher education; and/or
- lack of understanding of the benefits of higher education qualifications.

Belfast Met is actively working to dismantle these barriers and to ensure that every learner — regardless of their starting point — has the opportunity to thrive.

Student Wellbeing: At the forefront of our commitment to student welfare, Belfast Met has a dedicated team of Safeguarding and Wellbeing Officers. This team provides tailored support to students presenting with a broad range of welfare-based problems and challenges and is able to engage extensively with students from Widening Participation backgrounds.

The service delivery model revolves around three core principles:

- **Promotion:** Initiatives like school inductions, wellbeing events, online workshops, and wellbeing pop-ups actively promote a culture of wellness.
- **Prevention:** Proactive measures include clinics with external agencies, early intervention, student activities, and comprehensive wellbeing support and guidance.
- **Intervention:** We provide tailored wellbeing tools, strategies, and resources. Our team engages in wellbeing assessments, robust safeguarding efforts, internal support services, Inspire Counselling, and adept referral/signposting to relevant agencies.

This service is highly regarded by students, as highlighted by the 2024 Learner Satisfaction Survey:

- 98% of learners said they felt safe and secure at Belfast Met.
- 93% of learners said they know who to turn to if they feel their wellbeing or safety is at risk.
- 96% of learners agree that the college encourages them to look after their mental health.

Support for Students with additional support needs: We are a College of Choice for learners with additional support needs. This is evidenced by the sustained growth the College has experienced in attracting students with a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical conditions. The Inclusive Learning team ensures that all presenting students, including HE students who are not supported under DSA, have their additional needs assessed and, where appropriate, are provided with curriculum support recommendations and specialist examination arrangements.

Careers and Employability: A team of trained advisers offers information, advice and guidance to current and prospective learners, to ensure they are supported to make effective decisions regarding their future careers and have access to opportunities for skills development,

work experience and employment. In doing so, the Careers and Employability Service delivers an impartial, high-quality professional service which supports inclusion and promotes equality of opportunity. The Centre has dedicated resource allocated for outreach pre-entry work aimed at targeting those most marginalised in our society. This service successfully achieved the renewal of the Matrix Quality Kite Mark (2022 – 25). They are instrumental in rolling out the “Moving on up at the Met Campaign” ensuring that students from economic backgrounds can see progression routes to HE provision within the College and to the real and viable opportunities open to them.

Student Funding Service: The College’s Student Funding Service is crucial in ensuring that both current and prospective learners are enabled to overcome the financial barriers they face to their education and learning. Each year this team assesses and supports student applications across five key funds: Hardship/Learner Support Fund (DfE), Care to Learn (DfE), Higher Education Bursary (Belfast Metropolitan College), Family Action Fund (Family Action), Digital Device Allocation Scheme (Addressing Digital Poverty).

In addition to the above, Belfast Met collaborates with employers to ensure that the skills being taught are relevant to the current job market. This collaboration helps in creating job opportunities for learners and supports employers in competing locally, nationally, and internationally.

By providing innovative, flexible, and high-performing programmes, we will ensure that Belfast Met continues to meet the needs of learners, employers, and communities while delivering on our commitment to inclusive growth and lifelong learning.

A three-year trend analysis of the numbers of individuals studying at Belfast Met, from 2021/22 to 2023/24, is captured in Annex 1 (as requested).

In 2024/25, the over 25s engaging in the AppNI programme was 33.6%.

Belfast Met offers a range of pathways to help individuals 16 and over advance their education and career across a broad and diverse range of professional and technical areas.

Apprenticeships (Levels 2 and 3) are available in a wide range of occupational areas to support business needs. Procurement is currently underway regarding our AppsNI2025 contract. Submission date is 9 July 2025.

Given the move to all Age Apprenticeship this has offered further opportunities for learners to engage with the College. In 2024/25, across both our AppNI and HLA provision, 38% of those learners were aged between 25-64.

As we move into 2025/26, we want to continue to build on this success through continued promotion of Apprenticeship pathways to learners of all ages.

Belfast Met intended to increase the Traineeship offer in 2025/26 to include 7 additional programmes. However, we wanted to consider the outworkings of the evaluation including revision of the blueprint document and supporting operational guidelines before expanding the provision as intended. It is envisaged this expansion will be planned for 2026/27.

In addition, Belfast Met is currently preparing a bid for SfLW. Given that the College was not involved in the delivery of this programme in the previous contract it will take some time to gear up resources and partnerships to be in a position to deliver for the 2026/27 academic year.

KPI 2.1		To enrol 12,383 individuals in the 2025/26 academic year. The total number of individuals enrolled in the College in 2023/24 was 12,365²².
Plans to achieve in the 2025/26 academic year:		
Level 0 - 3	No. of individuals on PT FE	5,074
	No. of individuals on FT FE	2,984
	No. of individuals on Traineeships programme	401
	No. of individuals on Apprenticeships NI programme	727
	No. of individuals on Essential Skills programme	723
Level 4+	No. of individuals on SfLW ²³	0
	No. of individuals on PT HE in FE	809
	No. of individuals on FT HE in FE	1,205
No. of individuals on High Level Apprenticeship programme		460

²² 12,365 is from the published FE sector activity report (table 6). This number includes students who did not reach the 1st November threshold. These students are however excluded from the CDR script and therefore are not captured when providing progress through CDP Progress Reports etc.

²³ Belfast Met will be making a bid under the SfLW framework which closes on 9 July 2025. Given that we have not delivered on this activity in previous years, it is our intention to be able to scale up to deliver on this programme from 2026/27 onwards.

KPI 2.2	To equip 220 individuals participating in international programmes with key employability skills necessary through participation in Turing and Skills Competitions in the 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
KPI 2.3	To support 7,154 individuals who are furthest away from the labour market and with low or no formal qualifications in the 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
No. of individuals from Quintile 1 and 2	4,917
No. of individuals declaring a disability/long term health problem	2,177
No. of individuals on ESOL programmes	826
No of individuals (prisoner enrolments) in Maghaberry Prison undertaking College led courses at a range of levels in the 2025/26 financial year.	347
No. of individuals (prisoner enrolments) in Hydebank Prison undertaking College led courses at a range of levels in the 2025/26 financial year.	90
No. of individuals (prisoner enrolments) in Magilligan Prison undertaking College led courses at a range of levels in the 2025/26 financial year.	324
No. of individuals on Step Up during the 2025/26 financial year.	97
No. of individuals participating on 10 Bank or America Academies.	150

KPI 2.4	To maintain the retention rate within the College at 92% in 2025/26 academic year (92% ²⁴ in 2023/24).
Planned Activity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a minimum of 3 performance reviews with each academic school in 2025/26 to closely monitor learner retention and attendance rates at course, school and CAM level to help identify 'learners at risk'. • Administer the Learner Support Fund (Student Hardship Fund) of circa £600k in 2025/26 to help increase access, retention and achievement for circa 350 learners experiencing exceptional financial difficulty in meeting costs associated with learning. • Achieve an annual learner satisfaction rating of 90% or above. • Following publication of the ETI evaluation of the Traineeship Programme, College Action Plans for Improvement (API) for Traineeships to be submitted by 26 August 2025 and Whole Sector API to be provided by 23 September 2025. APIs to be submitted to ACVED. Regular implementation and impact updates against APIs to be provided to the Traineeship Project Board and progress checks sought as part of CDP updates. • Following publication of the ETI evaluation of the Traineeship Programme, College Action Plans for Improvement (API) for Essential Skills to be submitted by 26 August 2025 and Whole Sector API to be provided by 23 September 2025. APIs to be submitted to Quality Improvement Team. Regular implementation and impact updates against APIs to be provided to QIT against which updates will be provided to the Traineeship Project Board and progress checks sought as part of CDP updates.

²⁴ RAS Performance Rates of final year regulated enrolments by FE College 2019/20 – 2023/24.

KPI 2.5	To increase the achievement rate within the College from 85% ²⁵in 2023/24 to 86% in 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that 90% of students in 2025/26 express satisfaction with the support provided for assessment in end of year surveys. • Facilitate three reviews of the improvement actions identified in the WCQIP by June 2026. • All substantial courses to have a Self-Evaluation Review (SER) in place by October 2025.

²⁵ RAS Performance Rates of final year regulated enrolments by FE College 2019/20 – 2023/24.

KPI 2.6	To enrol 5,021 individuals in the 2025/26 academic year, who are between 25 and 64 years old to participate in education and training.
Planned Activity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support 97 individuals through College Connect+ (32), DARE (35) and WRAP (30) by June 2026²⁶. • Continue to build and grow on the 38% of individuals aged between 25 and 64 engaging in our Apprenticeship activity, both HLA and Apps NI, by June 2026. • Deliver 2 Digital Skills Academies for Women Returners targeting 30 individuals by June 2026. • Launch new community classes in Ligoniel Wolfenden Centre, Shankill Women's Centre, and Belfast South Community Resources and Vine Community Centre by June 2026.

²⁶ As per Step Up LOO July 2025.

Reduce Carbon Emissions	
Aim/Outcome - 3	To address the skills needs of the future workforce in green industries through upskilling and reskilling individuals in support of a net zero economy in Northern Ireland.
Headline Indicator	CO² Emissions per Capita
Supporting Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources Energy Intensity Energy Efficiency Circular economy material and carbon footprint
Background	<p>Belfast Met has launched an ambitious and comprehensive 2030 Sustainability & Climate Action Framework. This framework aims to embed sustainability across every aspect of the College's operations, with the long-term goal of becoming a sustainable and net zero carbon college before 2050.</p> <p>The framework is organised around 11 cross-cutting themes, including Sustainable Leadership, Teaching & Learning, Energy & Climate Change, Water & Waste Management, Procurement & Contracts, Sustainable Construction & Refurbishment, and Partnerships & Engagement.</p> <p>Delivery of this framework is supported by an annual action plan that sets out key activities for each year. This includes ambitious goals for reducing carbon emissions through carbon management projects, sustainable construction, and refurbishment projects.</p> <p>In April 2025, Belfast Met's dedication to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles was recognised with a Highly Commended award at the Belfast Telegraph Business Awards — a remarkable achievement that reflects the passion and commitment of the entire College community.</p> <p>This recognition was echoed again in May 2025, when Belfast Met received another Highly Commended accolade at the Business Eye Awards, further affirming the impact and effectiveness of its ESG initiatives within the Northern Ireland business landscape.</p> <p>Belfast Met continues to lead the way in the local Further Education sector, pioneering innovative approaches to ESG and ensuring that its actions deliver measurable impact both within the organisation and across the wider community.</p>

	Belfast Met has also recently established an internal Green Skills Working Group to review the proposed curriculum offer through the green agenda aligned to the Minister's economic priorities.
KPI 3.1	To train 6%²⁷ of college staff in delivery of green sustainable skills in the 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A further 60 staff to undertake accredited Carbon Literacy Training in partnership with OU during the 2025/26 academic year.
KPI 3.2	2,246²⁸ individuals participating on green/sustainable courses in the 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct 4 meetings of the Green Skills Internal Working Group during the 2025/26 academic year. • Adopt a mapping tool and scoring matrix during the 2025/26 academic year to review the green agenda mapped to the curriculum offer. • Conduct comprehensive internal review of all curriculum provision and implement green transition initiatives in at least 4 curriculum areas by the end of the 2025/26 academic year (business, construction and the built environment, hospitality and tourism and engineering).²⁹

²⁷ 6% of college staff (941 total as at 30 April 2025) equates to 60 individual members of staff.

²⁸ This number may be subject to change in light of a circular DfE are soon to issue to colleges to help provide a definition of 'green/sustainable courses'.

²⁹ This work is separate to any curriculum hub or sectoral partnership activity and refers to the entirety of our curriculum offer.

Reduce Carbon Emissions	
Aim/Outcome - 4	To deliver against the Public Body reporting duties of the Climate Change legislation delivering an energy efficient and sustainable estate.
Headline Indicator	CO² Emissions per Capita
Supporting Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of electricity consumption generated from renewable sources • Energy Intensity • Energy Efficiency • Circular economy material and carbon footprint
Background	<p>Under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the subsequent Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, the College has several reporting duties to ensure an energy-efficient and sustainable estate.</p> <p>The key reporting duties are:</p> <p><u>Climate Change Mitigation Reports</u>: First report due October 2025 with subsequent reports every three years. These reports must detail how the College has reduced greenhouse gas emissions and mitigated the effects of climate change.</p> <p><u>Climate Change Adaptation Reports</u>: First report due January 2026 with subsequent reports every five years. These reports should include assessments of climate change impacts, proposals for adaptation, implementation timelines, and progress evaluations.</p> <p>These regulations aim to ensure that public bodies actively contribute to Northern Ireland's goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.</p>

KPI 4.1	To establish the key actions to improve/maintain energy efficiency in the College in the 2025/26 academic year.
Planned Activity:	
In 2025/26 academic year, to establish key actions to improve/maintain energy efficiency / GHG emissions of College and reduce impact of the college on the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 1-Rollout of Food waste recycling facilities in all canteens / staffrooms in each campus by September 2025. • Action 2- Implementation of Social value clauses in new Catering contract (Theme 3 -Delivering zero carbon) by September 2025. • Action 3- Determine College Scope 3 emissions and develop appropriate metrics to monitor these emissions by September 2025. • Action 4 - Develop a new sustainability travel plan covering travel to work, travel at work and travel for work by March 2026. • Action 5 – Achieve recertification of ISO 14001 Environmental Management system by September 2025. • Action 6 – Achieve recertification of ISO 50001 Energy Management system by September 2025.
In 2025/26 financial year, Minor Works projects³⁰, pending funding allocation, that contribute towards a sustainable College estate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade to more efficient chiller system to Springvale Campus IT server room by September 2025. • Installation of 125kwp Solar PV system at Millfield campus by September 2025.

³⁰ Includes Energy Branch Invest to Save Funded projects.

<p>In 2025/26 academic year, improve baseline position for each College campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Carbon emissions</u> Achieve reduction in college campus Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 25% against 2016/17 baseline. • <u>Energy Consumption</u> Achieve reduction in overall college campus energy consumption by 25% against 2016/17 baseline. • <u>Renewable Energy</u> To increase energy generated from Solar PV renewable sources by 25% from 2024-25 baseline.
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Promote Regional Balance & Raise Productivity	
Aim/Outcome - 5	To contribute to improved regional balance and development of good jobs through the delivery of skills solutions which underpin City and Growth Deals.
Headline Indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Output per hours worked Regional Employment Rate
Supporting Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative active businesses (including number of Innovation Recognitions) Proportion leaving NI HEIs with narrow STEM qualifications. Economic Inactivity Rate excluding students. Qualifications by level of study (HLAs).
Background	<p>Belfast Met has played a leading role, alongside Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) partners, to inform and shape the Employability and Skills Proposition. This sets out how the partners will work together to maximise the benefits of the city deal capital investment.</p> <p>The BRCD unlocks £1 billion of transformative co-investment, which will deliver more and better jobs, a positive impact on the most deprived communities, and a balanced spread of benefits across the region.</p> <p>Belfast Met has been leading the skills and employability programme under the BRCD since its inception. The College provides support to the BRCD Programme Office and chairs the BRCD skills and employability board.</p> <p>The College works closely with the BRCD Executive Board to ensure that other colleges are involved in feeding into the skills aspects of the city and growth deals.</p> <p>Belfast Met is committed to delivering skills solutions that underpin City and Growth Deals. This includes conducting region-wide city and growth deal skills assessments and action plans covering advanced manufacturing, digital, and creative industries.</p> <p>The College continues to support the development of the Centre for Digital Innovation and Technology (C.D.I.T) and works to ensure that City and Growth Deal opportunities are aligned with evolving approaches to regional economic planning.</p>

KPI 5.1	By June 2026, Belfast Met will lead the BRCD Skills and Employability Pillar by developing three separate proposals to address skills and employability needs aligned to Digital Skills.
Planned Activity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully chair the BRCD Employability and Skills Pillar and participate in 6 BRCD and Innovation City Belfast strategic planning groups by June 2026. • Develop a Classroom of the Future Proof of Concept proposal in partnership with CDIT by January 2026. • Implement the core pillars of the CDIT partnership by June 2026.

5. Key Challenges/Constraints

The below table sets out the challenges/constraints³¹ towards achievement of planned delivery set out in section 4 above.

Challenge	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
Industrial Relations Landscape – Comparisons to teaching profession for parity in respect of pay aligned to contractual arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action short of strike, withholding of grades impacting on students' ability to complete qualifications and progress Continuous negative impact on FE activities which acts as a potential recruitment drive for post primary schools Uncertainty leads to parents and students taking alternative pathways not within FE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two year pay deal accepted by lecturing trade unions Employer commitment to workload review in 2024/25 Employer commitment to pay parity review in 2025/26 Employer commitment to take forward FE transformation
Economic Planning Complexity – Pace of change of the key drivers for education and skills in FE Sector with new economic priorities and target actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges in aligning College Development Plans to evolving indicators. Staff resources committed to existing curriculum delivery with limited flexibility. Work underway with Councils to integrate local College curriculum plans with regional LEP plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing engagement to refine performance indicators from FE programmes to link to Minister economic priorities. More clarity required on the approach to regional planning and LEPs and alignment with Council and InvestNI roles. Formal re-engagement with InvestNI commenced and ongoing via representations at LSPs

³¹ Drafted by FE sector.

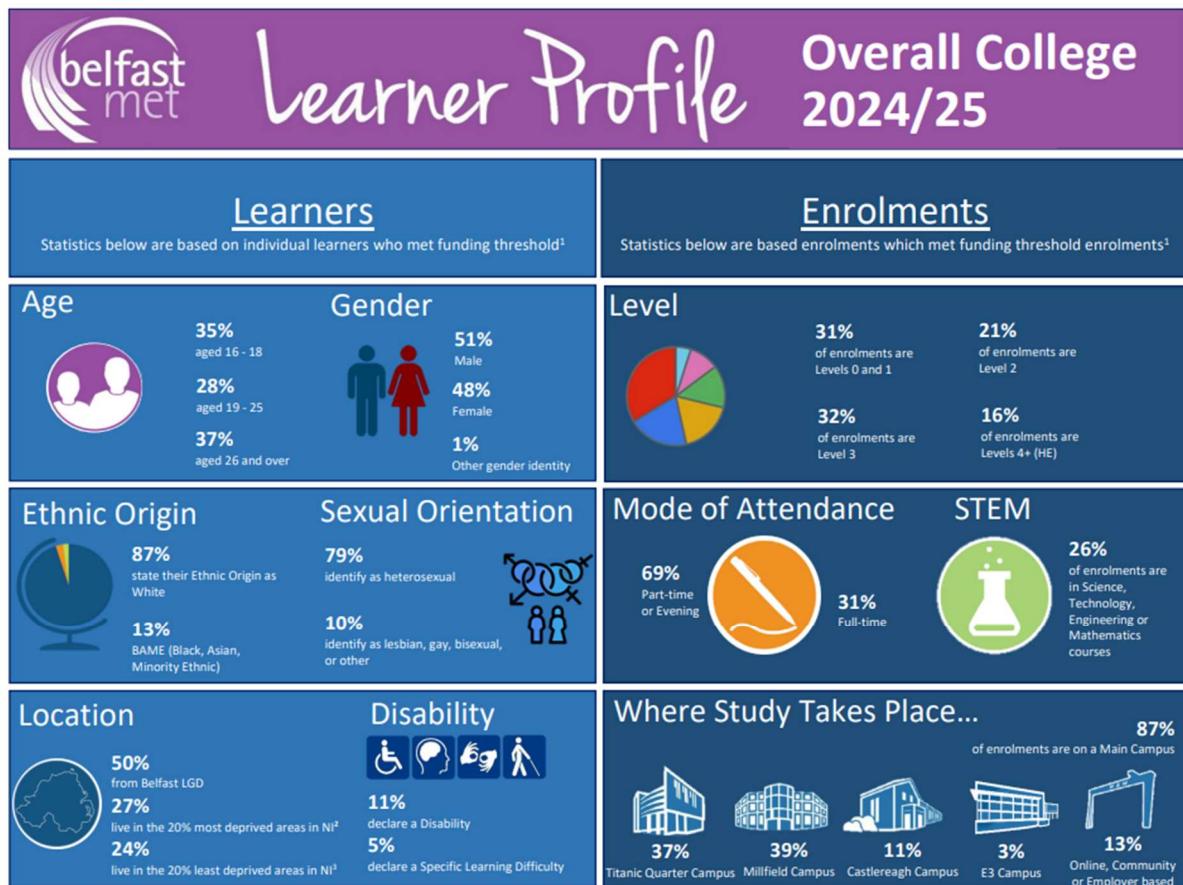
Challenge	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
<p>Uncertainty and Complexity Around Funding Streams and Delays in LOOs – impacts on ability of Colleges to include planned delivery in curriculum build and associated targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncertainty on budgets, downward pressures coupled with a 3 year budget settlement with further savings anticipated. Late approval or visibility of additional funding streams becoming available can make it difficult to build into delivery planning which starts at different time-frames compared to the commencement of the academic year in September whilst requiring full-spend by March. Range and variety of funding pots and compliance and eligibility issues takes time to put in place and test learner eligibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More visibility through NIFON and Curriculum Directors on scale of opportunities. Holding back on recruitment and utilising full-time staff whilst supplementing with part-time lectures as required Explore the opportunity to pull a number of separate programmes in over a central theme : Business and Innovation, Support for Inclusion Wider consideration of the funding model requires NIFON input in terms of different rates to ensure consistency and viability. Work with funders for release of LoOs earlier in the year to enable full integration into curriculum planning and delivery Identification earlier from funders of new or additional in-year allocations to enable building of capacity
<p>Recruitment challenges Impacting on Enrolment – Colleges not being able to attract lecturers/trainers in traditional trade and STEM areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trend for last 5 years of significant interest in trade and STEM areas which cannot be accommodated due to recruitment challenges. Aging profile of the workforce may have longer term impact in key sectors with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate review through HR sector working group of trends in applications and enrolments in last 3 years Implement pay parity to increase salary levels and consideration of specialist lecture grades Understand the opportunity for more flexible approach in terms of recruitment premium for agreed occupational areas

Challenge	Potential Impact	Mitigating Actions
	<p>significant critical skills gaps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative impact on curriculum offer, quality of service provision and learner success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure pay remit approval to progress towards salary expectations Industrial Relations review to commence, focusing on pay parity and terms and conditions
<p>Investment in facilities (including IT and AI) and infrastructure to ensure competitiveness and to support action towards net zero targets in context of one-year budgetary landscape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to be at the forefront of new advances in technology developments. Failure to implement full obligations under the Climate Change Act and impact on net/zero/sustainability targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further in-year bids to be placed to DfE to secure funding to deliver new initiatives. Progress commenced with establishment of baselines and initial progress towards targets.

The College has a Risk Management Framework in place including Corporate and Operational Risk Registers from which key risks are reflected.

Annex 1: College Data Analysis

Appendix 1: 2024/25 Belfast Met Learner Profile



Appendix 2: Belfast Met Learner Profile Trend Analysis (2019/20 – 2023/24)

Who are our customers?

Learner Profile: 5-Year Trends at Belfast Met

- Next, we present a 5-year trend analysis for each of the demographic characteristics for Belfast Met only.
- The aim of this was to provide insights into how our learner profile has / hasn't changed over the last 5 years.

Quintile 1

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners from Quintile 1 (2019/20 - 2023/24)



Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Groups

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners from BAME Groups (2019/20 - 2023/24)



Dependents

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners with dependents (2019/20 - 2023/24)

A bar chart titled 'Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners with dependents (2019/20 - 2023/24)'. The y-axis represents the percentage from 0% to 14% in 2% increments. The x-axis shows the academic years 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, and 2023/24. The bars are colored dark blue, cyan, green, and light green. The data values are: 2019/20 (12.3%), 2020/21 (8.6%), 2021/22 (11.4%), 2022/23 (11.0%), and 2023/24 (11.8%).

Academic Year	Proportion (%)
2019/20	12.3%
2020/21	8.6%
2021/22	11.4%
2022/23	11.0%
2023/24	11.8%


❖ Proportion of enrolments accounted for by learners with dependents has fluctuated over the 5-year period, but has decreased by 4% overall

Disability

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners with a disability (2019/20 - 2023/24)



Over 25's

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners over 25 years old (2019/20 - 2023/24)



LGBTQ

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners identifying as LGBTQ (2019/20 - 2023/24)



Other Religions

Belfast Met enrolments accounted for by learners from non-Christian backgrounds (2019/20 - 2023/24)



Who are our customers?

Summary: 5-Year Trends at Belfast Met

	Proportion of Enrolments Account For (5-Year Trend)
Quintile 1	5% increase
BAME	49% increase
Dependents	4% decrease
Disability	15% decrease
Over 25's	23% increase
LGBTQ	70% increase
Other Religions	31% increase

Appendix 2: Belfast Met Staffing Headcount

Staff Type	24/25 Staff Count Q3		Staff Count Totals Q3 24/25
	FT	PT	
ELT	5	0	5
Academic	238	86	324
PTL	0	209	209
Support	331	72	403
Totals	575	366	941

Source: Belfast Met HR Committee Papers for Q3

Appendix 3: 2025 Learner Satisfaction Survey Report



Overall College Results⁵ (% Agreement)			
	2024	2025	% Change
Overall Learner Satisfaction Indicator			
I feel welcome at Belfast Met	94	95	+1
I feel safe and secure at Belfast Met	98	99	+1
Belfast Met is an excellent place to study	98	99	+1
Belfast Met is an excellent place to study	94	95	+1
I would recommend this course to a friend or family member	91	92	+1
I believe that I have made the right course choice	98	95	-3
I enjoy my course *	89	90	+1
College Staff			
My tutors are cooperative and helpful	91	92	+1
Reception Areas	88	87	-1
I can get help from the following staff:			
The Library	91	93	+2
Careers	83	86	+3
Canteen	86	88	+2
IT	85	86	+1
Student Support	87	87	0
College Environment			
I am treated with respect and dignity by Belfast Met staff	97	98	+1
I am treated with respect and dignity by fellow students	97	97	0
I feel comfortable interacting with others from different backgrounds, religious differences, ages, races, and abilities	99	99	0
I would recommend Belfast Met to my family and friends	95	95	0
Teaching & Learning			
I am satisfied with my course *	90	91	+1
My teachers/tutors arrive to class on time	92	92	0
The content of my course is interesting	91	90	-1
My course is challenging (in a good way)	89	88	-1
I have good support to help me learn and progress (e.g., tutorial/teaching team) *	91	92	+1
I believe the teaching on my course is good (e.g., teachers use a variety of teaching and learning methods)	87	89	+2
My tutors use different ways to help me learn (e.g., videos, quizzes, group work) *	85	86	+1
My tutor informed me how to communicate with them outside of class (e.g. via email, Teams, Canvas)	92	93	+1
My tutor responds to me promptly if I contact them with questions outside of class	87	88	+1
The course's online resources are useful *	86	88	+2
I have been given opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy, and digital skills throughout my course.	84	85	+1
Tutors encourage me to work to the best of my ability *	98	98	0
I am clear about what will be covered in each module/unit/subject I am studying	96	97	+1
I know what I need to do to pass my course & my tutor informs me of any changes	97	98	+1
I am clear about the level of Maths, English and ICT I need for progression	98	99	+1
Assessment & Feedback			
I received an assessment schedule at the start of my course	91	93	+2
I was given clear guidance and support to prepare for assessments *	96	97	+1

The expected standards of work are made clear to me (i.e., I know what to do to obtain a certain grade/mark) *	96	98	+2
My assessments are spaced evenly throughout the year	91	92	+1
I get clear guidance on how to improve my grade	95	96	+1
When I meet the hand in date, I receive timely feedback (within 15 working days)	89	93	+4
Future Plans			
I am learning new skills that will help in real life *	96	96	0
My course is preparing me well for a career in this area	96	97	+1
My course is preparing me well for further study in this area	97	97	0
I have received support and guidance on what my next steps will be on completion of my course	91	94	+3
I have benefitted or expect to benefit from the links the College has with the relevant Industry/University	92	95	+3
I am learning literacy, numeracy and digital skills that will prepare me for my chosen career.	94	96	+2
Belfast Met Services			
I am aware of the student handbook and what support/information it provides	87	85	-2
I am clear about the support I can get from the College (e.g. Learner Success) *	89	91	+2
I am aware of who I could talk to about Safeguarding *	83	86	+3
The facilities provided at the College help me learn *	96	97	+1
I am satisfied with the College's online learning provision	89	93	+4
I can easily access online learning facilities (e.g. Canvas, BigBlueButton, MS Teams etc.)	91	95	+4
When I have had problems getting online, the College has helped me access online learning	90	92	+2
I find the information provided for my course through online platforms fully accessible and readable.	92	95	+3
My course resources are uploaded regularly to Canvas.	-	89	N/A
Course resources which are uploaded to Canvas are well organised and easy to find.	-	87	N/A
Resources on Canvas are up to date and relevant to me / my course.	-	89	N/A
College Culture & Diversity			
I have had opportunities to interact socially with other students whilst studying at Belfast Met	97	97	0
I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies Belfast Met has to offer	93	92	-1
The College has shared spaces where I can go to relax or socialise with other students	93	94	+1
I feel part of a diverse & inclusive culture at Belfast Met	97	97	0
I think Belfast Met values students regardless of their unique backgrounds, identities, and abilities	98	98	0
I feel that my unique background and identity are valued at Belfast Met	97	98	+1
Student Wellbeing			
The College encourages me to look after my mental health	96	97	+1
I know who to ask for help if my safety and wellbeing or that of a fellow student is at risk	93	94	+1
The support the College provides for my personal wellbeing is good	96	97	+1

Appendix 4: Retention, Achievement & Success Rates

The RAS rates cited in this document are taken from the most recent publication of [DfE's FE Sector Activity Report](#), which covers the period 2019/20 – 2023/24.

Table A30: Performance rates of final year regulated enrolments by FE College (2019/20 to 2023/24)

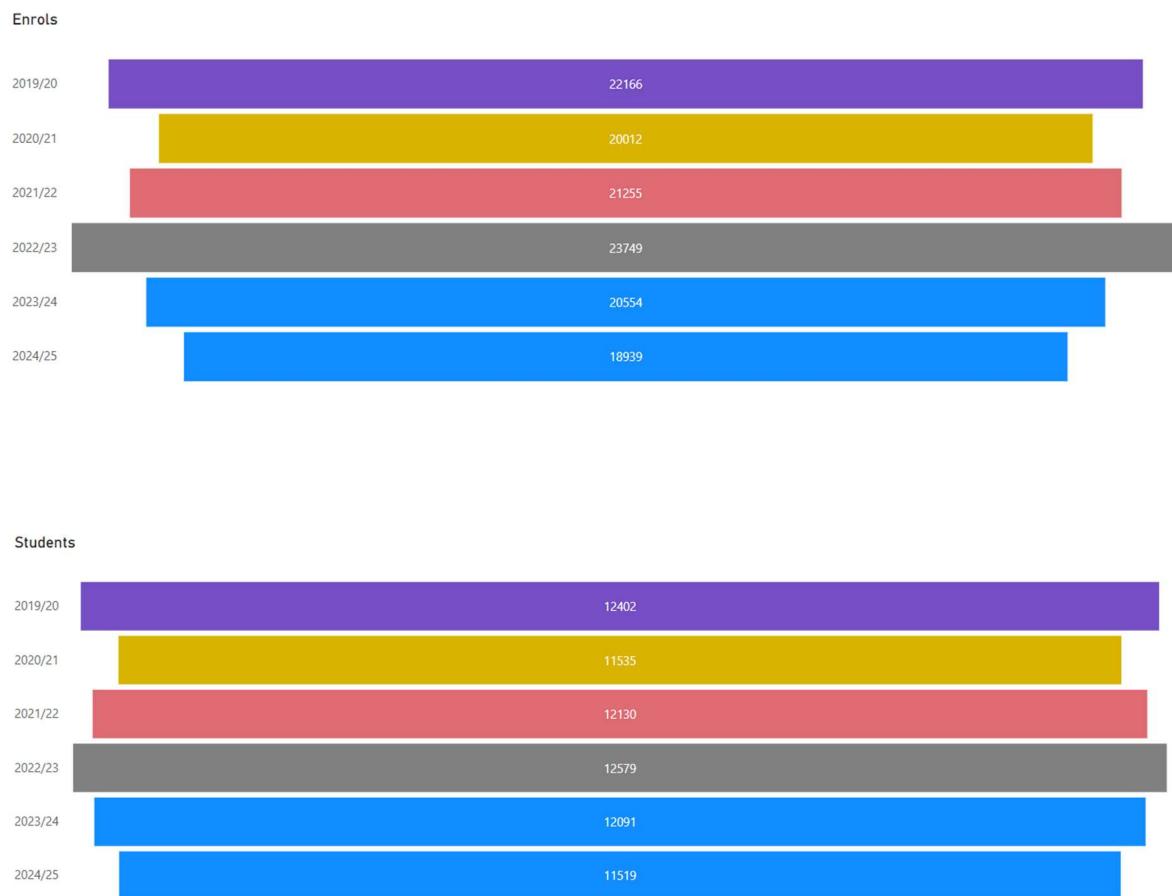
Academic Year	FE College	Final Year enrolments	Final Year Completers	Retention Rate	Achievements	Achievement Rate	Success Rate
2019/20	Belfast Metropolitan College	18,240	16,700	92%	14,645	88%	80%
	Northern Regional College	11,705	10,665	91%	8,220	77%	70%
	North West Regional College	8,520	7,730	91%	6,660	86%	78%
	South Eastern Regional College	18,605	16,925	91%	15,330	91%	82%
	Southern Regional College	15,385	14,150	92%	12,410	88%	81%
	South West College	11,070	10,200	92%	8,395	82%	76%
	Total	83,530	76,370	91%	65,660	86%	79%
2020/21	Belfast Metropolitan College	15,330	13,990	91%	12,160	87%	79%
	Northern Regional College	8,975	7,970	89%	6,970	87%	78%
	North West Regional College	6,775	5,940	88%	4,925	83%	73%
	South Eastern Regional College	15,010	13,270	88%	12,260	92%	82%
	Southern Regional College	11,775	11,045	94%	9,560	87%	81%
	South West College	8,170	7,400	91%	6,125	83%	75%
	Total	66,035	59,620	90%	52,000	87%	79%
2021/22	Belfast Metropolitan College	16,580	15,020	91%	13,015	87%	79%
	Northern Regional College	9,360	8,275	88%	6,820	82%	73%
	North West Regional College	8,220	7,105	86%	6,010	85%	73%
	South Eastern Regional College	13,055	11,340	87%	10,470	92%	80%
	Southern Regional College	12,915	11,810	91%	10,215	86%	79%
	South West College	8,725	7,935	91%	6,700	84%	77%
	Total	68,860	61,485	89%	53,230	87%	77%
2022/23	Belfast Metropolitan College	18,275	16,670	91%	14,310	86%	78%
	Northern Regional College	10,340	9,215	89%	7,410	80%	72%
	North West Regional College	7,955	7,020	88%	6,000	85%	75%
	South Eastern Regional College	16,255	14,690	90%	13,340	91%	82%
	Southern Regional College	14,110	12,895	91%	11,140	86%	79%
	South West College	9,240	8,105	88%	6,765	83%	73%
	Total	76,170	68,600	90%	58,965	86%	77%
2023/24	Belfast Metropolitan College	15,560	14,270	92%	12,125	85%	78%
	Northern Regional College	8,830	7,540	85%	6,350	84%	72%
	North West Regional College	7,840	6,980	89%	6,085	87%	78%
	South Eastern Regional College	15,535	14,430	93%	13,030	90%	84%
	Southern Regional College	13,365	12,325	92%	10,605	86%	79%
	South West College	9,930	8,940	90%	7,610	85%	77%
	Total	71,060	64,480	91%	55,800	87%	79%

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)

Notes:

For further details on definitions please refer to the metadata.

Appendix 5: Belfast Met Learner & Enrolment Trends (2019/20 – 2024/25)



Source: Belfast Met Historical CDR Power BI Dashboard

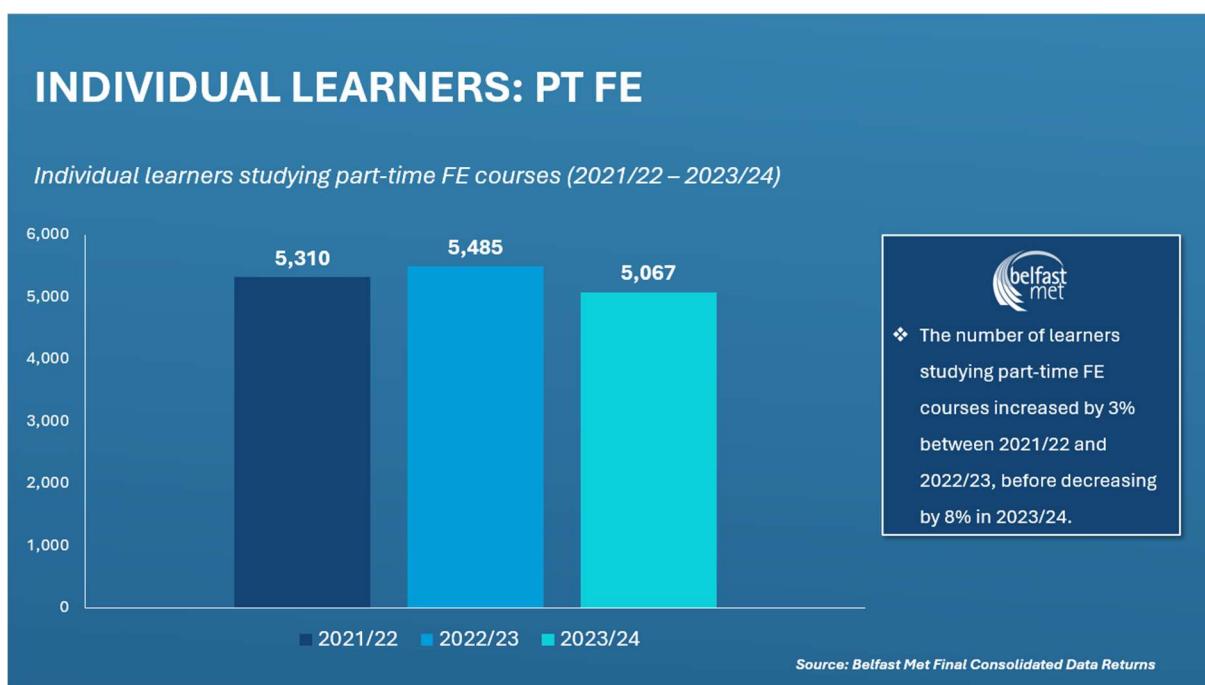
Appendix 6: Trend Analysis of Learners by Provision Area (2021/22 – 2023/24)

Raw Data

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Individuals on PT FE (excl. ES)	5310	5485	5067
Individuals on FT FE (excl. ES)	2754	2921	3014
Individuals on Traineeships	118	222	273
Individuals on AppsNI	886	808	667
Individuals on Essential Skills	701	686	774
Individuals on PT HE	1033	1113	865
Individuals on FT HE	1089	1037	1075
Individuals on HLAs	203	295	356

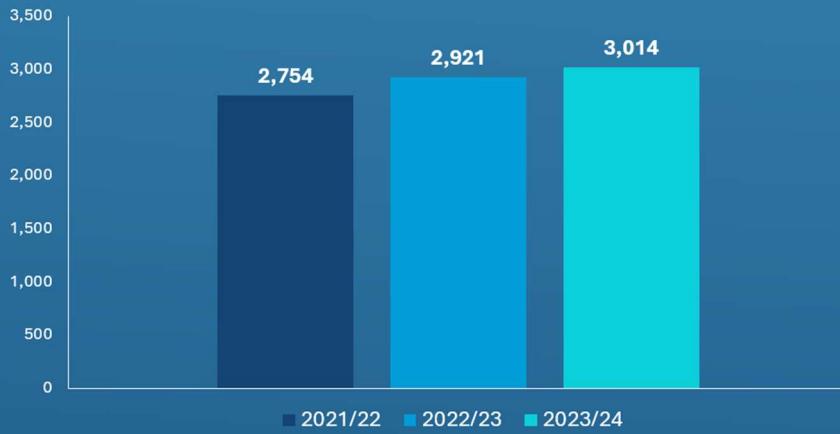
Source: Belfast Met Final Year Consolidated Data Returns 2021/22 – 2023/24

Trend Analysis



INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: FT FE

Individual learners studying full-time FE courses (2021/22 – 2023/24)



- ❖ The number of learners studying full-time FE courses has increased steadily across the last three years, by a total of 9%.

Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: TRAINEESHIPS

Individual learners studying on Traineeship programmes (2021/22 – 2023/24)



- ❖ The number of learners studying on Traineeship programmes has increased considerably across the period, by a total of 131%.

Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: APPSNI

Individual learners studying on AppsNI programmes (2021/22 – 2023/24)



Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns



- ❖ The number of learners studying on AppsNI programmes has decreased across the period, by a total of 25%.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Individual learners studying Essential Skills courses (2021/22 – 2023/24)



Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns



- ❖ Despite a small dip in 2022/23, the number of Essential Skills learners has increased over the last three years, by a total of 10%.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: PT HE

Individual learners studying part-time HE courses (2021/22 – 2023/24)



- ❖ The number of individual learners studying part-time HE courses increased by 8% between 2021/22 and 2022/23, before decreasing by 22% in 2023/24.

Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: FT HE

Individual learners studying full-time HE courses (2021/22 – 2023/24)



- ❖ The number of individual learners studying full-time HE courses has remained relatively consistent across the period, only decreasing slightly by 1%.

Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns

INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS: HLAs

Individual learners studying on HLA programmes (2021/22 – 2023/24)



- ❖ The number of individual learners studying on HLA programmes has increased considerably across the period, by a total of 75%.

Source: Belfast Met Final Consolidated Data Returns

SUMMARY: 3-YEAR LEARNER TRENDS BY PROVISION AREA

	3-Year Trend
Part-Time FE	<i>Decreased by 4.5%</i>
Full-Time FE	<i>Increased by 9%</i>
Traineeships	<i>Increased by 131%</i>
AppsNI	<i>Decreased by 25%</i>
Essential Skills	<i>Increased by 10%</i>
Part-Time HE	<i>Decreased by 16%</i>
Full-Time HE	<i>Decreased by 1%</i>
HLAs	<i>Increased by 75%</i>



- ❖ Findings of the analysis are positive. Although learner numbers have increased in 4 areas and decreased in 4 areas, two of the decreases are minimal (1% & 4.5%), whereas increases have been substantial, particularly in terms of Traineeships and HLAs.

Appendix 7: Key Local Data for Belfast Metropolitan College

Most deprived SOAs within BELFAST LGD								
INCOME		EMPLOYMENT		HEALTH AND DISABILITY		EDUCATION, SKILLS AND TRAINING		
Rank	£	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
7	Woodvale 1	1	New Lodge 2	1	Whiterock 2	1	New Lodge 3	1
8	Ardoine 2	2	Water Works 2	2	Collin Glen 2	2	Woodvale 1	2
12	Woodvale 3	8	Whiterock 2	3	New Lodge 2	3	Woodvale 2	3
23	Water Works 2	9	New Lodge 1	4	Water Works 2	4	Shankill 2	4
27	Woodvale 2	11	Collin Glen 2	5	Whiterock 3	5	Whiterock 2	5
29	Ardoine 1	12	Ardoine 3	6	Ardoine 3	6	The Mount 2	6
30	Crumlin 2	15	Ardoine 2	7	Falls 2	7	Shankill 1	7
34	Crumlin 1	17	Whiterock 3	8	Water Works 1	8	The Mount 1	8
35	Blackstaff 1	18	Water Works 1	10	New Lodge 1	9	Falls 2	9
44	Duncairn 2	19	Ardoine 1	11	Falls 3	10	Crumlin 2	10
ACCESS TO SERVICES		LIVING ENVIRONMENT		CRIME AND DISORDER		MDM		
Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
278	Collin Glen 1	1	Botanic 2	2	Falls 2	2	Water Works 2	2
306	Derryaghy 1	2	Botanic 1	3	Shankill 2	4	Ardoine 2	4
314	Highfield 1	3	Windsor 3	4	Botanic 3	7	New Lodge 2	7
326	Legoniel 1	4	Beechmount 1	5	Water Works 3	8	Woodvale 1	8
332	Glencairn 1	5	Windsor 4	9	Falls 3	9	Ardoine 3	9
334	Stormont 1	6	Malone 3	11	Botanic 2	12	Woodvale 2	12
355	Glencolin 1	7	Water Works 3	13	Botanic 5	15	Water Works 1	15
415	Upper Malone 1	8	Blackstaff 1	14	Clonard 2	16	Ardoine 1	16
434	Island 1	11	Botanic 3	16	Ardoine 3	17	Woodvale 3	17
441	Cavehill 3	12	Chichester Park 1	17	The Mount 1	18	Shankill 2	18
For each domain, as well as the overall multiple measure the 890 SOAs in NI are ranked from 1 (most deprived) to 890 (least deprived)								

Annex 2: Employment Rate Including Students, NI LGDs

Employment Rate Including Inactive Students (LGDs)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Antrim & Newtownabbey	80.6%	79.4%	81.9%	81.2%	76.3%	81.2%	80.8%	83.1%
Ards & North Down	78.8%	81.0%	78.3%	79.7%	78.0%	80.5%	78.6%	82.8%
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	76.4%	79.5%	80.6%	79.9%	78.1%	80.3%	83.0%	81.7%
Belfast	75.9%	72.1%	75.1%	74.6%	71.1%	73.9%	74.4%	76.5%
Causeway Coast & Glens	65.4%	69.8%	71.8%	72.0%	71.6%	75.9%	74.7%	73.7%
Derry & Strabane	64.4%	70.0%	73.5%	75.4%	70.0%	73.4%	73.7%	72.7%
Fermanagh & Omagh	73.7%	79.4%	77.7%	74.4%	74.4%	78.7%	79.2%	78.5%
Lisburn & Castlereagh	82.8%	82.6%	82.6%	85.6%	82.5%	82.2%	82.7%	82.8%
Mid & East Antrim	79.5%	80.9%	76.2%	79.9%	78.7%	77.7%	82.4%	83.3%
Mid Ulster	79.5%	80.2%	79.3%	83.0%	82.4%	80.5%	83.7%	83.8%
Newry & Mourne	78.5%	73.0%	74.1%	79.2%	79.1%	78.8%	80.8%	83.5%
Northern Ireland	76.1%	76.6%	77.3%	78.3%	76.0%	78.1%	79.1%	80.0%

Source: DfE Research Bulletin (2024): Measuring Regional Balance Using Employment Rate

What are the needs of our city?



Key Local Data for Belfast: Challenges

15.6% of Belfast's working age population have no qualifications (above NI average of 13%).



Belfast West: 29% (*highest in NI*)

Belfast North: 18%

Belfast East: 7%

Belfast South: 7%

40% of Belfast's working-age population are educated to Level 4+ (below NI average of 43%).



Belfast South: 54%

Belfast East: 47%

Belfast North: 32%

Belfast West: 23%

There are currently **stark contrasts** in qualification levels across Belfast. Improving the skills profile, especially in deprived areas, is crucial for achieving economic growth, increased productivity, and regional balance.

Source: *DfE Research Bulletin (2024): Qualifications & Skills Overview*