

Feedback Report on Sister City Visit to Hefei

27th October to 2nd November 2013

1. Background to Hefei

Hefei has a population of 7.5 million and covers an area of 11.5 km squared. It is the capital of the Anhui province and is well connected to other China cities and global destinations due to excellent connections by rail, road, shipping transportation and air travel.

Hefei has developed rapidly during the period 2006 to 2011. In recent years its GDP rate was generally around 17%, however this has started to slow down slightly. It is a major industrial city known for its powerful manufacturing capacity with a focus on home appliances such as fridges, washing machines, air conditioning and colour tv sets. It is the only city in China capable of producing both LCD and plasma screens and is ranked 1st among China's provincial cities in terms of speed of development. Hefei is also known for car production and innovation in relation to electric vehicles and boasts a bus service powered purely by electricity in the city.

The city has 200 science and research institutes and hosts the University of Science and Technology of China. In relation to research and development it is ranked 3rd city in China next to Shanghai and Beijing. In 2012 the city also ranked 3rd in China as an attractive investment destination.

While air quality is a major issue for many Chinese cities Hefei takes pride in having 200 days per year of good air quality and continues to seek ways of improving on this. The city administration invests in the eco environment and Hefei has won recognition as 1 of 3 landscape environmental cities in China. New areas of focus for the city include solar industry, speech synthesis software, addressing the water quality of the fresh water lake Chahou and tourism.

2. Sister City Relationships

Hefei has 30 years of Sister City experience, Columbus Ohio is currently the most active of all Sister Cities which include:

Kurume, Japan	Freetown, Sierra Leone
Bujumbura, Burundi	Columbus, USA
Aalborg, Denmark	Lleida, Spain
Darebin, Australia	Wonju, Korea
Belfast, UK	Osnabrueck, Germany
Santiago, Chile	

Hefei also has friendly cooperative city relationships with:

Daejeno, Korea	Seosan, Korea
Rostock, Germany	

The city administration values learning from other cities and wishes to expand its relationships by establishing friendly cooperation with a city in France.

3. Learning from other Sister Cities

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Columbus Ohio have a 25 year relationship with Hefei. Ohio State University works with Hefei on:

- Electric vehicle, construction light gauge steel
- Eco partnership to work on water quality of lake Chahou
- Green buildings (note forum for alternative Belfast, FAB)
- The city hosts students for language schools each year
- Teachers from Columbus spend time teaching in Hefei (Opportunities for unemployed teachers from Belfast)

Wonju, Korea

- Wonju is hosting the 2018 Winter Olympics (construction opportunities)
- It has a sporting focus with Hefei
- It majors in medical device manufacturing (Andor Technology)
- It promotes collaboration with its 6 universities

Since our return to Belfast officials from Wonju have been in touch to say their Mayor is interested in visiting our city and wish us to confirm this is possible.

Karume, Japan

- Hefei and Karume have primary school football games every year
- Both cities have home stay projects where tourists stay with host families
- Agriculture cooperation - Kurume has provided good quality strawberry and grape seedling which grows well in Hefei
- Cultural exchange - calligraphy and painting exhibitions have been held in Karume and Hefei
- Each city takes it in turn to host anniversary celebrations every five years which increases understanding and links between the people in both cities
- Business activities are increasing between both cities to promote the economic development

4. Opportunities for Collaboration with Hefei

In preparation for the visit to Hefei our Belfast China Stakeholder members were asked to give consideration to opportunities for collaboration with the city. A range of Belfast agencies including our two universities, Confucius Institute and hub schools, the British Council and PSNI responded. Their suggestions were presented during our meetings in Hefei. Opportunities for collaboration included:

- Partnering in EU funded projects which China is eligible to participate in
- Renewables
- Creative industry
- Tourism
- Connected Health
- Art and cultural exchanges
- Exchange of people with a focus on home stays
- Visits from high rank officials
- School/teacher exchanges

These were welcomed by Hefei officials who will now make direct contact with the above organisations to follow up on potential opportunities.

We are now making preparations with the city of Hefei for an inward visit to Belfast in December 2013 or January 2014. While this visit was initially planned to discuss an art exhibition scheduled to take place in Hefei next June, officials are happy to widen the scope of the visit to meet with our city stakeholders.

4. Meeting with Confucius Institute

Key points from our meeting with Mr Qin Qilun of the Confucius Institute are as follows:

- Further opportunities to build on local school hubs in Belfast
- Potential to link Hefei school with Confucius and a Belfast school and to explore opportunities to link up Belfast and Chinese schools
- Potential to arrange capacity building and fact finding visit to China for elected members with some costs covered by Confucius
- Potential to look at opportunities for student teachers from Belfast to undertake a placement in China
- Irish dancing is extremely popular in major cities such as Beijing and the Chinese people enjoy opportunities to attend dancing events
- Other Confucius cities are Dublin and Cork, potential to explore working relationships/partnerships with these cities
- Chinese cities face major environmental challenges and have recycling targets, potential to learn together and share models of best practice

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8th November 2013