

Proposed International Relations Framework for Belfast  
2012 - 2015



# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Purpose of the International Relations Framework .....	4
3. Belfast Infrastructure and product .....	4
4. Marketing Belfast .....	7
5. International City Links .....	8
6. How we move forward .....	10
7. Action Plan.....	11
Appendix 2. Action Plan (attached) .....	15

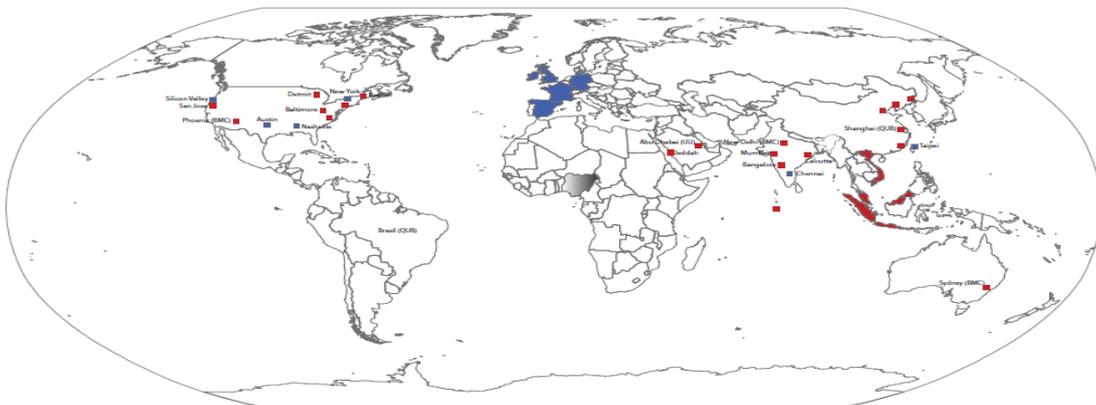
# 1. Introduction

Belfast City Council is one of many city stakeholders with established connections to the world through a range of channels and relationships. In order to win new investment, attract talent and visitors, push forward our indigenous businesses and connect our communities to the world, Belfast must present a united proposition that enables all stakeholders to fulfil their own goals – in short, city stakeholders must speak to the world as one city, with one voice.

There is a great potential to capitalise and build on existing networks and relationships, building on Belfast's reputation as a world class city. The range of existing international relations and connections is shown in the map below and city stakeholders are already engaging on a range of international relationships such as:

- Belfast City Council has a long established sister city relationship with Hefei and Nashville
- Belfast Metropolitan College have recently opened a New Delhi office
- The University of Ulster's recently opened Confucius Institute with Hangzhou, which will facilitate student and staff exchanges with China.
- Queen's University's recent mission to Nashville Vanderbilt University
- Invest Northern Ireland's annual international trade mission programme, seeks business investment and research opportunities in world markets including China
- NI Connections network links Belfast directly to worldwide Diaspora.

The map below highlights some of the key existing (blue) and more recent or emerging international links (red).



There are significant benefits from harnessing the power of city stakeholders to develop a more collaborative city-wide approach to international promotion because:

- Collaborative working has the potential to enhance success for all
- Relationships are strengthened *across* the city and *for* the city in the global arena
- More effective use of resources

- Sharing expertise across the city
- Creates a single, city-wide approach with a shared voice

Taking forward an International Relations Framework for Belfast requires:

- identifying the key city organisations, agencies and companies engaged in international marketing activity
- agreeing the target audiences, messages and methodologies for an integrated approach to international promotion
- agreeing and focusing on key locations
- identifying where collaborative activity between stakeholders makes business and political sense

This document is designed to provide the basis for further consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.

## **2. Purpose of the International Relations Framework**

The purpose of this international marketing framework is

*to ensure that Belfast is internationally positioned as a strong, attractive and competitive destination of choice for those who trade, invest, visit and study*

### **Aims and Objectives**

Based on consultation with city stakeholders, the proposed aims are as follows:

- To maximise economic return of development for Belfast
- To increase the economic benefits of promoting Belfast internationally

The following objectives are proposed to help increase the economic benefits of developing a city-wide approach to proactively marketing Belfast internationally:

- Develop meaningful international partnerships and civic relationships to support Belfast's growth
- Promote the global attractiveness of the city for business, education and tourism
- Create the optimum mechanisms for the international marketing of Belfast

This framework will help us build on existing international relationships and partnerships to develop effective collaborative approaches to achieve shared city development goals. This means that the city has a shared narrative internationally which will provide the foundation to create sustainable and meaningful relationships with different cities and organisations which will support and sustain growth in Belfast. This will help to attract inward investment, increase tourism as well as attracting and retaining talent in the city.

## **3. Belfast Infrastructure and product**

Following initial research and engagement with the main city stakeholders three key sectors have been identified as the focus to build an integrated and collaborative approach to international promotion – these are on Investment & Trade, Tourism and Education and Talent.

1.	Investment and Trade
<b>Why it's important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To secure new foreign direct investors to locate in Belfast and NI</li> <li>- To create jobs, sustain existing jobs, build the local supply chain and wealth creation</li> <li>- To build research and development capacity</li> <li>- To secure trade deals and partnerships to deliver income to Belfast and NI companies, aiding their growth and expansion and increasing exports</li> </ul>
<b>Belfast's current offer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Connectivity:</b> Belfast is the gateway and regional driver for the Northern Ireland economy with two modern airports</li> <li>- Belfast Harbour is Northern Ireland's principal maritime gateway and logistics hub, serving the Northern Ireland economy and increasingly that of the Republic of Ireland</li> <li>- Northern Ireland was the first region in Europe to have 100% access to broadband;</li> <li>- <b>Competitive business environment:</b> Operating costs for business in Northern Ireland is highly competitive and amongst the lowest in the UK</li> <li>- Telecoms costs and prime office rents in NI and greater Belfast are among the most competitive in the world</li> <li>- 65% of companies investing in NI already reinvesting or are planning to invest further</li> <li>- There is significant land development potential in Belfast such as Belfast Harbour, Titanic Quarter and Springvale</li> <li>- Belfast is now a major international filming location and its creative industries sector along with environmental and new energy technologies are the fastest growing sectors in the economy</li> <li>- <b>Quality of life:</b> Belfast has one of the lowest residential housing costs in Europe</li> <li>- It scores highly when compared to other cities in relation a good work-life balance and a relatively short average commuting times to work.</li> </ul>
<b>Other developments under way</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast successfully secured £13.7million to improve the city's broadband infrastructure to become a world class digital city by 2015.</li> <li>- A £400 million investment in the Royal Exchange retail-led scheme in the north east of the city</li> <li>- An £8 million bid for the development of a green business park on the North Foreshore</li> <li>- An £8 million development of an Innovation Centre at Springvale.</li> <li>- The council is working with Invest NI to develop a £4 million Digital Hub to promote digital technology based enterprises in the city.</li> <li>- The planned Belfast Rapid Transit scheme will be a new cross city public transport route that will link east and west of the city with each other and with the city centre</li> </ul>

2.	Tourism
<b>Why it's important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To maximise the growth in the tourist industry and economy</li> <li>- To attract new and repeat leisure and business visitors to Belfast and NI</li> <li>- To encourage tourist expenditure in the local economy with direct economic returns to local industry the local economy</li> </ul>
<b>Belfast's current offer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast is a vibrant, cultural city with a unique historical legacy</li> <li>- There are over 6000 bedspaces in the city ranging from budget accommodation to five star suites</li> <li>- Key cultural venues are located across the city –Lyric Theatre, Grand Opera House, the MAC, Culturlann, Ulster Hall</li> <li>- The Titanic Belfast visitor centre opened in 2012 as a major visitor attraction and focal point for the city's maritime heritage</li> <li>- Belfast hosts around 50 cultural and arts festivals throughout the year and 300 bars and clubs.</li> <li>- The city has an abundance of open space, including parks and greenways</li> <li>- Belfast is a major cruise destination, with over 50 cruise ships docking in Belfast harbour last year and a target of 60 cruise ships visiting Belfast, generating up to £6m for the economy in 2013</li> </ul>
<b>Other developments under way</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast is a city of choice for major international events and is scheduled to host, Giro d'Italia 2014 and Tall Ships 2015</li> <li>- New hotels and stadia are planned for the city, including the redevelopment of Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park stadia</li> <li>- Over the next two years over £6 million will be invested in tourism and cultural products of Belfast</li> <li>- By 2016, significant investment will transform Belfast Waterfront Hall into a state of the art convention and exhibition centre, with additional 2100m<sup>2</sup> exhibition and banqueting space for 750 delegates, plus additional breakout facilities.</li> </ul>

3.	Education and Learning
<b>Why it's important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To attract international students to Belfast and NI to undertake further and higher education</li> <li>- To support the increasing cultural diversity and dynamism of the city</li> <li>- To enrol international students in their own countries on study programmes delivered by educational establishments in Belfast</li> <li>- To attract academics and researchers to Belfast to undertake their studies, enhancing the relationships the education-business links and supporting Belfast's international profile</li> </ul>
<b>Belfast's current offer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast has a young, diverse and dynamic population with over 22,000 full time students and a growing ethnic minority population</li> <li>- Belfast has a number of key third level educational establishments within its boundaries and close to the city centre.</li> <li>- Belfast educational institutes are key drivers in the development of Nis technology and knowledge industries</li> <li>- Belfast's two universities have globally recognised research centres across a</li> </ul>

	<p>range of disciplines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast Metropolitan College's new e3 campus is a model for the innovative use of new and emerging technologies with resources for the testing and demonstration of renewable energies</li> <li>- Belfast's educational institutes offer quality sports facilities in Belfast and at Jordanstown.</li> <li>- There is a strong track record in the commercialisation of research and successful business ventures.</li> <li>- Through knowledge transfer and innovative initiatives, including the highly successful NI Science Park, the universities have supported £100m's of new investment and 1,000's of high value new jobs.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>- The city has an abundance of open space with 940 hectares of parks, playing fields and greenways.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other developments underway</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work is underway with the city's educational establishments to develop a student housing strategy to encourage affordable, quality, fit for purpose student housing in the city that supports student and community life</li> <li>- Belfast is set to become a world class digital city by 2015 and has secured almost £13.7million to improve the digital infrastructure in the city</li> <li>- University of Ulster will relocate to the heart of Belfast with a £250 million new building.</li> <li>- Significant investment will see the redevelopment of Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park stadia</li> <li>- The planned public bike hire scheme is due to be introduced in 2015 to enhance connectivity across the city</li> </ul>

Research has indicated that the most important factors for attracting investment and improving quality of life are a solid infrastructure and connectivity. Belfast has an improving infrastructure and offer which acts as the foundation to attract and retain international investment.

Significant work is underway in Belfast to support and enhance the city's infrastructure through various development strategies and investment in the city to promote growth and revitalise the economy, support employability, enhance connectivity and ensure a vibrant social and cultural scene which form the foundations for a city that can compete and promote itself on the global stage. While Belfast already has a distinct and strengthening offer to promote internationally, the relationships developed and impact of international marketing will directly increase the economic success of the city and its economic, social and cultural development.

## 4. Marketing Belfast

Belfast has tended to operate with an organic approach to marketing rather than a specific marketing strategy. Belfast proposition, brand, city narratives and the main marketing channels are all essential aspects of marketing our city. Belfast still needs to work hard to develop a unique story and unify its marketing efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> QUB Report to DEL Committee March 2011

Presently Belfast is marketed internationally by a range of city stakeholders, albeit each tends to focus on their own perception and experience of Belfast and their own messages, methodologies and target audiences. A comprehensive, shared vision is needed for Belfast to maximise its international reputation and the economic benefits.

There is a strong argument that Belfast needs to revamp the Belfast brand, develop a strong shared proposition and a new city narrative that is shared by all city stakeholders. A reinvigorated coordinated city-wide approach to international marketing is therefore required.

This International Relations Framework needs, therefore, to be set out in the context of a coherent, integrated and effective City Marketing strategy, which includes:

1. The development a city narrative which is agreed by all key stakeholders
2. Refreshing the Belfast brand to ensure it reflects the current values and narrative of Belfast and has city-wide ownership
3. Agreeing the key target audiences, product development, marketing collateral and communication channels
4. Agreeing the optimum vehicle for co-ordinated international marketing within Belfast

## 5. International City Links

Belfast has well established relationships with Europe and maintains two sister city relationships with Nashville, USA and Heifei, China. A number of other key global markets have been identified, in consultation with stakeholders, as avenues to develop and enhance relationships and marketing. City stakeholders are forging relationships with key global economies in China; India and North America. These form the initial focus for Belfast to move beyond Europe and enhance collaborative working relationships. It is therefore important for Belfast and particularly Belfast City Council to consider destinations in these countries where formal civic linkages would add value.

Belfast’s city stakeholders have taken significant steps to form international relations with each of these countries and by working collaboratively there is potential for all city stakeholders to add value to these relationships to maximise the benefit and impact for Belfast. For example:

Target Global Markets	What is in place / Opportunities
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BMC have opened a New Delhi office in January 2013</li> <li>- QUB has links with University of Hyderabad, Nation Institute of immunology in New Delhi and Videcon business in Calcutta</li> <li>- QUB proposal to develop a civic relationship with Chennai as part of a New York/Chennai/Belfast partnership</li> <li>- Invest NI trade mission scheduled for April 2013 with other stakeholders participating</li> </ul>
China/Far east	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BMC hosted a China Week in February 2013 which may be built upon</li> <li>- BMC has links with Beijing Polytechnic</li> <li>- UU established Confucious Institute in partnership with Zhejiang University of Media and Communications</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UU developed links with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates</li> <li>- Belfast's sister city relationship in China is with Hefei</li> <li>- QUB has MOU established with universities in Peking, Shanghai, Minzu, Jilin, Harbin University of Commerce and East China University of Science and Technology, Shenyang University</li> </ul>
North America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- QUB planned outward mission to Nashville Vanderbilt University with which it has special links</li> <li>- QUB has also links with Georgetown University, UMAS Lowell and Fordham University (New York)</li> <li>- UU linked with colleges in New York and Washington.</li> <li>- BMC is a Member of the RC20/20 Group – Baltimore, Dallas, New York, Detroit and Philadelphia</li> <li>- Belfast's relationship with ITLG in Silicon Valley</li> <li>- Belfast's presence at South by Southwest conference and exhibition (links with Austin Mayoral office)</li> </ul>

Through an International Relations Framework there is potential to maximise relationships, build on the existing links and networks to enhance Belfast's reputation and the benefits for the city as a whole.

## Sister Cities

Reviewing and fully utilising the civic and sister city relationships that already exist has formed part of the development of this Framework.

Belfast City Council has a sister city relationship with Nashville, USA and Hefei in China. Sister cities relationships provide a formal civic link between Belfast and that city. In order to make it meaningful actions need to be attached to each relationship to deliver results for Belfast. At this point it is considered valuable to continue developing the sister city link with Nashville given its importance in the creative industries and especially music sector.

Hefei in China has always been a more difficult sister city link to develop and achieve tangible results. Strenuous efforts have been made to deliver trade and investment and specific programmes of work have been put in place; however, securing a meaningful result in the short term remains a challenge. The Local Chinese Chamber of Commerce remains committed to Hefei and one of their members has recently been appointed by Hefei City Government as a special envoy to promote the relationship. This means that it may be difficult to withdraw fully from the relationship without causing offence. Our latest analysis would indicate that it may be more fruitful to develop a new relationship with Shenyang in China which is the region visited last year by OFM/DFM, QUB, UU, BMC, Invest NI and Bombardier. Exploratory work is currently underway to assess the full value of a formal link with Shenyang.

## NI Connections (NIC) Belfast Connections

Council is now a member of the newly established Northern Irish Connections body which is a company set up under the auspices of Invest NI to link to diaspora throughout the world. The work programme encompasses

- the creation of an active database of persons from NI, and persons with an interest in NI;
- the hosting of in market events to bring the diaspora together to ask for their help in attracting investment and opportunities for NI; and
- the establishment of the diaspora network as an international marketing tool.

As a member of this network Belfast has access to the named contacts and can be part of events and communications for specific marketing purposes. There is potential to reignite the Friends of Belfast network which existed from the late 90s as a social capital network of business people, academics, political and community representatives with an interest in supporting the regeneration of Belfast. Whilst some of the original Friends of Belfast network members are still in contact with Council there is a need to refresh and launch a meaningful network aligned with the Investment Programme 2012-15 objectives and priorities. It is considered that this can best be achieved by developing a 'Belfast Connections' subset within the NIC network. This will avoid duplication and confusion and ensure that Belfast has a specific identity of its own which links to NIC contacts with a particular interest in Belfast. As part of the wider NIC network the Belfast Connections network could be sustained with minimal cost albeit separate budgets will be required for specific Belfast Connections events and marketing activity.

As collaborative working increases and stakeholders such as Invest NI continue to monitor opportunities arising from emerging economies, there will be greater opportunities to expand horizons and collaborative effort to additional markets such as CIVETS (Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, turkey and South Africa), Dubai, Middle East etc.

## 6. How we move forward

In developing the framework, the proposed steps are outlined below (as illustrated below):

- 1) **Baseline work** – has been completed. BCC identified the key city organisations, agencies and companies engaged in international marketing activity. Research and engagement has taken place with stakeholders (Appendix 1). Initial data assembly and analysis has been completed and a first collaborative discussion led by the Lord Mayor of Belfast.
- 2) **Developing Marketing Tools** –to ensure stakeholder buy-in and to be fully equipped to establish valuable international relations
- 3) **Delivering products and city links** – developing a suite of promotional materials for Belfast to enable the achievement of objectives to increase tourism, trade, investment and skills exchange.
- 4) **Outcomes** –. A number of draft outcomes have been proposed relating to increasing tourism, trade and investment and student/academic life. Given the city-wide focus of this work, these will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders. They are the long-

term outcomes which will help to refine the framework and establish appropriate indicators to monitor success.

**Diagram 1. Outline of the process for the Integrated Relations Framework**



## 7. Action Plan

The action plan is detailed in Appendix 2 and focuses on the actions that are underway and planned over the course of the first year of this framework. Building collaborative working relationships across the city to deliver these actions will help shape future actions to achieve the aims and objectives outlined in section 2 and that will directly contribute to the NI Assembly ambitions in the delivery of the NI Economic Strategy by:

- Increasing the value of exports for local business and inward investment
- Increasing tourism spend and the number of tourists visiting Belfast
- Increasing the number of international students and academics attracted to and remaining in Belfast

The actions are broken into the three core market sectors (Business and Leisure Tourism; Education, Talent and Learning; and Trade and Investment). The key actions for Belfast City Council as the civic and city convenor have also been highlighted.

City stakeholder engagement and support is central to progressing the international relations framework. Key geographic areas can be identified that will enhance existing and develop new international links to maximise the value and benefit of targeting the three market segments for Belfast as a whole.

In addition to the actions outlined above it will be important to work with city stakeholders to monitor changes in the global environment and the emerging economies in the rest of the world to ensure that Belfast exploits market opportunities moving forward. Developments in Brazil have already been identified by OFM-DFM and potential opportunities emerging from CIVETS locations (Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa) are being examined by Invest NI. This intelligence will be critical in informing future and changing international relationships, priorities and tools.

## 8. How we will measure success

Belfast has a significant contribution to make to a number of regional strategies such as the Programme for Government, Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland and Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland in terms of trade & investment, tourism and education:

- Secure total investment in the Northern Ireland economy of at least £1 billion.
- Increase the value of manufacturing exports by 20%
- Develop and deliver a full range of support throughout the export lifecycle
- Increase tourism revenue to £676m and tourism visitor numbers to 4.2m
- Increase the number of international students and academics

The following draft outcomes and annual targets have been proposed to align to the delivery of the regional frameworks, and focusing on the benefits that a city-wide collaborative approach to international marketing may bring. While the outcomes require further consultation and agreement with key city stakeholders, it is anticipated that activity in year one of the framework will focus on building effective collaborative approaches and partnerships. The Council has taken cognisance of key partners targets in Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau, Invest NI, Belfast Metropolitan College and the universities and will work to support the delivery of these for the benefit of the city.

Segments	Proposed Outcomes <i>(to be agreed with city stakeholders)</i>	Draft Annual Targets <i>(to be agreed with city stakeholders)</i>
Trade and Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase the value of exports for local businesses</li> <li>- Increase the number of local businesses exporting</li> <li>- Increase % of globally focused start-ups</li> <li>- Increase foreign investment</li> <li>- Improved partnerships and collaboration</li> </ul> <p><i>(The emerging Integrated Economic Strategy will inform the development and agreement of outcomes with stakeholders)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belfast promoted at 4 international trade exhibitions, including participation in major investment conferences</li> <li>- 30 significant leads of potential new inward investment identified</li> <li>- 4 major inward missions received in Belfast</li> <li>- 50 companies provided business opportunities in new international markets</li> <li>- Support Invest NI to deliver their target of 30 trade missions and participate as appropriate</li> </ul>
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase in value and number of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 new collaborative programmes</li> </ul>

	<p>business tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 20% increase in tourism spend to £294m by 2014/15 (Integrated Tourism Framework)</li> <li>- Grow visitor numbers to Belfast by 20% (BVCB)</li> <li>- Increase visitor spend in Belfast by 40% (BVCB)</li> <li>- Lead generation programme and research to identify Top 500 prospects for extension to Waterfront Hall</li> </ul>	<p>undertaken with multiple stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 new international operators include Belfast on their itineraries</li> <li>- Increase the economic impact of annual events in Belfast by 5% per year</li> <li>- 10 familiarisation visits to Belfast from new markets or specialist fields</li> <li>- Support BVCB to deliver the target of profiling Belfast at 20 trade/consumer shows and generate 80 new out of state conference leads</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase % of international students and academics</li> <li>- Attract at least 1895 international students to higher education institutes and up to 300 international students to further education institutes in Belfast by 2016</li> <li>- Increase internationally recognised research projects</li> <li>- Improved partnership working and collaboration</li> </ul> <p>NB. University of Ulster have a target of attracting up to 3000 international students per year, although most of their growth is anticipated to be at Magee</p> <p><i>(By 2014, higher &amp; further education establishments will have reviewed their international strategies and developed targets which will inform the framework outcomes and indicators)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote the city jointly with the educational institutes in 2 new markets/countries</li> <li>- Increase % of international students and academics to Belfast – attract up to 100 new international students to further education in Belfast and over 600 higher education students to Belfast per year</li> <li>- 3 new research projects instigated</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1. International Framework Contacts

Organisation	Representatives
Andras House	Lord Rana Dermott Brooks Sameer Seth
Arts Council NI	Nick Livingston Noirin McKinney
ArtsEkta	Nisha Tandon Muksha Sharma
Belfast Metropolitan College	Marie-Therese McGivern Ned Cohen
Belfast City Airport	Brian Ambrose
Belfast City Centre Management	Andrew Irvine
Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Roy Adair
Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau	Gerry Lennon
Bombardier	Alec McRitchie
British Council NI	David Alderdice
Delta Print	Terry Cross
European Commission NI	Colette Fitzgerald
HMS Duncan	Commander John Gray
Invest NI	Bill Montgomery Barry McBride
NI Chamber of Commerce	Ann McGregor Sandra Scannell
NI Connections	Grainne McVeigh
NI Tourist Board	Alan Clarke Susie McCullough
Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister	Tim Losty Debbie Sweeney
Queens University Belfast	Dr Satish Kumar Isabelle Jennings
Titanic Quarter	Michael Graham
Tourism Ireland	Aubrey Irwin
University of Ulster	Prof. Anne Moran Roisin McEvoy
US Consul in Belfast	Gregory S. Burton, Consul General

**Appendix 2. Action Plan (attached)**