



Subject:	Educational Inequalities Action Plan
Date:	9 August 2017
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Ruth Rea, Assistant Economic Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the key issues and factors associated with educational underachievement within the City• Seek Member endorsement and budgetary approval for priority initiatives, set out in 3.8-3.11• Seek Member approval for Council to sign up to the Business in the Community Business Education Charter

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note and approve priority actions identified in sections 3.8-3.11 for development and delivery in conjunction with relevant partner organisations in 2017/18 and approve expenditure of budgets. These skills development budgets have already been agreed as part of the annual estimates process and have been set aside within the Departmental budget • Seek Member approval for Belfast City Council to sign up to the Business in the Community (BITC) Business Education Charter.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>One of the Belfast's greatest economic strengths is its access to skills and talent. This is one of the reasons why the City has been so successful in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and why indigenous businesses are experiencing growth both locally and abroad. However, sustained investment in the skills and development of the workforce – and a re-focusing of education delivery in preparation for access to the world of work – is critical to ensuring sustainable and inclusive economic growth.</p>
3.2	<p>Many of the City's schools, colleges and universities rival the best in the world and nearly 35% of the city's working age population are educated to degree level or higher. Students from Northern Ireland achieve higher grades than their counterparts in all other UK regions at both GCSE and A-Level. Historical trends suggest that GCSE performance levels are improving annually with 60.2% of year 12 pupils in Belfast achieving 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A*-C in 2014/15. However, this also means that almost 40% of our young people area reaching the age of 16 not having achieved this standard. Educational attainment levels impact significantly on an individual's employment prospects. Research suggests that individuals with no skills are five times more likely to be unemployed than those with level 4 qualifications and above (BTEC/NVQ level). Employment trends indicate that this position is expected to worsen with future employment growth expected to be driven by jobs requiring higher levels skills.</p>
3.3	<p>While the overall level of those attaining 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A*-C is around 60%, this figure stands at only 35% for those young people who are entitled to free school meals (FSME). Social disadvantage clearly has a significant impact on educational</p>

	<p>attainment levels. Other contributory factors can include attendance levels, language barriers, special educational needs, overall school performance levels and the cultural importance placed upon education within the family and community setting.</p>
3.4	<p>The Belfast Agenda makes explicit commitments to ensuring that children and young people can get the best start in life and to proactively addressing educational inequalities for those who are socially disadvantaged. The Council's Employability & Skills Framework 2015-2025 mirrors this commitment, recognising that this will require a more integrated approach to learning and skills, ensuring that young people are supported through the education system and by their peer networks to develop their aspirations; to make informed career choices, based on labour market intelligence and have access to opportunities to experience the world of work. The framework also recognises a need to promote alternative routes into employment through entrepreneurship.</p>
3.5	<p>Access to an effective education system aligned to current and future employment needs are vital components of an effective pathway to employment across all skill levels. The activities being undertaken by Council in this regard span across the Growing the Economy and Working and Learning themes of the Belfast Agenda. A report will be brought to committee in Autumn 2017 to update members on work being undertaken and key achievements to date via infographics.</p>
3.6	<p>At the June meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, Members heard presentations from education experts working with young people across the City. These focused, in particular, on the innovative approaches that they are developing to focus on young people who risk leaving school without minimum education standards and also on new ways of improving work placements and careers guidance to help young people navigate the world of work and explore new employment opportunities.</p>
3.7	<p>Building on these inputs, Council Officers also engaged with a wider group of more than twenty careers teachers from across the City to identify interventions that they might find useful in delivering their work and improving the work experience and skills development opportunities of the young people within their schools. Teachers identified the need to simplify the current system, to provide access to meaningful work placements and to support the provision of high quality and timely information to give young people insights into the world of work. As a result of this engagement, and based on wider research, the following activities are planned for the coming year.</p>

3.8	<p><u>Career Advisory & Employer Engagement Initiatives</u></p> <p>Our research has identified the need to create mechanisms for employers to engage with schools to influence the curriculum and to provide meaningful insights to future employment opportunities. This might include industry insight days, careers events, school competitions aligned to skill needs and work placements.</p>
3.9	<p>The proposed priority activities to be taken forward will build on existing campaigns such as the “Connect to Success” work experience portal operated by the Department of the Economy’s Careers Service and the Skills NI careers event which will take place in the Titanic Exhibition Centre in October 2017. One new area of work to be developed will be a programme of paid work experience (4-6 weeks over the Summer period) for secondary school students, primarily in priority growth sectors. Across these activities a minimum of 50 employers will be engaged, 290 work experience opportunities will be provided (of which 40 will be the 4-6 week placements, although there is an opportunity to increase this figure as more employers are engaged) and over 1000 students will be engaged in careers events, insight days, school competitions etc. The costs associated with these employer engagement initiatives will be up to £70,000. The focus of these investments will be on those schools where the need is greatest and where proposed support would not normally be available to students.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Development of Digital Skills</u></p> <p>Future employment trends suggest a lack of digital skills is not only a barrier to people fulfilling their potential, but also a barrier to a more productive economy. As the demand for digital skills continue, there is a ongoing need to invest in education to ensure young people across the city are equipped with the skills required for future industry. It is proposed that Officers engage with key organisations such as NI Screen, Makematic etc as well as other potential funders in this area to identify how the Council can best contribute to this agenda. To support this activity a financial investment will be required by Council; it is proposed a budget of £60,000 will be ring-fenced from existing budgets for this activity in the 17/18 financial year.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Support for targeted activities to help young people who have recently fallen out of the education system</u></p> <p>It is recognised that not all young people fully engage with the education system while many fall out of mainstream provision before completing their education. To engage with those</p>

young people, it is proposed that **Council resources are used to add value to existing interventions provided by the Prince's Trust through the "Get Started" Programme and the Development Awards.** Both initiatives aim to remove barriers for engagement for young people, by encouraging their positive engagement through Get Started or by removing financial barriers to training or employment through small cash grants (maximum £500 grant) through the Development Awards programme. It is expected that up to 250 young people will be supported through these initiatives, of whom 78 are expected to move into employment and 139 will move into further education. Both initiatives target individuals aged 16-25 year olds who face multiple barriers to employment including educational achievement levels below 5 GCSEs grades A*-C. The costs associated with these activities will not exceed £70,000.

3.12 As a key employer within the city, the Council has a vital position in leading the way for employers. Business in the Community (BITC) will shortly launch a new Business Education Charter and are encouraging employers to sign up to this charter and pledge their support to engaging more organisations in supporting literacy and numeracy in order to achieve the goal of 90% of children leaving primary school with Level 4 in Literacy and Numeracy by 2020. It is proposed that the Council demonstrates its commitment to this agenda by officially signing up to the Charter and aligning its investment with the broad commitments set out within the Charter. This will also ensure that there are opportunities to learn from other employers and to build economies of scale when developing interventions to improve business-education linkages.

3.13 The activities listed above will be in addition to existing support provided to local schools across the Council including the work of the Corporate HR team. Already, Officers from this team are engaged in an extensive range of school support activity such as undertaking mock interviews, attendance at career days and the coordination of work experience placements within the Council.

3.14 It should be noted these activities identify the planned areas of intervention for the 2017/18 financial year. However, Officers are continuing to engage with government departments and other Councils to identify areas for collaboration and to add value to the areas highlighted above. Additional opportunities for collaboration and engagement may emerge – as Departmental budgets are released – and these may include activities such as aligning resources to support Urban Villages activities and adding value to existing Careers Service intelligence at a city level. Proposals for joint working will be brought back through this

	Committee for Members' endorsement.						
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>						
3.15	<p>The recommended budget allocations for the current financial year for each of the elements set out in 3.8-3.11 are summarised below. These skills development budgets are already available to undertake these areas of work and have been approved as part of the budget estimates process. A total of £200,000 has been allocated in the 2017/18 financial year. The breakdown is as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Careers Advice and Work Placement support</td> <td>£70,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Development of Digital Skills</td> <td>£60,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Princes Trust Development Awards and Get Started programmes</td> <td>£70,000</td> </tr> </table>	Careers Advice and Work Placement support	£70,000	Development of Digital Skills	£60,000	Princes Trust Development Awards and Get Started programmes	£70,000
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	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u>						
3.16	Events and programmes have and will continue to be designed to help remove barriers to participation and promote equality of opportunity.						
4.0	Appendices						
	None						