



Subject:	City Pledge for Young People: Emerging Research Findings
Date:	12 September 2018
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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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
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Committee on progress against the Belfast Agenda commitment to “Establish a city pledge for our young people”.
1.2	The work is one element of the “Working and Learning” work programme for 2018/19 that was approved at this Committee on 11 April 2018.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: - Note the research findings, recommendations and proposed next steps for work on the City Youth Pledge

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree that a report will be brought back to a future meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, setting out a series of proposed actions to deliver on the Belfast Agenda commitment to help the city's young people to achieve positive and productive education, employment and training outcomes.
3.0	Main report
3.1	The Belfast Agenda includes a commitment that, by 2035, Belfast will be a place where everyone fulfils his or her potential and that they will be supported and enabled to do so and to make a positive contribution to city life. This will mean creating access to opportunity and removing the barriers that prevent people from achieving that potential and participating in all areas of life.
3.2	In order to achieve this ambition, the Belfast Agenda commitment was to “establish a pledge that commits to developing coherent pathways for education, training and employment for our young people”.
3.3	As part of our research and development work to scope out the potential approach to developing a Youth Pledge for Belfast, we engaged the local organisation Include Youth to help us better understand what this Youth Pledge might look like. They examined best practice and engaged with our young people and employers to ascertain interest and potential commitment to and support for the initiative. The research has recently been completed and work is under way to articulate how the Youth Pledge may develop and what the resource commitments are likely to be.
3.4	<p>The research undertaken by Include Youth involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder engagement on the focus, content and structure of the City Youth Pledge involving partner organisations, young people themselves and employers A review of best practice models for City Youth Pledges and their impact in other locations Identification of recommendations on how the City Pledge might operate in practice in Belfast.
3.5	A total of 174 young people from across the city and 65 adults including teachers, employers and voluntary/community representatives were involved in the qualitative research through focus groups and interviews and a further 106 young people responded to an online survey. Five consultation events were also held in Belfast City Hall.

Research Findings

3.6

The research identified a number of barriers preventing young people from engaging fully in society through education, training or employment. These included:

- Lack of confidence, qualifications and finance prevent progression into positive post-formal education options: 73% of respondents to the online survey cited lack of confidence as the main reason for not progressing into further education while 69% suggested that the lack of money and lack of qualifications were key factors impacting on their ability to access third level education. With regard to the world of work, 61% said that the lack of qualifications was preventing them from progressing into employment, 56% said lack of work experience, 47% said not having interview skills and 53% suggested that it was a lack of confidence. Only 36% said there were not enough jobs.
- Undervaluation of certain education pathways and competition between providers: participants in the research suggested that some education routes were perceived more positively than others: they felt that schools sought to market themselves based on academic achievement. As a result, A-levels results leading to university entrance is often presented as the 'best' – or sometimes only – option available and many young people are left feeling ashamed, invisible and unsupported if they fail to meet the school's expectations.
- Access to Advice: there is evidence that many young people receive limited and, at times, poor advice about their options; the advice is often too general and variable as there is no standardisation. Also evident from our research was the lack of standardisation of careers advice, both within mainstream education, and across the alternative education projects. Those from alternative education are considerably more disadvantaged than those in mainstream education.
- Preparation for employment: nearly one third of 16-18 year old respondents had not met with a Careers Advisor; less than half had been taught interview skills and nearly one third of this age group did not have the opportunity of work experience for more than three days. Young people were very keen to experience work placements and could see the value in them but they were often frustrated that the placements were not for long enough and were not necessarily with employers they were interested in. If they are to be of value, the necessary preparation must be put in in advance both to ensure that the employer is ready to receive the young person and has a programme in place, and that the young person goes to a placement which is relevant to their career interests.

- Access to relevant support services: lack of mental health and social support for young people trying to access employment or entering into further education/training were highlighted as being a critical barrier. Self-motivation and self-confidence are seen as key: transitions can be particularly challenging for young people who have received a high level of individualised support as they often struggle to cope in mainstream educational provision
- Child and youth friendly education system: respondents felt that schools needed to be more responsive to pupils' personal circumstances and that the current provision failed to meet specific requirements – thus impacting on performance
- Financial concerns: young people felt that there were financial barriers preventing them from staying on in education (concern at student loans; expensive childcare costs). They also wanted to ensure that they would be appropriately remunerated for the work undertaken – and there were concerns about only being able to achieve minimum wage and not having access to progression routes once they find a job.

3.7

Statistics demonstrate that, of the 3,695 school leavers in Belfast in 2015, 42% went on to higher education, 26% to further education, 14% to employment and 12% to training. Only 5% were “destination unknown” (205 individuals). On the face of things, it might appear that at least 95% of young people already go on to a “positive destination in education, training or employment” in terms of the aspiration of the Youth Pledge. However, the recently-completed Skills Barometer for Belfast acknowledges that educational performance – particularly to GCSE level – is lower in Belfast than in all other District Council areas (although there has been a steady improvement over the last decade). 61.5% of young people in Belfast achieve 5 GCSEs including English and Maths at grades A*-C. This achievement limits the potential for young people to move on to further and higher education and, as a result, impacts on their potential to access employment opportunities that can provide levels of remuneration beyond minimum or low wage roles. It is also important to note that achieving 5 GCSEs including English and Maths is often a requirement for many jobs and a pre-condition for entry to many education and training courses. Finally, this research also demonstrates that young people in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) are less likely than their peers to achieve the 5GCSEs A*-C including Maths and English. Only 41.5% of pupils in receipt of Free Schools Meals achieve this standard. This is a source of significant concern as a failure of address inequities amongst young people at an early age, and throughout their school journey, can cause a long tail of underperformance at GCSE level which perpetuates in the form of worklessness and poverty concentrated in deprived communities in later years.

3.8	<p>The examples from other cities indicated that there are a number of approaches that have been tested. Some of the collective lessons learned from those experiences include:</p> <p>Need for engagement with both employers and young people: initiatives which address both supply (young people) and demand (employers) are likely to be more effective</p> <p>All of the projects are public-private partnerships: this is critical to their success. Where the private sector has actively engaged, the levels of success in terms of job outcomes have been enhanced</p> <p>The Local Authority has played a lead role in all instances but this has varied from place to place: in some areas, they have been the convenor; in others, the key funder</p> <p>Some of the pledges have recognised the employers; some have been used as a “campaign banner” for a series of initiatives focused on young people</p> <p>Work experience is a critical element of the support that the private sector partners can offer</p> <p>Some cities have used financial incentives – for both employers and young people</p> <p>Many of the areas have targeted specific groups – these appear to have been identified as priority groups for other areas of work (Nottingham example)</p> <p>A number of these initiatives have been supported by online resources.</p>
3.9	<p>The next step is for the Council to share some of these research outcomes with partners and to agree the way forward, including securing buy-in from partners for key initiatives. This will include our work with the five neighbouring Councils as part of the Belfast Region City Deal. These proposals will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for agreement and decision. Based on the work to date, there are a number of principles and key findings that are likely to guide the Council’s investment decisions and approach to this work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work placements are critical: securing meaningful work placements will require strong engagement with willing private sector partners. We need to use all levers at our disposal to secure this buy-in from the private sector • Young people who are disadvantaged are statistically less likely to have a positive post-formal education outcome. Early interventions will be critical to give these young people the best possible chance to achieving a positive outcome once they complete their formal education • There are a lot of initiatives currently in the market which are supporting this work to some extent but activity is patchy. The challenge is to develop a programme of scale to ensure that all young people can benefit – regardless of where they live or what their educational outcome will be post formal education • The Council itself has a key role to play – we are a major employer and are already actively involved in engagement and outreach work. We can use this best practice to

	<p>influence others to get involved and to dispel any concerns that other employers might have about engagement in initiatives such as this.</p> <p><u>Financial and resource implications</u></p>
3.10	<p>No specific financial or resource implications at this point.</p> <p><u>Equality or good relations implications/rural needs assessment:</u></p>
3.11	<p>All activities will be equality screened. Consideration will be given to prioritising specific groups requiring targeted intervention and reasonable adjustments and additional support will be provided where required. Research indicates that this challenge is more significant in urban areas.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Detail on City Youth Pledges in other locations