



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

International Relations Framework

2016 - 2020

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1 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – A NEW FRAMEWORK

Belfast City Council (BCC) has been involved in European and International activity for several decades. During that time the focus has shifted from EU funding and access to EU networks to an increasing emphasis on international relations in a broader sense, including Sister City agreements and outward and inward missions for trade and investment, student and tourist attraction. With enhanced economic development and new planning powers acquired under Public Sector Reform, and expected regeneration powers in coming years, BCC is increasing its' ambition in positioning the city as a competitive location to start and grow a business and to live, work, visit, trade with and invest in. Growing the economy is a priority for the City, as outlined in our 'Belfast Agenda 2030'. This International Relations Framework will reflect and complement these ambitions and the vision they represent.

1.1 Purpose and scope

BCC is one of many city stakeholders with established international connections through a range of channels and relationships, such as Sister City agreements and trade missions, aimed at attracting visitors, investment, talent and students. The purpose of this International Relations Framework is to ensure that Belfast is optimally positioned on the international stage to realise its ambitions, and that our resources and priorities are aligned with the overarching strategic vision for the city and - as a driver of the regional economy - with Northern Ireland's Programme for Government. It provides the rationale that a city such as Belfast can and should be active internationally, that the Council has a 'value add' role to play, and together with our partners across the city we can compete internationally for the benefit of our citizens.

1.2 Unprecedented times require renewed effort

Cities, and their role as drivers of economic growth, is not a new concept but is one that is gaining increasing attention as more of the world's population shifts towards city living. Today, 600 cities generate 60% of global GDP. It is not just large conglomerations such as New York and London that are attracting people and growth; mid-size and smaller cities across the world are enjoying an economic renaissance. Across the UK, city growth is gaining new momentum through initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine - Belfast must be part of this trend for city region led growth.

Cities and city regions are increasingly casting out on their own to achieve their international ambitions.

Belfast has an increasingly dynamic and compelling proposition to make internationally – there is a new energy about the city, demonstrated through successes such as the MTV music awards, new Waterfront Hall, Tall Ships and Innovation Factory.

Competition between cities and how cities position themselves in the world market are crucial considerations of any city with ambition, such as Belfast. Belfast has an increasingly dynamic and compelling proposition to make internationally – there is a new energy about the city, demonstrated through successes such as the MTV music awards, the Tall Ships event, the new Waterfront Hall, our Innovation Factory and ambitious plans for Giants Park. Belfast wants to achieve much more. By 2030, the City aims to be a place where all people are benefitting from a thriving and prosperous economy and be a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly city¹. Getting there is not without its challenges and will require considerable effort across infrastructure development,

¹ Draft Belfast Agenda 2030

regeneration, tourism promotion, talent development, indigenous business creation/growth and international business attraction.

The uncertainty created by the UK vote to leave the European Union adds additional impetus to Belfast's need to be an 'outward facing' international city. The rise of an ever more connected world and globalisation adds weight to the argument that to stand still is to fall behind; BCC recognises it cannot stand still on international relations. This new International Relations Framework will shape and guide Belfast City Council's efforts to create a more competitive, attractive and global city.

1.3 Building on success

Belfast can draw on considerable achievements in international relations to date. A selection of highlights includes:

- The Financial Times named Belfast as the world's most Business-Friendly City of its size, and the city has achieved notable successes in attracting inward investors such as Baker & McKenzie, Deloitte, PwC and A&L Goodbody.
- In North America, Sister City agreements with Nashville and Boston are building substantive links and tangible outputs including the 'Friendship Four' hockey tournament – the first ever competitive National Collegiate Athletic Association college ice hockey fixtures outside of North America. Strong links are being developed between our universities and institutions in the USA, including with Vanderbilt University in Belfast's Sister City of Nashville.
- Securing increased co-operation for the J1 visa programme for students from Queen's and Ulster Universities travelling to Boston.
- In China, Belfast have had a Sister City agreement with the city of Hefei since the 1990s. Since then several inward delegations have been hosted and reciprocated. Building on links with China, a new Sister City agreement was signed in 2016 with Shenyang, which presents considerable opportunity for international collaboration with the world's second largest (and fastest growing major) economy, and its most populace country.
- Links with India are developing. The Global India initiative resulted in 350 CEOs from top Indian companies, as well as senior politicians, coming to the Belfast to discuss investment opportunities and establish business leads.
- Closer to home, Belfast and Dublin have signed an agreement to explore the economic potential of the 100-mile economic corridor that joins the two cities and links have been established with London & Partners (the official promotion company of London) to undertake mutually beneficial cross working with the UK Capital.

1.4 A Partnership Model

Belfast's international ambitions rely on strong collaboration with a range of partners including the Executive Office, Invest NI, the universities, FE colleges and a range of bodies with shared ambitions to attract investment, tourism, conferences, students and so on.

This framework recognises the work that other partners are undertaking, alongside their strategies and ambitions for growth. At its core is the recognition that BCC has a key role to play in promoting the city and to complement and amplify the work of these partners, rather than compete against them.

This framework sets out the context in which we as a City Council will operate, and outlines the key principles that will guide our international relations work in partnership with others towards shared outcomes.



2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Building strong international relations is now more important than ever for Belfast's economic success. The UK vote to leave the European Union has created significant uncertainty with provoked key questions over the content of any exit agreement, including whether the UK will maintain access to the EU single market. It is vital that BCC establishes a refreshed international relations framework to enable the Council to build on opportunities in progress, identify and plan for new ones, and seize others as they emerge. This section places the international relations framework in the context of both emerging and current policy, and assesses the importance of international relations for our city.

2.1 Policy Context

The policy context, including the enabling activities and strategies of BCC and its partners, is summarised in the figure below:

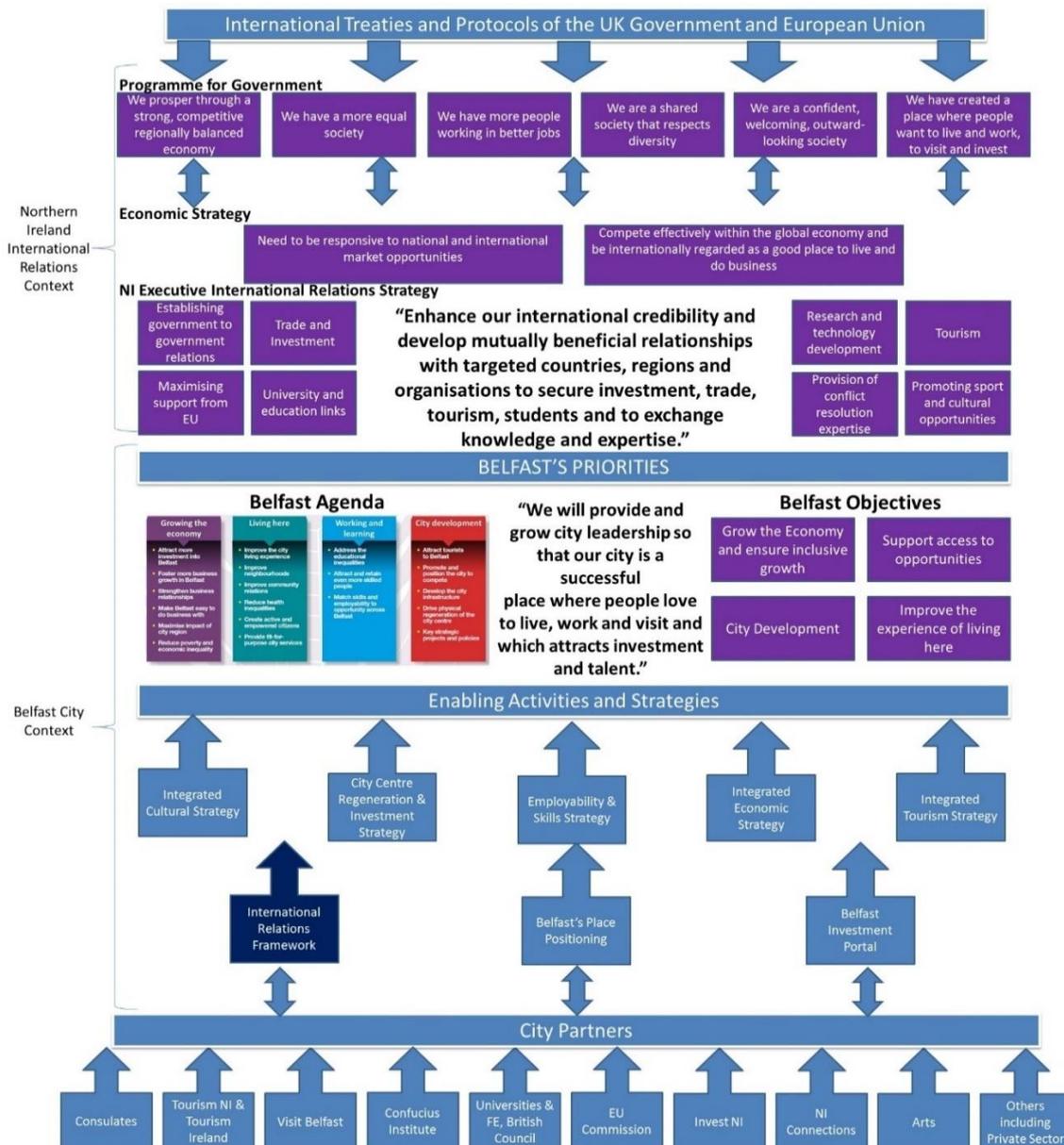


Figure 1 - Policy Context Overview

2.1.1 National Policy

Our International Relations Framework will evidently take cognisance of international treaties and the protocols of the UK government and (while a member) the European Union. At a Northern Ireland level the Programme for Government, Economic Strategy and Executive's International Relations Strategy provide a regional vision and outcome framework for Northern Ireland's societal, economic and international relations.

The forthcoming Programme for Government 2016-2021 focusses on achieving 14 strategic outcomes which the Executive determine best describe the society we wish to have. Of those proposed, there are several that relate directly to international relations. These, and the role that international relations can contribute to their achievement, are noted in the table below.

Programme for Government Strategic Outcome	Link to international relations
Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong, competitive regionally balanced economy	The Executive notes that attracting and embedding greater levels of higher quality inward investment and supporting the conditions where a greater number of businesses are competing successfully overseas is a key facet of achieving this outcome.
Outcome 3: We have a more equal society	Diversity can strengthen and enrich our society through embracing the talents and the range of perspectives of different people and communities. An improved international reputation is cited as one indicator of measuring success towards this outcome.
Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs	This outcome relates to both the creation of jobs and the attraction of the best talent to Northern Ireland (including drawing back those who have moved abroad) by creating high value employment opportunities. It also relates to attracting high quality employers, and encouraging growth of indigenous businesses, to offer sustainable employment opportunities.
Outcome 9: We are a shared society that respects diversity	BCC's city partners have noted that creating a city that is welcoming to international visitors, students and workers is an important enabler of successful international relations outcomes. This Programme for Government outcome acknowledges that diversity builds strength and adds value to our community.
Outcome 10: We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society	A key outcome from an international relations perspective, this outcome relates to building NI's reputation and standing on the international stage. Integral to this will be building confidence in communities to view connections with the wider world as opportunities to build a stronger society.
Outcome 12: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest	<p>This is another key outcome from an international relations perspective. It relates to encouraging others to come to visit and explore, to be inspired by what NI has to offer as a tourist destination and to want to return. It is also about encouraging business investment both indigenously and in terms of foreign direct investment. To achieve this outcome, the Executive proposes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promote Northern Ireland as a destination for high quality investment and jobs. • Develop an internationally competitive and inspiring tourist destination of which our community can be proud. • Recognise the economic importance of tourism and the potential to grow the tourism industry into a high-performing export-led sector. • Continue to invest in our economic infrastructure and in our strategic network of gateways to improve our connectivity. • Working to build our reputation on an international stage <p>The Programme for Government notes an intention to work with key partners, including diaspora.</p>

Table 1 - The role of international relations in the new Programme for Government

The Executive's Economic Strategy (currently being refreshed) also points towards a strong international relations theme. In recognising the need to be responsive to national and international opportunity, there is a commitment to keep the economic strategy under review to identify new opportunities, both at home and abroad. Within the economic strategy the overarching aim of rebalancing the economy recognises a need to compete effectively within the global economy and be internationally regarded as a good place to live and do business. Under a banner of 'competing globally', the strategy places an emphasis on attracting FDI, increasing exports and improving air links.

Recognising that key objectives in the Programme for Government 2011-2015 would require inward investment, tourism and increased exporting, in 2014 the Executive published an International Relations Strategy with the objective of enhancing our international credibility and developing mutually beneficial relationships with targeted countries, regions and organisations to secure investment, trade, tourism, students and to exchange knowledge and expertise.

Focussing on North America, Asia/Middle East, Europe and South America, International priorities are identified as follows - many of which are in alignment with BCC's International Relations Framework:

- Establishing government to government relations;
- Trade and investment;
- Maximising support from the EU;
- Tourism;
- University and education links;
- Research and Technology development;
- Provision of conflict resolution expertise; and
- Promoting sport and cultural opportunities.

2.1.2 BCC Policy

There is a comprehensive range of strategies that have been developed, or are under development, in BCC which cover focus areas such as economic development, tourism, employability and skills, culture, regeneration and investment.

Each is influenced by, and factors into, Belfast's Community Plan (the Belfast Agenda 2030) and seek to contribute to the four priorities noted to the right. It is evident from the aims and objectives of each key priority that there is a significant role for international relations to contribute to achieving the City's Corporate vision as a successful place where people seek to live, work, visit, study, trade and invest in.



Figure 2 - draft Belfast Agenda Priorities

At an operational level, the Local Development Plan under development, identifies multiple strategic objectives for the City, several of which require strong international relations to enable delivery, such as:

- Strengthen the local tourism economy through supporting the development of suitable tourism and cultural facilities, and visitor accommodation; and
- Grow the population of Belfast to connect with other cities across the UK and Ireland in supporting a greater level of inward investment.

2.2 External Context – why international relations are important for Belfast

Belfast's economic, cultural and social fabric is heavily influenced by a long history of being an open, internationally facing economy; a cause and effect relationship that will continue and expand over the coming decades. The importance of international relations to the city must not be understated - this

section assesses the external context of trade, inward investment performance, tourism and student attraction. This external context also provides a useful guide to identifying where global opportunities lie, in terms of trading markets, FDI sources and visitor markets.

2.2.1 Trade

The NI Economic Strategy notes that export led growth is a key economic driver, citing a need to both grow exports and diversify into new markets. Northern Ireland companies sell £22bn of goods and services outside Northern Ireland annually; the major markets that Northern Ireland exports serve are presented in the table below.

Country	Share of total NI exports	Country	Share of total NI exports
Irish Republic	34%	China	1%
United States	18%	Belgium	1%
Canada	6%	Australia	1%
Germany	6%	Saudi Arabia	1%
France	5%	Poland	1%
Netherlands	2%	UAE	1%
Thailand	2%	Switzerland	1%
Spain	1%	Other markets	18%

Figure 3 - Destination markets of NI exports. Source: HMRC

The spread of key markets for Northern Ireland's exports is therefore relatively small, with Ireland, the US, Canada, Germany and France accounting for nearly 70% of total outbound goods and services. It should also be noted that, having posted significant growth in exports in 2012 and 2013, the Department for Economy reports that Northern Irish exports declined by 2.6% in 2014.

From a city perspective, trade data relating to Invest NI clients in Belfast shows that export sales in 2014 (the most recent year for which data is available) totalled £1.48bn – 40% of the total turnover of these firms. Invest NI's Belfast based companies biggest export markets are GB, USA, Canada and RoI, as shown in the diagram below:

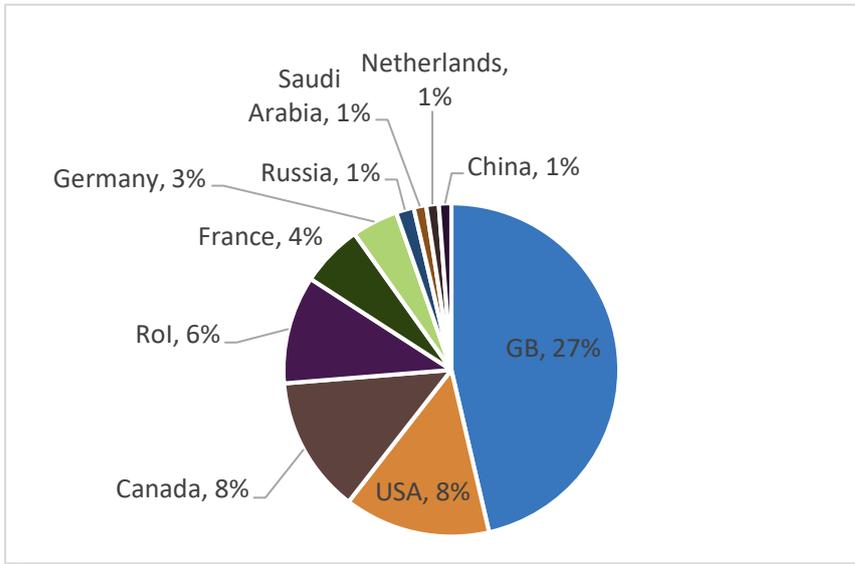


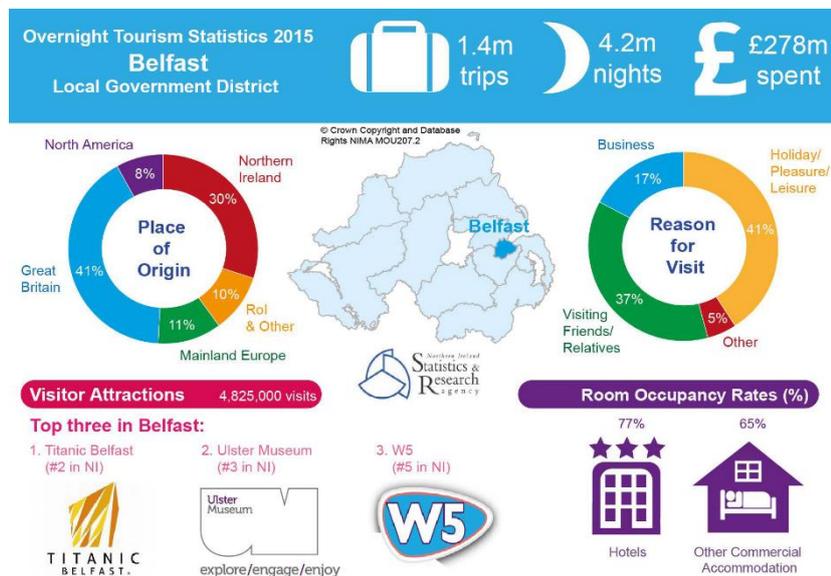
Figure 4 – Invest NI Belfast Clients: export destination markets. Source: Invest NI

2.2.2 Tourism

Attracting international visitors (either for conferences, other business or leisure) is an important element of any international relations framework.

There were close to 4.2 million overnight trips taken in Belfast during 2015, with overnight visitors predominantly local or from GB (71%). 21% of overnight visits to Belfast are from mainland Europe and Rol.

Growing tourism numbers and increasing tourism spending is a BCC objective – one that requires international marketing (in its widest sense). Determining what type of tourist (e.g. city break, socially active or culture seekers) should be targeted/prioritised is a decision that Belfast and its partners will decide upon as the city develops its place positioning and ‘go to market’ plans.



2.2.3 Inward Investment

Belfast is an inward investment success story, having secured over 20,000 inward investment jobs in the past decade. A significant proportion of these jobs have originated from a small number of source countries - out of a total of 23 investing countries that have delivered projects into Belfast, the top five

account for 80% of projects. The map included immediately below, showing source markets over the past five years, illustrates this:

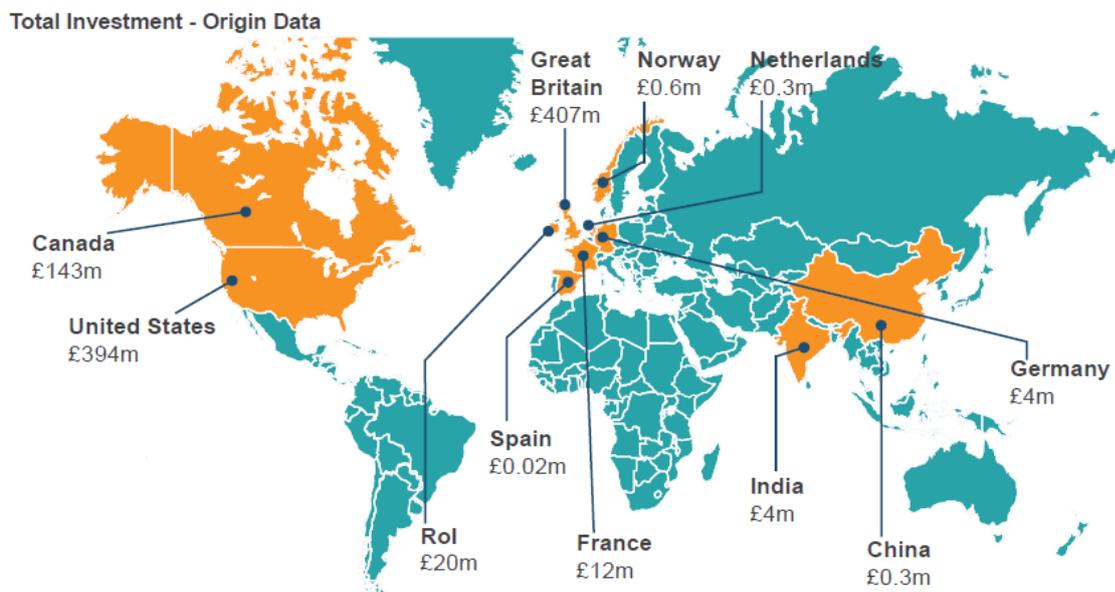


Figure 5 - Total Inward Investment to Belfast 2010/11 - 2014/15 by Source Region. Source: Invest NI

Inward Investment and core cities

Belfast's success in attracting inward investment is evidenced further when considered in the context of UK core regional cities and Dublin. The table below shows the volume percentage of inward investment projects into Belfast and competitor cities by top source cities; shaded cells reflect a top three destination for the source city. For example, Belfast is receiving 15% of projects from NYC, second only to Dublin and is thus shaded.

Source City	Destination City	Dublin	Belfast	Manchester	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Birmingham	Bristol	Leeds	Cardiff	Liverpool	Nottingham	Total Projects
NYC (NY)		36%	15%	10%	13%	9%	4%	1%	3%	5%	3%	1%	177
London		100%											110
Paris		28%	5%	10%	11%	14%	11%	6%	3%	6%	5%	2%	109
Dublin			38%	18%	13%	8%	6%	1%	2%	1%	8%	4%	99
San Francisco (CA)		74%	2%	7%	3%	5%	5%	3%	0%	0%	2%	0%	61
Tokyo		34%	9%	9%	9%	13%	9%	6%	6%	2%	4%	0%	47
Stockholm		26%	3%	16%	8%	11%	13%	3%	8%	8%	3%	3%	38
Dubai		6%	3%	21%	27%	15%	12%	6%	0%	3%	3%	3%	33
Amsterdam		35%	6%	13%	3%	6%	3%	13%	6%	10%	3%	0%	31
Chicago (IL)		48%	16%	16%	3%	3%	3%	6%	0%	3%	0%	0%	31
Seattle (WA)		55%	0%	0%	17%	3%	7%	10%	3%	0%	3%	0%	29
Sydney		31%	0%	17%	10%	14%	10%	14%	3%	0%	0%	0%	29
Boston (MA)		41%	34%	3%	7%	0%	7%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	29
Munich		26%	4%	19%	15%	11%	7%	7%	11%	0%	0%	0%	27
Mumbai		4%	23%	19%	0%	15%	12%	0%	8%	12%	8%	0%	26
Zurich		24%	4%	8%	32%	8%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	25
Mountain View (CA)		80%	12%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25
Brussels		35%	15%	10%	15%	10%	10%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	20
Luxembourg		26%	0%	26%	5%	16%	16%	0%	0%	5%	0%	5%	19
San Jose (CA)		63%	5%	11%	11%	5%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	19
Total Projects		399	108	105	96	80	61	34	30	30	29	12	984

Figure 6 - Inward investment Projects in Belfast and selected cities, 2003-2016 by source city. Source: Wavteq/FDI Markets from the Financial Times

Based on the table above, there is little to suggest that Belfast is missing out on any significant source markets and much to be positive about in terms of the number of projects secured. Our city is the second largest recipient of inward investment from these sources behind Dublin, which has several inherent advantages (such as size, a lower corporation tax and the seat of central government) which Belfast cannot challenge [or readily challenge].

Although not major sources of inward investment, Belfast has achieved a high proportion of inward investment from Boston and Mumbai. Belfast has established links with both cities during the previous International Relations Framework. Conversely, source cities such as Stockholm, Dubai, Amsterdam, Seattle or Sydney are not fruitful source markets for Belfast. There is an emerging case for Belfast to build additional international relations in markets such as the middle east or Australia which we will continue to monitor.

Whilst corporation tax rates represent one of many factors which overseas companies assess when selecting office locations, there is a significant correlation between its level and the volume/value of inward investment. Our international relations work must be cognizant of this in the context of a planned reduction in NI Corporation Tax, and aligned (where appropriate for BCC's international relations objectives) to Invest NI's developing strategy for maximising the value that can be derived from this reduction.

Can the success last: Brexit

The vote to leave the European Union in June 2016 has created significant uncertainty in terms of prospects for economic growth and attracting investment. For all Belfast's success in attracting inward investment, retaining it and drawing more in will be difficult whilst there remains little understanding of future access to the EU single market. Taking a truly compelling offer to inward investors is a priority for the city. Our ongoing work on 'place positioning' will contribute to maximising the value and mitigating any losses created by Brexit, and our International Relations Framework must be flexible enough to manage associated changes and impacts through to 2020.

While it is true that the vast bulk of inward investment comes from North America, there are downside risks to future opportunities if access to the EU single market is important to these firms. The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) estimates that EU membership increases FDI in member states by 14-38%, with the average impact an increase of 28%. The CEP estimates, conservatively, that FDI into the UK will fall by 22% over the next decade due to Brexit. Furthermore, analysis by Wavteq (an FDI specialist firm) suggests that 70% of FDI in NI is at 'medium or high' risk if the UK does not retain membership of the single market. Brexit, and the terms of the deal that follows in the coming years, is a key driver for refreshing our international relations framework for the city.

2.2.4 International Students

With approximately 435,000 enrolled in UK universities, international students generate a significant economic contribution to the UK. Universities UK, a body representing higher education institutions, estimate that nearly 20% of output generated by the higher education sector can be attributed to the enrolment of non-

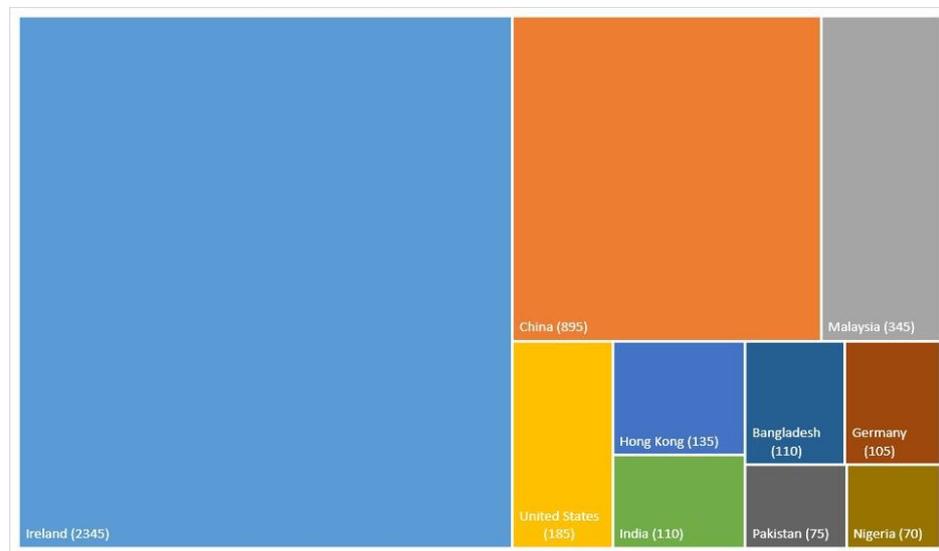


Figure 7: International Students Enrolled in NI. Source: HESA

EU students. Accounting for all non-UK students, export earnings of the HE sector in the UK were over £10bn. Belfast currently has approximately 5,000 international students enrolled, or ~1% of the UK total, against a population of nearly 3% of the UK total. To place NI performance in further context, 1% of students that come to study in the UK from China come to Northern Ireland, with Scotland attracting 8% and Wales 5% (in approximate line with their total UK population share). Obviously, the number of institutions and available places is an influencing factor but both local Universities, and Belfast Metropolitan College, are in the process of renewing their international student attraction strategies. Each institution recognises the importance of attracting students and are setting

considerably higher targets than previously established. Our international framework will align with these, and indeed the efforts of any of our schools to attract international students.

2.3 Conclusions

The internal and external context serves to demonstrate several key points:

- Strong and active International relations are an important enabler to deliver on Northern Ireland's and Belfast's strategic ambitions, and will support the achievement of a selection of Programme for Government outcomes.
- BCC's international relations has and should continue to contribute to a range of economic drivers:
 - **Trade:** Two opportunities are evident in a trade context - Belfast companies do not export enough and those that do need to diversify to more markets.
 - **Tourism:** Belfast has an opportunity to attract a greater proportion of visitors to the island of Ireland to visit and stay in Belfast, as well as market the city in recently launched air route destinations from the city.
 - **Inward Investment:** Belfast's success story in inward investment provides an opportunity to embed these inward investors into the city and grow their presence, and provides strong credentials with which to promote the city as an attractive place to do business. Brexit challenges aside, Belfast has much to offer inward investors.
 - **International Student Attraction:** Education providers in the city all recognise the upside benefits of attracting more international students. Opportunities exist to grow the international student base that comes to the city.

The international relations activities that BCC will undertake over the duration of this framework will, with our city partners, contribute to delivering growth across each of these key drivers.

3 OUR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FRAMEWORK

Wide ranging consultations with city partner organisations and desk research have raised a series of priorities for BCC’s role in international relations. The activities and initiatives the Council will undertake to maximise its role through to 2020 will be guided by the principles outlined in this section.

3.1 The Role of the Council

BCC is one of many important stakeholders, including private companies, tourist bodies and higher education institutions who have a role to play in Belfast’s international promotion. Our optimal role in international relations work (i.e. where we can deliver the most value for trade & investment, tourism and education) will be to leverage our resources towards shared outcomes with city partners; to amplify the work of these partners; co-ordinate and organise where appropriate and utilise our civic leadership functions to open opportunities and access to influencers on a scale that is beyond what these partners could achieve unilaterally. As lead authority for Belfast’s economic growth, it is important that we play a convening role which brings our city partners together and drives common purpose.

Our optimal role is therefore complementary, working alongside our partners in a structured, ‘joined up’ approach, but we will be **involved only where a value for money benefit to the residents of Belfast is shown.**

3.2 Guiding Principles to fulfil BCC’s role

The following principals will guide our international relations work over the period of this framework.

Communicating a single proposition

Belfast has a range of target audiences to engage across multiple international markets, from potential investors to students and tourists, and we need to raise our international profile. Over time, the city has developed a suite of marketing materials and ‘place positioning’ collateral that have served specific needs well. We need to ensure that, as we ‘approach the market’, we as a city are communicating a shared message that clearly and concisely articulates the benefits of our city, and what differentiates it on a global stage. Defining and communicating an overarching, compelling message for our audiences, in collaboration with our city partners, is a priority for the Belfast City Council.

Belfast needs to develop a single, compelling and consistent ‘narrative’ that all partners can use when pitching our city internationally

Strengthening our relationships

Building successful international relations takes time, resources and effort. Within the context of this guiding principle, we have identified the following priorities:

- **International partnerships:** Belfast’s international focus aligns well with the NI Executive and other key city partners. Belfast is open to new opportunities from wherever they emerge and will assess each opportunity on its merits but maximising our current relationships will take priority.

Recent years have seen a new impetus behind our Sister City agreements in North America and China – the recent signing of an agreement with Shenyang represents a significant opportunity to build new links with the World’s second largest economy, and most populace country. Maximising the outcomes from these agreements will be a focus through to 2020, to ensure the resources and effort that created these important links are translated into benefits for Belfast.

Enhancing the profile of the city without displacing other partners is a core principle of this framework – ‘complement’ not ‘compete’

We will also seek to assess, repurpose and refocus our activities with other key international partners where we have existing links, specifically Dublin, London and India, building on the Belfast-Dublin Economic corridor, links with London & Partners and the Global India initiative respectively. In North America, there is an emerging case to build on our strong cultural and business relationships with Canada and leverage our common trade, employment and diaspora links.

- **City Partnerships:** Our partners play a valuable role in Belfast’s growth and its positioning on the world stage. These organisations include the private sector, Invest NI, Visit Belfast, Tourism NI, British Council and NI Connections, amongst many others. Complementing their activity and amplifying its’ impact is both a core role of the Council and a core principle of this framework. BCC will work with these partners to ensure our role contributes to theirs for the benefit of the city; our measures of success will be developed in conjunction with these partners to further cement this ‘additionality’ role and ensure our resources are deployed towards shared outcomes.

We will also seek ways to support our partners by sharing collateral developed by the Council, which could benefit our partners as they seek new international opportunities or develop existing ones. As a Council, we produce a significant amount of material to support our international promotional efforts; making this available to others to support them in the delivery of shared outcomes will benefit the city as a whole.

- **Civic Leadership:** In addition to playing a convening and complementary role with our partners, Belfast City Council has an important civic role to play in international relations, enabling and facilitating access to key influencers and networks. Further, the role of the Lord Mayor in outward visits and in hosting delegations that visit the city has been recognised by our city partners as a vitally important contribution that Belfast City Council makes. Our international relations efforts will ensure our elected members play a key civic leadership role where their involvement supports our strategic objectives.
- **Diaspora:** There are tens of thousands of people across the world who were born and/or raised in Belfast, who share an affinity towards the city. In addition, there are many other individuals who are ‘friends’ of the city, having lived or studied here over the past decades. It is important for us to engage this diaspora and identify both business and cultural opportunities for Belfast in their current locations.
- **Best Practice and Influence:** BCC holds several international (or internationally facing) memberships and subscriptions such as Eurocities, NI Connections and Friends of NI in China. Belfast has recently been chosen as one of 100 Rockefeller Resilient cities from around the world, which gives our city support to develop responses to the challenges of the 21st century and plugs us in to a global network of cities with similar aspirations. Ensuring we access and leverage both the learnings and experience of others will help us maximise the value of our international relations work; as part of this we will assess the value and effectiveness of all our existing memberships, and identify new ones that can strengthen and augment our promotional work.

Objectively assessing new relationships and opportunities

While we will focus on maximising the relationships we already hold with Nashville, Boston and Shenyang, new opportunities for city partnership working will undoubtedly arise. These opportunities, which could be generated either by our work, or via city partners through their own activities, will require measured assessment to determine value to the Council and our residents. Using an objective assessment tool, BCC will evaluate each new opportunity against a range of economic, tourism, cultural, educational and operational factors before investing in any new opportunity. Specifically, the evaluation will assess:

- Export potential:
 - Trade intensity: the current value of trade between Belfast/NI and the proposed location as a proportion of total Belfast/NI trade, relative to the share of world trade going to the proposed partner location.
 - Priority Sector match: Belfast's sectoral priorities reflect where we have achieved success and can see significant future potential. These are:
 - Fintech
 - Financial services
 - Creative and Digital Industries
 - Cyber security
 - Green Technology
 - Life Sciences
- Investment potential:
 - Inward Investment potential: Measure of how many inward investment projects the source location has provided to Belfast, NI, UK or Ireland over the past three years
 - Sovereign Wealth Fund investment potential: measure of whether the proposed location is a strong source of sovereign wealth investments or pension investments
- Student/Educational potential:
 - Assessment of how many students already come from the source location to Belfast
 - Assessment of how many students already come from the source location to the UK/Ireland
- Tourism potential:
 - Assessment of how many tourists come from the source location to Belfast
 - Assessment of how many tourists from the source location come to the UK/Ireland
- Cultural links:
 - Assessment of how many residents in Belfast are from the potential source market
 - Determination of whether Belfast has a cultural link or shared experiences with which to share learning (e.g. emerging from conflict, waterfront regeneration or port city regeneration)
- 'Ease of doing' business:
 - World Bank 'doing business' rating
 - Business language used
 - Assessment of direct flights from Belfast/rest of Ireland?
 - Current UK trading relationship with destination (free trade/tariffs?)
- Partner Priorities:
 - Identification of how many Sister City agreements the proposed location already has
 - Determination if any of our city partners have an ongoing link with the proposed location
- Costs:
 - Estimated/indicative costs involved of entering a new partnership arrangement, and ongoing support to develop associated opportunities

Opportunities to support or fund events and initiatives will also be objectively assessed using a standard process based on accepted appraisal guidance and alignment with BCC's strategic objectives.

Promoting Trade and Investment

Belfast has achieved significant success in attracting inward investment in recent years. This inflow extends beyond job creation and includes attracting investment for infrastructure and regeneration projects. Our recent attendance at MIPIM is an example of where Council can work closely with city partners to advertise and augment Belfast's investment opportunities to a global audience. Maximising future opportunities to attract investors is paramount to growing our city.

Under our 'Growing the Economy' priority within the Belfast Agenda 2030, we will establish an Economic Forum in conjunction with our city partners; this forum will enable strategic discussion and

challenge, agree and oversee the economic growth priorities, and support the delivery of these. International relations work will be both an input and an output of this forum's activities and will therefore be heavily involved in its work.

Importantly, our activities will not stop once an investment is secured and delivered. Through maintaining regular communications with key international investors, we will ensure that we are well placed to proactively support a response to their needs, with the objective of seeking their further expansion in the city. This is not limited to new/potential investors – it also includes engaging with major overseas owned companies who have established operations in Belfast.

Belfast is home to many small dynamic and ambitious companies. Building the confidence and capabilities of these companies and helping them find international trade links will help our economy thrive. We will support these companies into international markets, and support the international trade efforts that our partners already undertake.

Attracting Visitors & Students

We have world class facilities such as Titanic Belfast, the Ulster Hall and the Waterfront Hall within our city, and can boast a safe and friendly environment. Our partners in Visit Belfast, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and our private sector tourist attraction/venue operators play a crucial role in attracting visitors and students here. Our investment support for Visit Belfast allows this public/private partnership to promote the city to a wide range of potential visitors across the world, in collaboration with over 500 partners. It is now the largest combined tourism, hospitality and retail membership organisation in Northern Ireland, and directly contributes to the continued success of positioning Belfast as an attractive location to visit and study. In 2015, for example, Visit Belfast's activities contributed £92 million to the local economy – a return of investment at a ratio of 26:1.

Attracting people to our city for study, leisure or business/conferences involves several related elements. The first requires a marketing strategy that sells the city to students, conference operators and leisure visitors, focussing on what each audience views as important to their own decision making, and cognizant of the overarching place positioning of our city. Access to the city is also important and we will work with our airports and seaports to support their route development efforts, where possible, and target marketing efforts in destination cities/regions. Once here, we must ensure Belfast provides a rich, positive experience through our culture, arts, leisure and events provision so that visitors leave with a positive experience, a desire to share those experiences and a wish to return.

Ensuring Transparency

International visits by BCC Councillors and officials must demonstrate purpose and value for our ratepayers. Full transparency on costs, delegation size and itineraries will form a central tenet of our international relations work. Visits will have a clearly defined purpose, will be undertaken with the minimum viable delegation size and costs will follow Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure guidelines.

Measuring and Communicating Success

Effective international relations activities require a partnership approach across many stakeholders. Attributing success to the efforts of any one party amongst many is complex, resource intensive and a long-term exercise, with outputs open to challenge and potentially damaging to key relationships. As such, measuring success in international relations will require a two-strand approach.

Firstly, we will measure our international relations activities against annual International Relations Team work programmes to ensure activities and outputs remain relevant. These programmes will be presented to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee annually for review and approval, with quarterly progress reports against these plans presented to this Committee.

Secondly, our international relations framework is positioned to contribute towards the Belfast Agenda 2030 and ultimately, the Northern Ireland Programme for Government Outcomes. We will baseline and track annual progress against a range of appropriate indicators that reflect our desire to increase trade and attract more inward investment, visitor and students, such as:

- Increase in the number of foreign owned companies in Belfast.
- Improvement in attractiveness as a destination (spend by visitors).
- Increase in our export intensity (exporting as a proportion of GDP).
- Increase in the number of international students in the city (HESA Statistics).
- Improvement in our international reputation (City Competitiveness index).

As noted previously, it is important that BCC’s ambitions for international relations are aligned not only to our own strategic objectives, but with those of our city partners. For example, we know that our Higher and Further Education institutions are in the process of revising their international strategies and student number targets. Early in the life of this framework, BCC will coordinate a series of strategic planning sessions with our city partners to ensure consistency of ambition against shared outcomes, and the key performance indicators to be reported on annually.



Figure 8 - draft Belfast Agenda outcomes