

Response ID ANON-MY8W-XQ2K-U

Submitted to **The Belfast Agenda (draft for consultation)**

Submitted on **2017-03-16 16:01:33**

Chapter 1: Introduction

1A What is your name?

Name:

Frances Morton

1B What is your email address?

Email:

frances.morton@open.ac.uk

1C Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or group?

Statutory Organisation

Name of Organisation:

The Open University

1D If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or group, and have held a group workshop/discussion on the Belfast Agenda, how many people (estimate) have helped to inform your response to the consultation?

Not Answered

Number of participants/contributors:

6

1E If you are responding on behalf of an organisation that primarily represents the interests of a particular equality or minority group please tell us which category or categories you represent.

BME, Children and young people, People with disabilities, Ex-offenders, Faith group, Irish traveller, LGBT, Men's group, Older people, People with dependents / caring responsibilities, Women's group

If other please specify::

If other please specify: The Open University is inclusive, innovative and responsive. We promote social justice and equality of opportunity for all the sections of society listed above. We have students from equality and minority groups that are specific cohorts in our institutional and national widening participation remit: black and minority ethnic, those with low socio-economic status, disabled students, first in family to attend higher education, adult returners, students in secure environments, young men from areas of disadvantage, Carers and Care Leavers.

Chapter 2: Vision, Outcomes and Ambitions to 2035, and 4 year priorities

2A To what extent do you agree or disagree with the long term vision for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this vision can be improved, please tell us your suggested changes::

2B(i) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long-term outcome for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

2B(ii) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

2B(iii) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

2B(iv) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

2B(v) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following long term outcome for Belfast?

Strongly agree

If you think this outcome can be significantly improved, please provide your comments here :

2C We have proposed four big ambitions for our city to work towards by 2035. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these proposed ambitions?

Ambitions agreement - Our city is home to an additional 70,000 residents by 2035:

Agree

Ambitions agreement - Our urban economy supports 50,000 more jobs by 2035:

Agree

Ambitions agreement - 50% reduction in the healthy life expectancy gap between neighbourhoods by 2035:

Agree

Ambitions agreement - By 2035 every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential:

Agree

Comments (Please be clear in any comments which of the above 'Ambitions' you are referring to):

While we agree with the last indicator, we recommend that this does not focus solely on young people leaving school but also includes adult learners. The Open University has over 3600 students in Northern Ireland, and the average age is 31. Three quarters of our students also fit their studies around their employment. This is important to acknowledge when aiming to ensure that individuals, regardless of age, achieve their potential, particularly in educational and career goals.

2D To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed city priorities for focus over the next four years?

Priorities agreement - Growing the economy: Creating jobs and investment in the city:

Agree

Priorities agreement - Living here: Creating a great city and neighbourhood living experience:

Agree

Priorities agreement - City development: Creating the right infrastructure and regenerating our city:

Agree

Priorities agreement - Working and learning: Supporting growth and connecting people to opportunities:

Agree

Comments (Please be clear in your comments which of the above priorities you are referring to):

In the priority 'Growing the economy', under the heading of 'Skills', the document notes that "68% of school-leavers went on to further or higher education". We would like to highlight that not only school-leavers at 18 years of age go into higher education and it is essential to note that a large number of adult learners enter or continue higher education each year, particularly through the part-time study route. The part-time sector plays a crucial role in contributing to economic growth and social mobility. Part-time study has an important life-changing role to play, particularly for adult learners – providing them with the skills they require to succeed in their careers and improving productivity.

Research carried out by London Economics (2014) indicated that the economic benefits of The Open University in Northern Ireland are significant. Results reported that the average increase in earning potential seen by students in Northern Ireland over their working lives who have completed an Open University undergraduate degree and who had non-traditional degree entry qualifications (five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) but less than two 'A-levels') prior to studying is £85,000 for males and £54,000 for females.

As mentioned earlier, The Open University has over 3,600 students in Northern Ireland, and the average age of a student here is 31. Therefore it is crucial that the Belfast Agenda recognises and acknowledges this demographic in terms of skills development and the contribution this makes to growing the economy.

Under 'Working and Learning', and the heading 'Universities', the document currently states that "the city's two universities have 45,000 students". The Open University is the third university located in Belfast and we would ask that this be changed in the document to state "the city's three universities". In 2013, funding for The Open University was devolved to the then Department for Employment and Learning, transferring to the Department for the Economy, making the OU fully accountable to the Executive.

Chapter 3: Growing the economy (optional questions)

3A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next 4 years, are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to)::

3B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Growing the Economy' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to)::

In relation to point 3. 'support 4,000 small business start-ups' we feel The Open University could potentially contribute to this. The Open University, in response to a major philanthropic donation, is designing an online course to guide senior managers of SMEs through the process of developing a business growth plan. This will be aimed specifically at SMEs who have ambitions to grow but find themselves in a stagnant position, unable to overcome internal or external barriers to achieve it. Operating on an all-Ireland basis, and with input and guidance from Invest Northern Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, this course will be unique in that it will not require participants to attend a physical location for classes; they will be able to engage with it at their own time and pace. Aside from improving business practice, the business growth plan will act as a mechanism to draw down additional support from development agencies and external finance.

3C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Growing the Economy' priority?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the workstreams you are referring to)::

Chapter 4: Living Here (optional questions)

4A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to)::

Under the proposal to 'reduce life inequalities' we feel that education, particularly part-time higher education, plays an important role in developing quality of life and access to opportunities. The Open University engages in local communities through tailored educational programmes designed to meet the varying support needs of residents who wish to access higher education. In partnership with community organisations, the University provides access to education and skills development to ensure that people are enabled to achieve their potential. A wide range of learning materials are available: informal free learning, Badged Open Courses (to develop knowledge and skills for study), Access Modules (to prepare learners for undertaking a degree pathway), and formal qualifications in higher education. Additionally, the University works with organisations that support people with disabilities, care-experienced individuals and carers to promote higher education and appropriate support for such groups.

We feel that The Open University's experience in 'Smart Cities' may be of value here to 'improving the city living experience'. The Open University has substantial experience in the "Smart Cities" concept due to being a lead partner in MK:Smart in Milton Keynes. MK:Smart is a £16m initiative, partially funded by the Catalyst Fund of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) and led by The Open University, which brings together a higher education and industry partnership with the aim of helping to secure the future economic growth of Milton Keynes. This will be achieved by putting in place an integrated innovation and support programme, which will leverage large-scale city data to sustain and accelerate economic growth. At the centre of this programme will be the MK Data Hub, a state of the art data acquisition and management infrastructure, which will curate and make available a variety of data sources relevant to how the city functions, including: local and national open data resources; data streams from both key infrastructure networks (energy, transport, water) and other relevant sensor networks (e.g., weather and pollution data); satellite data; and data crowd-sourced from social media or through specialised apps. In particular, the MK Data Hub will make it possible to implement radical new solutions for managing demand, a key enabler to ensure that the city's capacity to reach forecast growth potential of 64% by 2026 can be effectively and sustainably realised.

We have initiated engagement with Belfast City Council to explore whether we could use this expertise to support the development of Belfast's Smart City ambition. This could range from hosting workshops and consultancy to actually helping to build and develop technical solutions for the City Council.

4B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Living Here' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to)::

4C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Living Here' priority?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the workstreams you are referring to)::

Chapter 5: City Development (optional questions)

5A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to): :

5B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'City Development' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to): :

5C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'City Development' priority?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above workstreams you are referring to): :

Chapter 6: Working and Learning (optional questions)

6A To what extent do you agree or disagree that the commitments set out under this priority, as areas for city partners to focus on over the next four years, are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above commitments you are referring to): :

The Open University agrees with these commitments are crucial to the Working and Learning priority. This is particularly relevant given the OU's delivery of part-time higher education, and how the latter contributes to commitments that will "address educational inequalities and increase skills attainment", "address barriers to employment at structural and personal level" and "Reduce poverty and economic inactivity".

Part-time study is an important agent of social mobility for adults. The Open University makes a significant contribution to social mobility via its part-time, open-access model. Part-time study is often the only way that individuals from these groups can study, around commitments and disabilities, in order to achieve a qualification and gain employment. This is particularly true for individuals with caring responsibilities who often cannot devote time to full-time study, and may have to stay at home, or within the vicinity of the person they care for. The Open University's online teaching enables individuals to access their studies anywhere and at any time – enabling students to fit their studies around their lives, rather than the other way around. This is the same for parents, particularly lone parents who also need to fit in their studies around their children and all the responsibilities that childcare and parenting brings. Students can access their studies in their own time and at a pace that suits them, via a range of mobile apps, online tutorials and other accessible methods. For disabled students, The Open University offers a range of specific support and our undergraduate disabled student population is 17%.

In terms of the commitment to "Enhance and increase the skill levels of our residents and attract and retain even more skilled people" and "Reduce poverty and economic inactivity" part-time study again is key. Students are able to earn while they learn and 73% of The Open University's students here remain in work while studying. Many of these students are up-skilling, to improve their career prospects within their current line of employment, or reskilling, to move into employment in a sector that offers better career prospects than the one they are currently in. Given the impending reduction of corporation tax in 2018 to 12.5%, The Open University is well placed to support the in-work population to up-skill and reskill to take advantage of the new employment opportunities that it is forecast to bring.

6B To what extent do you agree or disagree that the stretch goals set out for 'Working and Learning' over the next four years are right for Belfast?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above 'stretch goals' you are referring to): :

Under stretch goal 2 "reduce the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications to fewer than 14 per cent", The Open University is well placed to contribute. The Open University's open access policy means that the majority of courses do not require traditional, formal entry requirements – all that is needed is a desire and a commitment to learn. Given our open entry approach, 38% of Open University undergraduate students here entered higher education with 1 A-level or less last year. In addition, 23% of our current students here come from the 25% most deprived areas.

The Open University is also currently entering into a process to approve Belfast Metropolitan College as a validated partner of the University. This will initially focus around supporting them to validate and develop a cyber security higher level apprenticeship. The Open University is hopeful that this will facilitate additional partnership work with the college to develop solutions to higher level skills deficits in Belfast.

6C To what extent do you agree or disagree that the workstreams identified for building momentum are the right ones for Belfast to deliver our 'Working and Learning' priority?

Strongly agree

Comments (Please be clear, in your comments below, which of the above workstreams you are referring to): :

Under workstream 1, the OU is well placed to enable those already in employment to undertake higher education on a part-time basis.

Under workstream 4: "Deliver an integrated city programme to address education inequalities", it is important to mention that The Open University partners with the trades unions in Northern Ireland to promote higher education among union members. The University's open access policy means that the working population with lower educational qualifications may study degree programmes with specialised preparation and support to enable success. A substantial suite of free online learning offers subject-specific courses and study skills to equip learners to pursue goals in education and their professional lives.

Under workstream 5, we would ask that The Open University is included alongside Queen's University, Ulster University and Belfast Metropolitan College. The Open University's funding for Northern Ireland activities was devolved to the Department for Employment and Learning in 2013, and now sits with the Department for the Economy.

Under workstream 6, we would ask that adult learners are also included in any coherent pathways for education, training and employment, as well as young people. As we have indicated previously in this response, adult learners have a key role to play in economic growth through upskilling and reskilling and through graduate premia.

We would also like to highlight the free learning resources that The Open University offers through its online learning platform, OpenLearn. Over 16,500 people in Northern Ireland accessed OpenLearn materials in the last year, with over 11,000 in Belfast alone. These resources could be utilised to further enhance the commitment to make Belfast a learning city.

Chapter 7: Tracking our progress - Population level indicators (optional questions)

7A If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.1 City productivity levels:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.2 Investment into Belfast:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.3 Performance of the Belfast Urban Area economy:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.4 The number of new business start-ups verses the number of business deaths (Business Churn Rate):

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.5 The proportion of the population living in relative poverty:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.6 The proportion of working-age population in Belfast who are unemployed:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.7 The employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.8 Skills barometer measure – the gap between current and future skill needs:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.9 Economic inactivity rate (excluding students):

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.10 Average earnings:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.11 Total spend by external visitors:

Include

Population Indicators Economy keep change - 1.12 Supply of suitable housing:

Include

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to):

We have responded to the Programme for Government consultation and are generally in favour of these indicators.

7B If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.1 Number of victims of any crime:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.2 Number of hate-motivated crimes:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.3 Proportion of people who feel safe:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.4 Number of anti-social behaviour incidents:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.5 Number of interfaces:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.6 The number of people who agree that people from different background get on well together:

Include

Population indicators welcoming safe keep change - 2.7 Proportion of population who believe the cultural identity is respected by society:

Include

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to):

We have responded to the Programme for Government consultation and are generally in favour of these indicators.

7C If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.1 Proportion of population who have attained Level 2 or above:

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.2 Gap between percentage of school leavers and percentage of free school meals school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above, including English or maths:

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.3 Proportion of school leavers entering employment, education or training:

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.4 Proportion of care leavers who aged 19 were in education training or employment:

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.5 Proportion of children who have reached attainment at Key Stage 2 (up to 11 years):

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.6 Proportion of pre-school children at the appropriate stage of development:

Include

Population indicators Potential keep change - 3.7 School attendance rates:

Include

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

We have responded to the Programme for Government consultation and are generally in favour of these indicators.

7D If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and wellbeing', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.1 Healthy life expectancy at birth:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.2 Gap in healthy life expectancy:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.3 Preventable deaths:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.4 Proportion of the population of adults and/or children who are obese:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.5 Proportion of population who smoke:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.6 Proportion of adults drinking above sensible drinking guidelines:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.7 Proportion of people who rank themselves as having high levels of well-being:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.8 Proportion of adults participating in moderate exercise at least five days per week:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.9 Number of households in housing stress:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.10 Proportion of population living in decent homes:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.11 Proportion of the population volunteering:

Include

Population Indicators Health keep change - 4.12 Proportion of the population participating in culture, arts and sport:

Include

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

We have responded to the Programme for Government consultation and are generally in favour of these indicators.

7E If you have views on any of the proposed population indicators to monitor progress towards our outcome 'Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly city', please indicate whether you think these should be included, excluded or changed for inclusion in the final version of the plan.

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.1 Air quality:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.2 Percentage of household waste that is recycled or composted:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.3 Percentage of all journeys which are made by walking, cycling or public transport:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.4 Visitor numbers:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.5 Renewable energy as a percentage of all energy consumed:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.6 Number of miles of cycle lanes, footways and footpaths:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.7 Proportion of homes that are energy efficient:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.8 Visitor satisfaction:

Include

Population indicators Attractive keep change - 5.9 Satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live:

Include

Comments (please be clear in any comments which of the above population indicators you are referring to) :

We have responded to the Programme for Government consultation and are generally in favour of these indicators.

Chapter 8: Any other comments (optional question)

8A If you have any other comments about the Belfast Agenda or this consultation survey please use the space below.

Any other comments:

Related Consultations

Chapter 9: Monitoring information (optional questions)

9A Gender

Not Answered

9B Which category best describes your age?

Not Answered

9C Marital status

Not Answered

9D(i) Under the Disability Discrimination (NI) Act 1995 a disabled person is defined as a person with: “A physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial or long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out a normal days activities.” Having read this definition, do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Not Answered

9D(ii) If yes please indicate how this disability affects you

Other (please specify):

9E Please indicate your community background

Not Answered

9F Please state your religious denomination

Not Answered

Other religion (please specify):

9G How would you describe your national identity?

Not Answered

Other national identity (please specify):

9H What is your ethnic group?

Not Answered

Other (please specify):

9I(i) Do you have dependants or caring responsibilities for family members or other persons?

Not Answered

9I(ii) If yes, please indicate which of the following caring responsibilities you have:

Other (please specify):

9J Is your sexual orientation towards someone of...?

Not Answered

Other (please specify):