



Our Story

**A TALE OF RESILIENCE
AND RELEVANCE**

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OURS IS A STORY THAT CONTINUES TO GROW BY THE DAY

INTRODUCTION

Belfast Metropolitan College was founded over 110 years ago.

Ours is a story that continues to grow by the day and each of us has a hand in writing it.

It has been an eventful journey – a journey of huge success and impressive accomplishments, but also a journey of adversity and seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

We know that the future will present challenges but, more importantly, we know it is full of potential. Most of all,

we know Belfast Met has endured for so long because of two qualities: resilience and relevance.

This is the story of how our capacity for resilience and our focus on relevance has brought us to yet another important moment in our history.

An aerial photograph of Belfast, Northern Ireland, taken at sunset. The city is bathed in a warm, golden light. In the foreground, a multi-lane road with a green-painted median runs across the frame. To the right, a tall, modern building with a dark facade and several brightly lit windows stands out. In the background, a large white dome-shaped structure is visible among other city buildings. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow, with the sun low on the horizon. A semi-transparent blue-grey overlay covers the left side of the image, where the main text is placed.

OUR VISION IS TO BE A
WORLD-CLASS COLLEGE
THAT NURTURES THE
TALENT AND AMBITION
OF THE CITY OF
BELFAST AND BEYOND

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

WE APPROACH THE FUTURE EQUIPPED WITH A FRESH VISION, AN UPDATED MISSION AND AN AMBITIOUS NEW CORPORATE PLAN.

Underpinning both our vision and our mission is a set of core values that resonate deep within the culture of our College.

Collaboration

Forging strong and creative partnerships based on shared goals and mutual respect, striving to bring out the best performance, and delivering clear and tangible outcomes.

Ambition

Determined to accomplish great things for our learners, our College, our business and industry partners, the communities we serve, and the city of Belfast and beyond.

Respect

Valuing everyone's contribution, acting with courtesy and consideration, providing help and support when needed, and always behaving in an honest, transparent and fair manner.

Excellence

Making excellence part of our day-to-day working lives, seeking continuous quality improvement, and setting and achieving the highest possible standards for individuals and for the College.

To understand Belfast Met today — our ambition, our passion and our resolve — we must look back at what has led us to this point.

IT HAS BEEN A ROAD WITH MANY TWISTS AND TURNS.

OUR CORE VALUES RESONATE DEEP WITHIN THE CULTURE OF OUR COLLEGE:
COLLABORATION
AMBITION
RESPECT
EXCELLENCE

OUR MISSION

TO MAKE A FUNDAMENTAL
IMPACT ON THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL SUCCESS OF THE
CITY OF BELFAST AND BEYOND
BY EQUIPPING ITS PEOPLE,
EMPLOYERS AND COMMUNITIES
WITH THE SKILLS FOR WORK



A PROUD HISTORY



OUR COLLEGE WAS FOUNDED IN 1906 BY THE BELFAST CORPORATION. THIS WAS AN INCREDIBLY DYNAMIC MUNICIPAL ENTITY, DEEPLY AMBITIOUS FOR THE CITY IT SERVED.

Our founders understood the power and necessity of vocational and technical skills, and they invested millions in building “the Tech”. Purpose-built around the needs of industry, our magnificent College Square East building was a confident and bold symbol of the city’s soaring ambition.

Our mission was to feed the skills demands of a city at the height of its industrial might.

We provided the knowledge, creativity and innovation that drove industry forward, equipping the workforce with the skills that enabled the city to prosper and thrive.



THINKERS, INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS



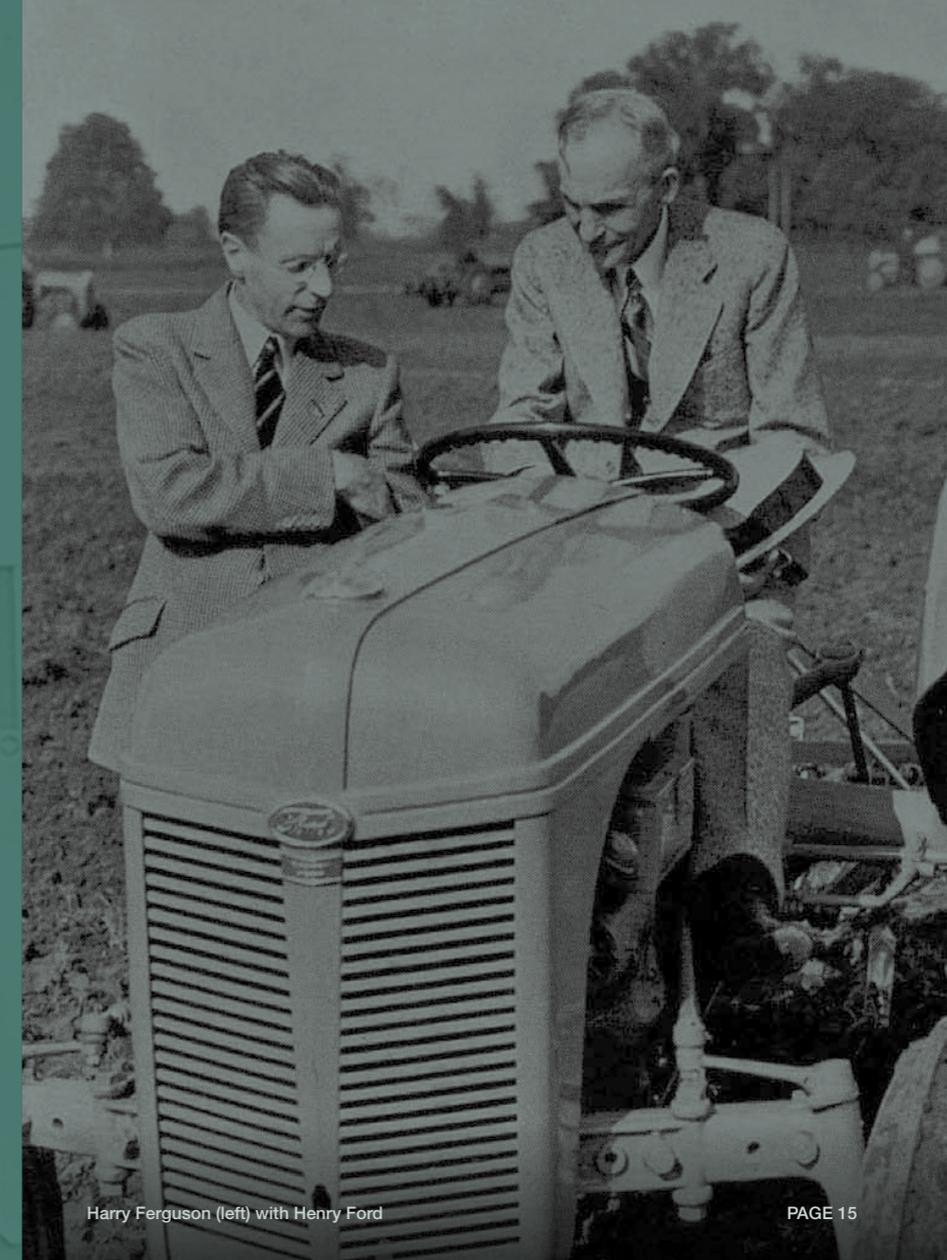
John Stewart Bell, Physicist

THE PIONEERING SPIRIT OF
THE COLLEGE IS REFLECTED
IN THE ROLL CALL OF ITS
ESTEEMED ALUMNI.

People such as the mechanical engineer Harry Ferguson, regarded by Henry Ford as one of the world's greatest inventors, ranked alongside figures such as Thomas Edison, the Wright Brothers and Alexander Graham Bell.

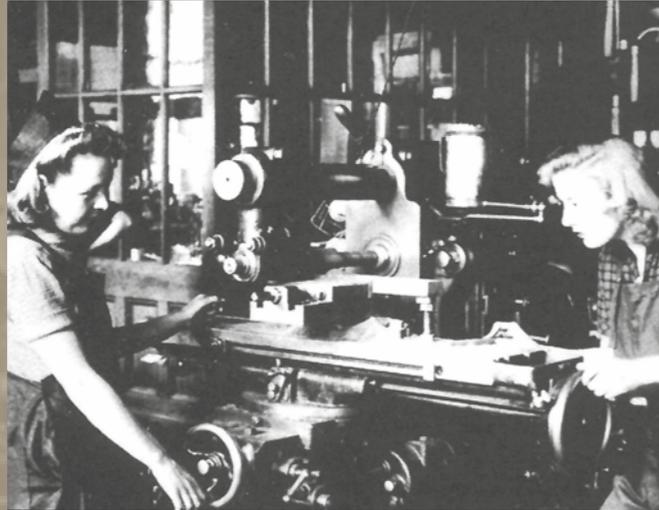
And John Stewart Bell – a native of the city and one of the twentieth century's most renowned physicists.

Thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs – people with talent, ambition, passion and all the good things that come from those qualities.



Harry Ferguson (left) with Henry Ford

THE WAR YEARS



Private William Frederick McFadzean VC

THE COLLEGE WAS BARELY EIGHT YEARS OLD WHEN THE FIRST WORLD WAR BEGAN IN 1914 AND CLAIMED MANY OF ITS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS.

It survived amid the political traumas following the Great War and remained a beacon during the Depression.

The College made a significant technical contribution during the Second World War, serving as a munitions factory and selected as one of only a handful of institutions to train Royal Air Force mechanics in the very latest developments in radio technology.



FEW THINGS
ARE IMPOSSIBLE
TO DILIGENCE
AND SKILL



REACHING OUT ACROSS THE CITY

THE COLLEGE ENDURED THE AUSTERITY OF THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR YEARS AND GATHERED NEW MOMENTUM IN THE 1950s AND 1960s WITH THE RISE OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL COURSES.



Millfield (1980s)

As provision grew, so too did our reach. We extended out from the cradle of College Square East, bringing education and skills to people across the city.

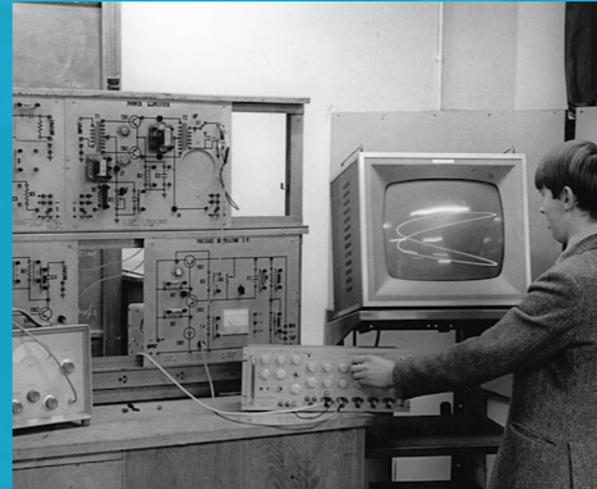
The College of Business Studies opened in Brunswick Street in 1970.

Whiterock in west Belfast followed in the mid-1980s.

The College provided comfort and transformation during 40 years of Troubles, remaining open to everyone, across every community in spite of difficult circumstances.



A BRAVE NEW WORLD



BUT THE WORLD WAS CHANGING. THE GLORY DAYS OF HEAVY INDUSTRY – OF SHIPBUILDING, LINEN-MAKING AND ROPE-MAKING – WERE AT AN END. THE COMBINATION OF GLOBALISATION AND RAPID ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY USHERED IN A BRAVE NEW WORLD.

The population of the inner city declined as more and more people moved out into the suburbs and into surrounding towns.

Higher education became more widely available and a university degree soon came to be regarded as the only real pathway to a good job and a promising career.

Somewhere along the way, society forgot the importance of vocational and technical pathways.

The growth of adult education had taken on a life of its own and Belfast Met had evolved in a largely unplanned way.

We met demand when demand presented itself but were not sufficiently tuned into the city's changing demographic and economic needs. We were not forecasting and proactively planning for future opportunities.

We had taken society's reliance on us for granted and were unwittingly drifting further off course and away from our original purpose. Belfast Met, and the sector it had spawned, had lost its lustre and was fast losing its relevance.

IT WAS CLEAR THAT TO SURVIVE AT ALL, FURTHER EDUCATION HAD TO RE-EXAMINE ITS ROLE AND ONCE AGAIN FIND ITS PURPOSE.

FURTHER EDUCATION MEANS BUSINESS



IN 2004, THE GOVERNMENT PUBLISHED ITS FURTHER EDUCATION MEANS BUSINESS STRATEGY.

The new strategy focused on economic and workforce development, social cohesion and securing a better match between what the further education sector provided and what the economy needed. It brought the emphasis back to industry and on reconnecting with employers.

The new government strategy also tackled the costly duplication in provision and called for the merger of several further education centres. In 2007, we amalgamated with our sister college in Castlereagh but that wasn't enough to change the direction in which we were headed.

We remained, for the most part, distanced from the realities of the economy around us.

THIS WOULD MEAN LOOKING HARD AT BOTH THE TYPE AND THE QUALITY OF OUR PROVISION.

- ▶ Raise skills and qualification levels in areas that meet the needs of the local economy.
- ▶ Ensure that curriculum provision in colleges is focused on economic and workforce needs.
- ▶ Update and ensure the quality of college services in keeping with international standards of best practice.
- ▶ Provide greater support to employers.

Further Education Means Business, Department for Employment and Learning, 2004

TIPPING POINT

BY 2009, BELFAST MET FOUND ITSELF TEETERING ON THE EDGE OF CORPORATE FAILURE. FACED WITH MULTI-MILLION POUND PROJECTED LOSSES, STAFF MORALE, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND PERFORMANCE WERE ALL AT CRISIS POINT.



These were unquestionably dark days. Our once proud College had stumbled badly on a road it had walked with dignity and purpose for just over a century.

We were on the brink of the unthinkable.

A series of adverse audit reports, coupled with a bleak financial forecast, led the College's Governing Body to call for an Efficiency Review. This was completed by the Department for Employment and Learning and published in June 2009.

The Review left no stone uncovered and identified no fewer than 72 areas which needed to be addressed.

- ▶ Poor strategic and corporate planning.
- ▶ Poor curriculum development.
- ▶ Poor financial planning.
- ▶ Poor estate management.
- ▶ Weaknesses in management and governance structures.
- ▶ Significant weaknesses in financial control and accountability.

Department for Employment and Learning Efficiency Review, 2009



**THE SITUATION
WOULD CALL
FOR UNITY
AND RESOLVE,
BROUGHT
TOGETHER
UNDER BOLD
AND DECISIVE
LEADERSHIP.**

A BASIC TRUTH

**AND YET, EVEN IN THESE
MOST DIFFICULT TIMES, STAFF
NEVER LOST SIGHT OF THE
IMPORTANCE OF THEIR ROLE
OR SCALED BACK ON THEIR
AMBITION FOR OUR LEARNERS.**

They never forgot a basic truth: Belfast Met remained capable of transforming lives.

It was a place that provided opportunity, was open to all and which somehow had the unique ability to ignite the potential in everybody.

We knew we had to get back on track and once again find our place in the world.

The situation would call for unity and resolve, brought together under bold and decisive leadership.



JACQUARD.
1752-1834

TEXTILE
INDUSTRIES.

Nothing great was ever achieved
without enthusiasm.

NOTHING
GREAT
WAS EVER
ACHIEVED
WITHOUT
ENTHUSIASM

SETTING OUT ON OUR JOURNEY

BY LATE 2009, BELFAST MET HAD A NEW PRINCIPAL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, MARIE-THÉRÈSE MCGIVERN.

Marie-Thérèse quickly set about uncovering the extent of the crisis. She delved deep, gathered the data and compiled the facts and figures that would reveal the scale of the challenge and, ultimately, a way forward.

Armed with this clarity, she called everyone together in early 2010.

Marie-Thérèse compared the College to a once great garden. A garden that had been created with form, purpose and structure. A garden that had been tended with love but which had, in recent years, been left to run ragged. It would need careful pruning, nurturing and care if it was to blossom again.

It would not be an easy journey but we knew where we needed to go and, by October that year, we had a map to guide us on our way – our three-year College Improvement Plan.

We carefully and courageously set out on our journey.

The road was at times difficult.

- ▶ Tough financial decisions, such as restructuring and a voluntary redundancy programme which saw 250 staff leave, resulted in an efficiency saving of £6 million pounds.

But it was also exciting.

- ▶ Our new Curriculum Strategy, *Skills Matter* (2011) nudged us back on track, once again aligning provision with economic demand, growing in areas where growth was needed and contracting in those in which it wasn't.
- ▶ Our new Estate Strategy focused on creating a fit-for-purpose estate. One which served the needs of a modern economy. One of consolidation and efficiency; of ambition and imagination.



BELFAST MET HAD COME BACK FROM THE BRINK

OUR CONFIDENCE RETURNS



Titanic Quarter Campus



e3 building, Springvale Campus

WE HAD SUCCESSFULLY REDEFINED AND REPOSITIONED OURSELVES. OUR FINANCIAL POSITION HAD BEEN STABILISED AND THE QUALITY OF OUR TEACHING AND LEARNING HAD IMPROVED. OUR GARDEN WAS BEGINNING TO FLOWER ONCE MORE.

Our self-confidence grew as our progress continued.

In autumn 2011, we unveiled our wonderful new flagship campus in the Titanic Quarter.

This was followed just ten months later by the opening of our equally impressive e3 building in Springvale.

We now had two of the finest educational facilities in the city. Modern, award-winning sites, strategically located to maximise our economic and social impact.

This trajectory continued and we purposefully and systematically continued to improve.



A REMARKABLE TURNAROUND

OUR 2013–2016 CORPORATE PLAN CAPTURED THIS MOMENTUM.

The plan centred on four strategic priorities, the first of which was to put our learners back at the heart of everything we do.

It included a stretching set of rigorously monitored targets and, for the first time, articulated a phrase which serves as a constant reminder of our deeply rooted strategic purpose: Leading the City to Work.

By coming together, we had overcome seemingly impossible odds to achieve financial break-even and bring our performance not just to satisfactory, but beyond that, to good.

We had achieved a remarkable turnaround in the space of just a few

short years. We had learnt the lessons of the past and begun to reclaim our birthright as one of the city's key anchor institutions.

Our performance had improved significantly.

Student Retention: 87.47%
Student Achievement: 84.04%
Student Success: 73.51%

Our goal was in sight. The question now was: is this enough or should we aim higher? The answer didn't take long coming.

We knew that we were capable of so much more. That we had the appetite, the ability and the ambition to once again become a great college.

And so we set out on another journey; a journey from good to great.

Significant commitment and investment of resources by the Executive Management Team to develop and embed quality improvement across the College.

Improved coherence in key strategic and business planning processes.

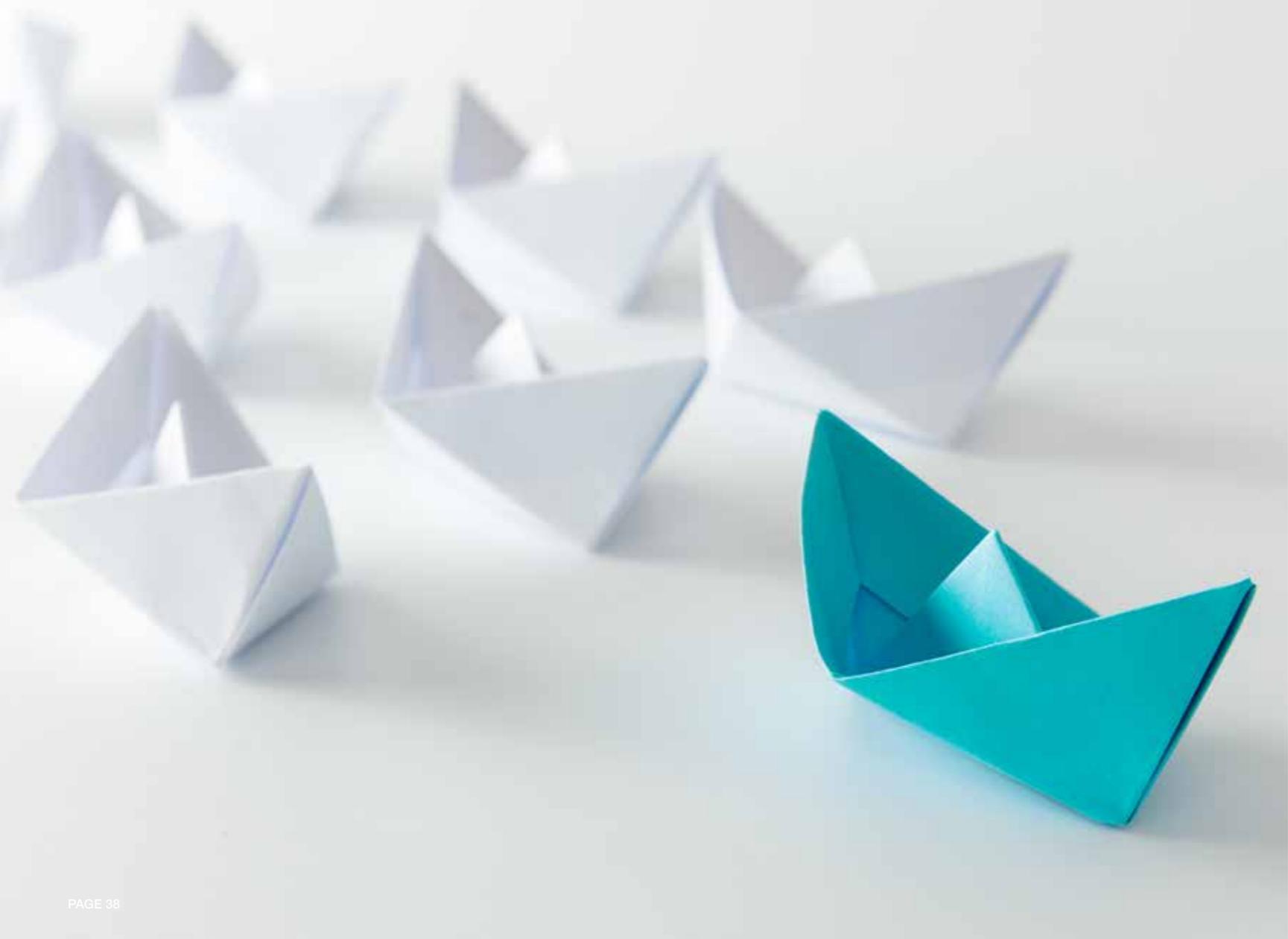
Increased accountability and communication at all levels that is creating an open culture of improvement.

ETI Inspection Report, January 2013

“We will keep investing in programmes that enrich us. Programmes like the one at Belfast Metropolitan College which teaches students from west and north Belfast the skills they need for new jobs.”

US President Barack Obama, Waterfront Hall
Belfast, June 2013





GOOD TO GREAT

WE BEGAN BY LOOKING CLOSELY AND CRITICALLY AT EVERYTHING WE WERE DOING. THIS EXERCISE LED US TO IDENTIFY SEVEN PROJECTS WHICH WOULD BECOME THE FOCUS FOR THE COLLEGE'S NEWLY FORMED GOOD TO GREAT GROUP.

1. **Creating leadership everywhere**
2. **Creating a relevant curriculum**
3. **Creating excellent teaching and learning**
4. **Making accountability real**
5. **Engaging employers and innovating**
6. **Building recognition and reputation**
7. **Taking technology seriously**

We now had the framework around which we could progress from good to great; the scaffolding around which we could build a high performing leadership team.

The projects were completed over a period of just 18 months, with each delivering tangible, necessary improvements while simultaneously developing the leadership skills and capacity of approximately 30 individuals who comprised the Good to Great team.

But leadership isn't the preserve of the few. Becoming a great college means that leadership behaviours have to permeate all parts and all levels of the organisation. We responded to this need by developing a series of complementary management programmes, this time targeting individuals at middle management – Leaders for Excellence – and those aspiring to become managers – Moving into Management.

Good to Great has since evolved to become the umbrella brand for Belfast Met's entire leadership and management approach. It has been reimaged and reconfigured to ensure it is relevant to today's needs. Based on a tiered approach to leadership and accountability, it once again focuses on a number of key transformational projects, all the while seeking to create an agile, values-led culture.

A NEW CHALLENGE

WE BEGAN THE 2014/2015 ACADEMIC YEAR OPTIMISTIC AND DETERMINED TO BUILD ON THE REMARKABLE PROGRESS WE HAD ACHIEVED TO DATE.

But this optimism was soon to be tested.

In late 2014, the Northern Ireland Executive produced its draft budget; a budget that proposed a potentially drastic funding cut of almost 11 per cent.

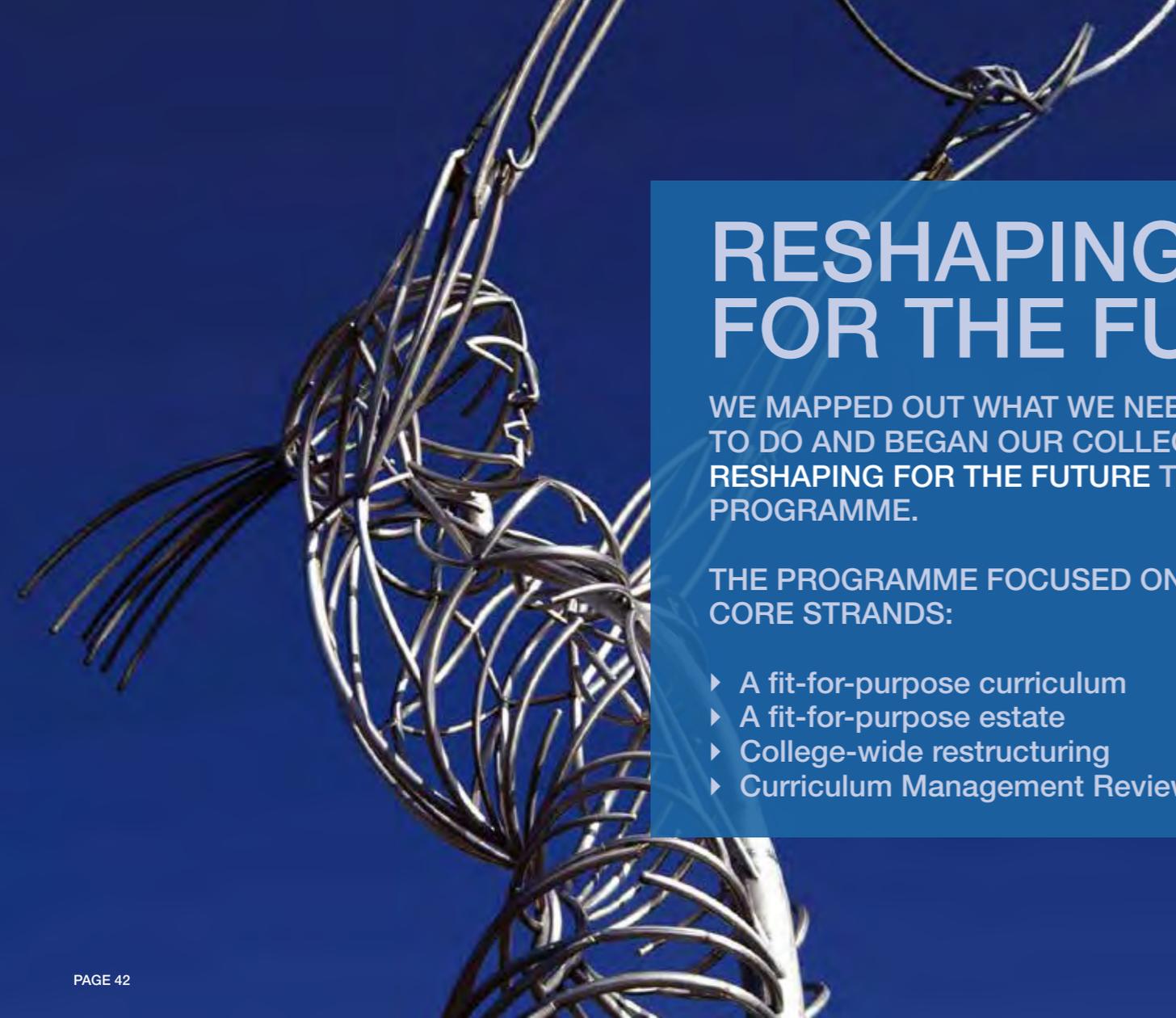
Our governors joined with the sector in lobbying against such a damaging cut. Their efforts paid off and the colleges were left with the less drastic but still significant challenge of a £2.6 million reduction in funding.

This funding setback coincided with a major internal need: the need to substantially review our curriculum and, with it, the structure of our College. This was the only way we could keep pace with changing economic and skills demands and, in doing so, equip our learners for work.

So, what did we do about it?

We gathered ourselves, looked the challenge straight in the eye and embarked once again on another ambitious and testing change programme.





RESHAPING FOR THE FUTURE

WE MAPPED OUT WHAT WE NEEDED TO DO AND BEGAN OUR COLLEGE-WIDE RESHAPING FOR THE FUTURE TRANSITION PROGRAMME.

THE PROGRAMME FOCUSED ON FOUR CORE STRANDS:

- ▶ A fit-for-purpose curriculum
- ▶ A fit-for-purpose estate
- ▶ College-wide restructuring
- ▶ Curriculum Management Review

It is hard to overstate the size of our transition programme or the progress we achieved in a period of just over a year.

- ▶ Re-engineering our curriculum and reorganising our entire academic structure.
- ▶ Setting up an innovative Centre for Excellence.
- ▶ Establishing a new Training and Apprenticeships department.
- ▶ Managing various stages of a sector-wide Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES).
- ▶ Consolidating our estate by closing two of our older, costlier sites while extending our reach in the north of the city by becoming an anchor tenant in Belfast City Council's stunning new Girdwood Community Hub.

And, as if that wasn't enough, we began preparations to become the first further education college in the UK to establish a Business School.

During the College-wide restructure and over the course of the year, we said farewell to 170 staff who opted to leave as part of the sector-wide Voluntary Exit Scheme. These were colleagues who had served our learners for many years and indeed many of whom held senior positions within the College.

WITH THEIR DEPARTURE CAME A NEW WAVE OF LEADERS READY TO GRASP THE GOOD-TO-GREAT MANTLE AND TAKE BELFAST MET INTO THE NEXT ERA.

PRIORITISING OUR LEARNERS



IT SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT THE STRENGTH AND SPIRIT OF STAFF THAT, AMID ALL OF THESE CHANGES, THE ESSENTIAL BUSINESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTINUED AS NORMAL.

Our learners remained our first and highest priority.

This is borne out in the performance for our 2015/2016 transitional year.

Student Retention: 88.90%
Student Achievement: 87.08%
Student Success: 77.42%

Contained within these figures are the stories of the thousands of individual lives we have touched.

They show that, regardless of the challenges and the changes taking place around them, staff never once faltered in their dedication and duty to our learners.



A NEW ERA

THE STORY OF BELFAST MET CONTINUES AS WE ENTER A NEW ERA. AN ERA OF MAJOR AND CONSTANTLY ACCELERATING TECHNOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE.

We have become a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), joining sister agencies Invest NI, Tourism NI and NI Screen as part of the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy.

We are working within a new government strategy, Further Education Means Success. This sets out challenging and ambitious policy commitments, which our College will have a key role in implementing.

Local government reform, meanwhile, has given councils new responsibilities and a broader range of powers. Belfast City Council's expanded role has opened up fresh opportunities for partnership in areas such as community planning and local business development. Our relationship with the council will deepen as we work together to achieve its ambitious and inclusive vision for the city.



**BELFAST MET
IS A RESILIENT,
FORWARD-
LOOKING AND
OUTWARD
FOCUSED
ORGANISATION.**

THE POTENTIAL

**WE ARE CLEAR ON OUR
MISSION AND COMMITTED
TO OUR DUAL MANDATE OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION.**

Our Corporate Plan 2016–2020 will guide us as we navigate this new terrain.

Our core values of Collaboration, Ambition, Respect and Excellence are simply an expression of the principles and approach that have characterised Belfast Met since its founding over 110 years ago.

They will shape our individual and collective behaviour, ensuring we remain true to Belfast Met's proud legacy, its unique spirit and its undeniable potential.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

OUR PATH HAS BEEN FAR FROM LINEAR.

It has included peaks, troughs and many difficult twists and turns. But we are resilient, and like the proud city of Belfast, we have rolled with the punches.

We will use our talent, energy and ambition to drive us forward.

Our individual contributions will come together to help shape the lives of our learners, the future of our College and the success of the city itself.

**TOGETHER, WE WILL
WRITE THE NEXT
CHAPTER OF
BELFAST MET'S STORY.**

TIMELINE

OURS IS A STORY THAT CONTINUES TO GROW BY THE DAY AND EACH OF US HAS A HAND IN WRITING IT.





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Page 10 Picture courtesy of Tourism NI.

Page 42 Picture courtesy of Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau.

Belfast Met would like to acknowledge Henry V. Bell author of Diligence and Skill (2006) for historical references contained in this publication.



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