

## Foreword

With its troubled past firmly behind it, Belfast has now taken up its rightful place as one of the best cities in Europe to live, work, shop and visit.

With a population approaching 500,000 in the wider Belfast metropolitan area, some of the best universities in the UK and Ireland, a strong tradition of entrepreneurship, and high standards of education, Belfast is becoming an ever more attractive place to do business. Like any city, much has changed during the last century. Belfast endured a difficult phase during the Troubles, but the level of investment over the last ten years is a clear demonstration that the city is in its ascendancy. A bustling city centre, low unemployment and strong property prices have restored the city's vibrancy. Situated in a valley right at the edge of Belfast Lough, those flying into the city cannot fail to be impressed by its beautiful location. Our proximity to some of the most world's most spectacular scenery, as well as major road, rail and air links, both in Northern Ireland, and the Republic, are just some of the factors that make the city an excellent place to do business.

While traditionally our enterprise relied on export-based industries, the city now boasts an exciting mix of technology, IT, industrial, retail and service operations. Citigroup and Microsoft have located in the city and IKEA's first store in Ireland opened in December 2007. Many sectors of our local economy, including engineering and aerospace, are at the forefront of new developments nationally and globally.

For visitors, Belfast offers an eclectic mix of small and large hotels, a strong independent retail sector and a wide selection of bars and restaurants where a traditional Belfast welcome is always guaranteed.

Our recent political settlement ensures that business in the city is backed by a pro-enterprise pro-regeneration government; working together to ensure that the city realises its full potential. Never before has the city enjoyed the political backing and commitment from across the board that it does now. Those involved in the city's governance are working with the private sector to ensure that the city delivers for all those who live in, work in and visit Belfast.

I look forward to welcoming you to our city, with full confidence that you will leave with the same positive opinion like all those who have visited before. I invite you to experience the energy and determination that has always existed in Belfast, and is now plain for all to see.



Dave Pennick  
President,  
Belfast Chamber of Commerce.



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