

Welcome

Belfast is currently re-inventing itself as one of Europe's most vibrant and progressive business locations.

From an industrial city once renowned for its shipbuilding, textile, tobacco and engineering industries, the City is well advanced in the transition from an industrial economy to one that is service-led and with a focus on retailing, hospitality and knowledge-based industries. Belfast is the fifth fastest growing regional economy in the UK, and had over six million visitors in 2005. With two international airports, a major seaport and excellent road and rail links, the city is well placed to serve increasing numbers of visitors from home and abroad.

The city's two universities, the Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster both have world-renowned research facilities, specializing in a wide-range of academic disciplines including life sciences, engineering and management. The new Belfast Metropolitan College is one of the largest colleges of further education in the UK, and caters for the vocational, training and professional needs of students from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and further afield. This focus on education is reflected in the City's workforce. Belfast has 190,000 employee jobs, with 24% of the working population qualified to degree level.

The regeneration of Belfast over the past decade is matched by the ambitious plans that are currently

being rolled out. The redevelopment of the City's Titanic Quarter has already commenced, with plans to invest over £1 billion, creating one of the largest mixed use, commercial, leisure and housing regenerations projects in the UK. In the city centre's multi-development Victoria Square complex with House of Fraser as its anchor tenant, the current retail capacity of the city centre will be increased by 30% and will see Belfast enter the 'Top Ten' retail centres in the UK. Other major retail-led regeneration schemes are planned for the North East and North West quarters of the city. The latest UK-wide survey from OMIS Research, "Britain's Best Cities", places Belfast in tier 1, ranked in 10th place, ahead of Bristol and Newcastle with city centre retail provision in Belfast estimated at 1.81 million sq ft.

An important part of Belfast's attraction as a retail centre is the appeal of its independent retail outlets and these complement the wide range of high street multiples. In the past year Belfast City Council, Belfast Chamber of Trade and BCCM developed a strategy to support the independent retail sector and to ensure that the voice of the independent and smaller retailer is heard. One aspect of this strategy was the launch of an independent retail guide, designed to combat the 'clone city' syndrome ►



William McGivern, Chairman of Belfast City Centre Management Company

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