

Belfast City of Sanctuary



# Building a Welcoming, Safe, and Inclusive City for All

A Sanctuary Culture Advancing the Belfast  
Agenda and Good Relations Strategy

 Belfast Shared City Partnership

 January 25, 2026



# A Growing Movement

Schools and Nurseries Leading the Way

# 59

## Schools & Nurseries in Belfast.

Since June 2017

From Blythefield Primary School in 2017 to 59 schools in Belfast, with a total of 99 Schools across northern Ireland today, the Sanctuary Network has fundamentally shifted how Belfast's educational sector approaches inclusion.

### Rigorous Appraisal

Schools are assessed against three core principles: Welcome, Safe Environment, and Inclusion & Integration, ensuring genuine commitment.

### Participatory Process

Appraisals involve refugees, asylum seekers, and community members, giving voice to those with lived experience.

### Urban Villages Focus

Strong adoption in Urban Villages areas, actively transforming communities through inclusive education.

### Future Ready

Equipping young people with the values and understanding needed for a diverse, interconnected world.

# Queen's University Belfast

Northern Ireland's First University of Sanctuary

Est. May 2025



## Access & Pathways

- **Widening Participation:**  
Pathway Opportunity Programme now includes Newcomers, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers (16-19).
- **Scholarships:**  
Dedicated support for displaced students to access higher education.
- **Scholars at Risk (SAR):**  
Institutional support for threatened academics.

*Removing barriers to entry for the most vulnerable.*



## Academic Support

- **McClay Library:**  
Free one-year Associate Personal Memberships for displaced academics and students.
- **Language Support:**  
Non-formal English classes and sanctuary language programmes.
- **Resource Access:**  
Full access to digital and physical learning materials.

*Ensuring success through comprehensive resources.*



## Community & Culture

- **Sanctuary Coffee Mornings:**  
Monthly welcoming gatherings for social connection.
- **QUB STAR:**  
Student Action for Refugees society providing peer support.
- **Sanctuary Roadshow:**  
2025-2026 outreach activities across communities.

*Building a culture of welcome beyond the classroom.*

# Belfast Trust

The Only Trust of Sanctuary in the UK and Ireland

In September 2024, Belfast Trust became the **first and only Health Trust** in Northern Ireland, the UK, and Ireland to receive the Trust of Sanctuary Award.



## Maternity Services of Sanctuary

Introduction of a Cultural Liaison Midwife to ensure culturally sensitive care for pregnant women and families from diverse backgrounds.



## International Workforce

Active international recruitment and support strategies, creating a workforce that reflects the diverse communities served.



## Inequalities & Inclusion Team

A dedicated team specifically supporting refugees and asylum seekers in navigating complex health services.



## Cultural Representation

Exhibitions like Oliver Jeffers' "Seen" remind staff and patients of the importance of compassion and solidarity.



## Vulnerable Youth Support

Specialised support programs for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, ensuring safety and care.



**The only Trust in NI with a comprehensive Good Relations Strategy**

# Institutional Models of Welcome

Ormeau Library and Belfast Met leading by example



## Ormeau Library

Library of Sanctuary (2023)

Serving a diverse and vibrant community, the library has transformed into an essential hub for learning and connection for those new to Belfast.

- Welcome
- Safe Environment
- Inclusion & Integration



## Belfast Met

College of Sanctuary (First in NI)

861

ESOL Learners

56

Countries

### Dedicated ESOL Unit (Oct 2025)

New institutional investment in language support alongside full scholarship places for asylum seekers.

# A Network of Change

## Organisations and Institutions Working Together

The Sanctuary Network builds a collaborative citywide ecosystem so welcome is shared across schools, services and communities.

### Education

Schools, universities and colleges creating inclusive learning.

### Healthcare

Trusts delivering culturally sensitive care.

### Public Institutions

Councils and libraries providing civic welcome and information.

### Community

Faith groups, businesses and volunteers offering housing and connection.

### The Integrated Journey

A coordinated approach supports a family at every step: learning, health, civic resources and pathways to a new future.



*Collaboration across sectors drives systemic inclusion.*

# Sanctuary Culture & Strategic Alignment

Operationalising T:BUC and Good Relations Strategies

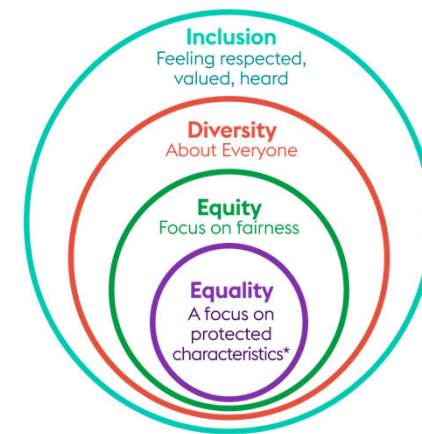
## T:BUC Priorities (2013)

- **Our Children & Young People:** Shaping a shared future.
- **Our Shared Community:** Creating spaces of welcome.
- **Our Safe Community:** Ensuring safety for all residents.
- **Our Cultural Expression:** Respecting diverse identities.

## Good Relations Outcomes

- Strong, transformative civic leadership.
- Shared and connected spaces for diverse populations.
- Structured collaboration through the Sanctuary Network.
- An intercultural city with respectful expression.

Sanctuary culture moves Good Relations beyond the traditional "two communities" framework to a comprehensive model of inclusion.



## Expanding the Definition of "Community"

 Newcomer Communities

 LGBTQIA+ Community

 People with Disabilities

 Young People

# Belfast's Diversity & Commitment

The Evidence for Inclusion

1,750

## Asylum Seekers

Approx. 69% of Northern Ireland's total supported population reside in Belfast.

4.1%

## LGBTQIA+ Community

Highest proportion in NI (2021 Census), indicating a vibrant, visible community.

24.8%

## Disability


Adults reporting limited activities due to health, requiring accessible services.

1,798

## Young Voices


Surveyed in Big Youth Survey (89% increase), showing growing engagement.

### Institutional Response

 59 Schools of Sanctuary

 861 ESOL Learners

 University Pathways

 Trust of Sanctuary





# From Aspiration to Reality

## Addressing Exclusion & Marginalisation

### Barrier

#### Systemic Exclusion (Jobs, Housing)

→ **Sanctuary Response:** University & College pathways provide skills, scholarships, and professional development to break cycles of poverty.

### Barrier

#### Discrimination & Racism

→ **Sanctuary Response:** Schools of Sanctuary explicitly teach diversity, countering xenophobia from an early age.

### Barrier

#### Health Inequalities

→ **Sanctuary Response:** The Trust of Sanctuary ensures culturally responsive care, removing barriers to access.

### Barrier

#### Social Isolation

→ **Sanctuary Response:** Libraries and Community hubs provide safe spaces for connection and belonging.

---

*"Institutional change alone is insufficient. Sanctuary culture requires sustained, coordinated action to ensure welcome translates into genuine belonging."*



**Inclusion for All**

Official Designation

# BELFAST CITY FOR ALL

Formalising our commitment to Welcome and Inclusion.



## Formalise

Recognise the Sanctuary Network and institutional achievements.



## Signal

Send a clear message of belonging to LGBTQIA+, Disabled, and Newcomer communities.



## Lead

Position Belfast as a leader in inclusive city development.

---

Let us make welcome our official policy.

