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The benefits of the decade long Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) were discussed by a BRCD Council Panel at Belfast City Hall.

BELFAST REGION REAPING REWARDS FROM CITY DEAL

Significant rewards are already being reaped from the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) decade-long programme of investment – that was the consensus from today's meeting of the BRCD Council Panel at Belfast City Hall.

The annual report was the central focus of the meeting, highlighting several key Belfast Region City Deal milestones being reached:

Studio Ulster has opened in Belfast, one of the most advanced hubs in the world for real-time

filmmaking, animation, in-camera VFX and immersive media. Developed by Ulster University in partnership with Belfast Harbour and supported by Northern Ireland Screen, Studio Ulster is not only transforming film and TV production workflows,

it's also shaping the next generation of talent and driving sustainable economic growth.

The UK Digital Twin Centre has opened in Belfast, delivered by Digital Catapult and funded by BRCD and Innovate UK, helping businesses in

high growth areas like advanced manufacturing to solve complex operational challenges with cutting-edge technology, expert support, and test environments.

**Continued on
page 4**

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Positive Ageing Month in Belfast

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is shining a spotlight on the importance of social connection and encouraging people to take part in age-friendly events as part of Positive Ageing Month this October.

Throughout the month, Age Friendly Coordinators in all 11 local council are hosting activities alongside community organisations designed to bring people together, help reduce isolation and celebrate the valuable contribution older people make to our communities.

To support positive ageing, tackle health inequalities and build intergenerational links, the PHA funds Age-Friendly Coordinators in all council areas across Northern Ireland. These coordinators, working alongside local partners, are delivering a diverse

programme of events and information sessions throughout October to encourage older people to stay active, engaged and connected.

Positive Ageing Month is also about looking ahead – ensuring that communities across Northern Ireland are places where people can thrive as they grow older.

To find out what's happening in your area, visit your local council website or follow their social media channels for details of Positive Ageing Month events near you.

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/positiveageingmonth

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Belfast City Council approves first ever Irish language policy

Councillors have recently approved an Irish language policy for the council.

Their decision, taken at a meeting of Belfast City Council last month, follows a public consultation which ran from August to November 2024.

The policy sets out how the council plans to promote and use Irish across its services, including interpreting and translation, key documents and publications, signage at facilities, on the council website belfastcity.gov.uk and within the council's corporate identity, including its logo.

Throughout August and September, councillors on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee reviewed feedback from the public consultation, which drew responses from residents, council staff, trade unions and members of the council's Irish Language Stakeholder Forum.

Following this engagement, the committee agreed to adopt the policy proposals, and that there should be a single bilingual logo for the organisation – a move aligned with



international best practice in promoting minority languages. Design work for the new identity and logo is ongoing, and further engagement will be undertaken with trade unions as part of this work.

Their decision was ratified at the full meeting of the council.

Alongside the policy, councillors also agreed a high-level implementation plan to guide delivery of the policy over the

next two years, with a focus on supporting staff and enhancing access to services in Irish. £1.9 million of funding was previously agreed, at July's full council meeting, to implement the policy.

The Irish language policy is the first policy to be delivered through the council's over-arching Language Strategy. The other strands are Ulster-Scots, sign language (British Sign Language

and Irish Sign Language), communicating with those with disabilities and minority ethnic communities.

Further programmes of work, focusing on these languages, are also underway.

Like the Irish language policy, these programmes will be shaped through engagement with language groups, so they are based on the specific needs of that particular community.

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TOURISM NI SUPPORTS “FANTASTIC” BELFAST INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

International and homegrown artists from the worlds of theatre, dance, music, visual arts, literature and film are set to come together this month for the renowned Belfast International Arts Festival.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1985 NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR THE RENEWAL OF AN ENTERTAINMENTS LICENCE

Take notice that application dated 20th October 2025 has been made under Article 3, Schedule 1 of the above Order for the Renewal of an Entertainments Licence for the provision of Dancing, singing or music or any other entertainment of a like kind at
The Auld House, 27 Church Road, Moneyreagh, BT23 68B.

Representations in relation to the application may be made to; Director of Environmental Health, Environmental Health Services Unit, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Civic Headquarters, Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn BT27 4RL by giving notice to the Council, stating in general terms the nature of the representation, not later than 28 days after the date of the application. Dated this 20th day of October 2025

Stephen Grey, 27 Church Road, Moneyreagh, BT23 68B

With support from Tourism Northern Ireland, the annual festival will take place across more than 30 venues in the city from October 14 to November 9.

This year marks the 63rd edition of the festival, which promises to provide 'bold ideas, unforgettable stories, and extraordinary artistry'.

The festival's values of global connectivity, cultural diversity, access and participation, community and contemporary arts practice are at the heart of three new projects and collaborations in this year's programme.

Among the highlights are musical performances from acclaimed artists Lisa O'Neill and Martin Hayes, as well as US folk/blues legend Chris Smither, talks with best-selling authors John Banville and Elaine Feeney and an international showcase of local theatre and performing arts.

Last year's event attracted more than 60,000 visitors with 10% coming from outside Northern Ireland as well as more than 600 participants.

The festival in 2024 resulted in around 3,000 commercial bed nights being booked across hotels, B&Bs, guesthouses and self-catering facilities.

The event last year generated over £530,000 for the north's economy.

Belfast International Arts Festival is one of 14 events which recently secured funding through Tourism NI's International Tourism Events Fund.



L-R) Siobhan McGuigan, Head of Events at Tourism NI, pictured with Susan Picken, General Manager at Belfast International Arts Festival.

The ITEF supports international media about the Belfast events which attract coverage which helps to International Arts Festival is available significantly high levels of showcase the region as a at www.belfastinter visitors to Northern Ireland must-see travel destination. nationalartsfestival.co.uk while also generating Further information

Roadworks embargo and extension to bus lane hours to Keep Belfast Moving!

The pre-Christmas roadworks embargo in Belfast City Centre is to be brought forward by two weeks to help keep traffic moving as the festive season approaches, Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has announced.

In Belfast the embargo, which covers all non-essential roadworks on key arterial routes, will now begin on 10 November and remain in place until 2 January 2026.

Liz Kimmins said: "Belfast is a thriving city where people come to work, shop and socialise and like all major cities we can expect more traffic as we head into the autumn and winter months.

"My department and those who do business in the city centre share a common goal – to Keep Belfast Moving as the city gets busier in the run-up to Christmas, and discussions have been ongoing throughout the year about the practical steps we can all take to achieve that. I have listened carefully to the business and hospital-ity sector and have decided to bring the roadworks embargo forward by two weeks to 10 November, when the festive season will be getting into full swing.

"While delivering key infrastructure projects is essential for helping to build our economy I also recognise the need to strike a balance between continued development and the needs of the public and our business and hospitality sectors who rely on them, especially at this important time of year."

The move is part of a package of measures to Keep Belfast Moving, which will also see an extension to operating hours for some bus lanes.

From Monday 3 November, a number of existing bus lanes, including on Ormeau Road, Lower Lisburn Road and Malone Road, will now operate from 7.30-9.30am and from 3.30-6.30pm (Monday to Friday).

Minister Kimmins said: "The operation of extended bus lane hours will assist Translink to provide more reliable public transport services across the network by allowing buses to avoid the worst impacts of traffic congestion. Signs to alert the public to the new bus lane times will be erected in the coming weeks and I would urge road users to exercise caution and avoid parking or driving in the bus lanes as they get used to the new arrangements.

A roadworks embargo in other major towns and cities across the north will operate between 24 November and 2 January.

Continued from page 1

Work has started on iREACH Health in Belfast, led by Queen's University Belfast. When it opens in 2027, the research centre will enhance patient care by accelerating the development and deployment of new medical treatments through clinical

trials. Construction also continues on the AMIC (Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre) site at Global Point, Newtownabbey and the centre is due to open next year.

The contract for funding has been signed for i4C Cleantech hub at the St Patrick's regeneration site, Ballymena.

Integrated design teams are continuing to progress designs for Bangor Waterfront, Belfast Stories, Destination Royal Hillsborough, Carrickfergus Regeneration and The Gobbins Phase 2 and construction is due to start shortly on the Theatre and Conference facilities, Civic Hub and

associated public realm in Newry city centre.

21 contracts have been awarded, incorporating social value clauses which have resulted in people receiving paid employment, apprenticeships and skills development, as well as health and wellbeing and community engagement initiatives.

Skills assessments for the Creative Industries (Virtual Production) and Digital sectors were also completed in the last year.

Members also received an update on Belfast Stories,

the landmark visitor attraction, public space and creative hub which is set to transform Royal Avenue when it opens in 2030, as well as reviewing recommendations to help ensure a qualified workforce for the growth in our digital sector, expected to result from the four City and Growth Deal programmes of investment in Northern Ireland.

To view the annual report, and for more information about the Belfast Region City Deal, visit www.belfastregioncitydeal.co.uk

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International Day of Peace marked

International Day of Peace was marked at a special event in City Hall recently, bringing together representatives from diverse communities and local organisations delivering PEACEPLUS projects across the city, administered by the Special EU Programmes Body.

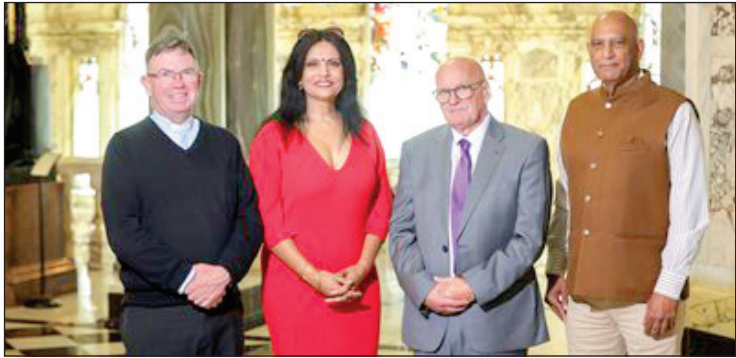
This year's theme – End Racism, Build Peace – was reflected with a moving speech from guest speaker M V Narasimha Rao (Bobby Rao).

A former test cricketer, Bobby has lived in Northern Ireland for over 30 years, having moved to Strabane during his overseas professional career. After meeting his wife, he settled here and has forged a path coaching young cricketers across the north-west, many to international level.

He told guests of his early struggles to integrate and how he then became involved in promoting peace, inclusion and cultural understanding within communities.

The event, led by broadcaster Lata Sharma, also included insights from Father Martin Magill and a performance from Yallaa Dabke Dance, while guests had the chance to chat with projects now taking shape as part of the PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan.

They include Streetbeat, who are leading a youth empowerment programme for 16 to 18-year-olds; Corrymeela Community, working with different



faiths to facilitate positive dialogue; People 1st, delivering language support and practical life skills for those whose first language is not English; and GEMS NI, who are working to support integration and inclusion of those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

In total, £15.1 million (£17.4million) has been invested by SEUPB to support 16 projects across the city under three themes – Community Regeneration and Transformation, Thriving and Peaceful Communities and Celebrating Cultures and Diversity.

Welcoming guests to the event, Councillor Ian McLaughlin, Deputy Chair of Belfast City Council's Shared City

Partnership, said: "I'm delighted to mark this year's International Day of Peace with this special event.

"Recent events in our city remind us all of our shared responsibility to work together to create a more inclusive and peaceful city, and today is a chance to highlight the great work being done to build a caring, welcoming and compassionate city for all those who call it home.

"Our council was pleased to secure PEACEPLUS funding last year from SEUPB and we are now starting, together with our delivery partners, to engage over 17,000 residents in events and activities designed to break down barriers, promote inclusion and

boost integration.

"Thanks to Bobby for sharing his inspiring story today and, to all the fantastic projects both underway and in the planning, keep up the great work."

The event ended with guests writing their own individual 'peace pledges' which will be added to a special Belfast 'peace tree'.

It will be placed within the Belfast Hills at a later date as part of the Access to the Hills project – another of the PEACEPLUS projects currently underway.

For more information on the various PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan projects, visit belfastcity.gov.uk/PEACEPLUS

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VOLUNTEER ROLES OPEN FOR BELFAST FLEADH IN 2026

Tune in, turn up – be the heartbeat of the Fleadh! The search is on for volunteers to help with the smooth running of the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann will make history by coming to Belfast for the first time in 2026, from Sunday 2nd to Sunday 9th August.

Volunteer Now, the leading voice

of volunteering in Northern Ireland, has opened recruitment for the momentous event. Organised by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) in partnership with

Belfast City Council and Ards CCÉ, the Belfast Fleadh will feature an eight-day programme of concerts, competitions, street performances and exhibitions. A range of volunteering roles will be available including street ambassadors, team leaders and customer services.

Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now, added: "The Fleadh always brings such an exhilarating energy with it and its arrival in Belfast will mark an exciting moment for the city and beyond. We have decades of experience recruiting volunteers for other major events, such as the 153rd Open and Balmoral Show, so we know that volunteers

are the secret ingredient to success. Thanks to their commitment, energy, professionalism and fun, volunteers make events like Fleadh smooth, safe and enjoyable for everyone involved. We will be providing extensive training to successful volunteer applicants to ensure they have a wholly positive and memorable experience as a volunteer.

"As well as being part of the delivery team, our volunteers will get to enjoy, up-close, the incredible spirit of the Fleadh and see firsthand how the city comes to life through music, dance, and culture.

We would encourage

anyone interested in volunteering to apply early, as we anticipate demand for these roles will be high. We can't wait to celebrate this special moment together in Belfast next August and hope many people apply to be at the very heart of it!"

Successful applicants will receive bespoke training from Volunteer Now, beginning in early 2026. With interest set to be high, anyone keen to be involved is advised to apply before the end of the year.

Niall McClean from Ards CCÉ added: "We're so excited to be partnering with Belfast City Council and Comhaltas as host branch for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann



2026. It means so much to our members, young and old, to be part of the Fleadh coming to Belfast. We hope everyone who volunteers will feel that

same sense of pride. It's a particularly special year for us as we celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2026. With Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann celebrating their 75th year,

we can't wait to be part of something very special."

To find out more and to apply, visit the volunteer section of the Fleadh Cheoil website.

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NI's Only Charity Careers & Volunteer Job Fair To Return To Belfast This November

An event celebrating careers, jobs and volunteering opportunities in the third sector is returning to Belfast for its second year.

The Charity Careers & Volunteer Job Fair, taking place on Wednesday, November 5th, will bring hundreds of people together in the city to explore the best opportunities the charity, voluntary, and social enterprise sectors have to offer.

The brainchild of recruitment company Charity Jobs NI the event will run from 10am to 2pm at the Assembly Buildings Conference Centre, Belfast.

The fair, which is free to attend, is the UK and Ireland's only event of its kind, bringing charities

and community-minded people together where purpose meets opportunity with visitors able to meet leading organisations across health, social care, housing, education, environment and community development, explore current paid roles and volunteer opportunities, and leave with clear next steps.

The last fair showcased more than 190 employment opportunities and 260 volunteer roles, generating over 450 applications on the day and turning conversations into real hires and volunteer placements

across Northern Ireland.

Previous exhibitors included Positive Futures, NOW Group, NI Hospice, Choice Housing, Inspire, MindWise, Simon Community and Cancer Focus NI, with new organisations joining each time.

Co-founder of Charity Jobs NI, Chris Bunce, said: "Charity Jobs NI was formed as a sister company to Happy Jobs NI after we saw a clear gap in the market. Charities needed a cost-effective, sector-savvy way to reach the right talent, and candidates

wanted a single trusted place to find purpose-led work. Our aim has always been to make hiring simpler, fairer and faster for the whole sector."

He added: "This event is about connecting people who want to make a difference with the organisations that need them. For attendees, it is a chance to explore whether a career in the sector or a volunteering role is right for them. For charities, it is a platform to meet new talent, share ideas with peers, and celebrate the work they do across Northern Ireland."

Among the organisations returning this year is the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Anne Crossan, Regional Retail Manager, said: "This event has been one of the most successful we've attended in terms of the quality and enthusiasm of participants. It's rare to find a recruitment fair where you meet such a perfect cross-section of people interested in both paid and volunteer roles. We've had meaningful conversations with many potential candidates, and it's clear that events like this are vital for connecting with the right talent. We would absolutely recommend it to others and look forward to returning."

Expressions of interest for exhibitors are open, with space for around 50 stands on the day. Allocation will be managed on a first come, first served basis.

To book your free ticket to attend or find out more about how your organisation can exhibit and take part go to charityjobsni.com/charity-careers-fair.

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Inclusive tourism voucher scheme for local businesses launched

Tourism and hospitality businesses, charities and social enterprises are being encouraged to apply for small grants of up to £500 to support them in becoming more accessible and inclusive to visitors.

The scheme, developed by Belfast City Council, is the latest initiative to help the sector explore new markets and tap into the benefits of the ‘purple pound’ – a market worth an estimated £249 billion each year to the UK economy.

The first support of its kind in Northern Ireland, the funding, awarded as a voucher, can be used to improve the visitor experience in small, but practical, ways, through staff training and awareness raising, support with navigating websites or booking tickets, or to upgrade signage or marketing materials.

Applicants must be based in the Belfast City Council area and provide services for visitors to the city. Vouchers will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information and to apply, visit belfastcity.gov.uk/tourism

Launched ahead of World Tourism Day (Saturday 27 September), the voucher scheme is part of the wider Embrace the Inclusive Spirit programme, delivered by the council, together with Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance, to support the Make Yourself at Home ten-



year tourism plan.

So far, it has provided a wide range of resources and training for tourism and hospitality businesses, including a practical support toolkit, online training videos, access to masterclasses where traders can chat to service users and test drive ideas, and suggested itineraries for disabled visitors, based on recommendations from local residents with disabilities.

Alongside the new scheme, six Belfast venues and visitor experiences were also recognised earlier this year for their work to support disabled visitors at the city’s inaugural Inclusive Tourism Awards.

An annual seminar, held

in February and returning again to Titanic Belfast on 17 February 2026, also brought together over 120 tour operators, hospitality providers, policy makers and event organisers in the city to hear from guest speakers and industry experts.

Businesses have also welcomed the wider support provided by the Embrace the Inclusive Spirit programme.

Denise Kennedy, Titanic Belfast Associate Director of Operations said: “We are proud to have supported and participated in the Embrace the Inclusive Spirit working group, which is helping to support the wider industry in creating truly memorable experiences for every visitor.

“This initiative not only ensures that guests with additional needs are fully considered and provided for, but it also enables tourism businesses, no matter their size, to connect with a largely untapped audience, offering them the same great experiences that Northern Ireland is world-renowned for.

“By working together as an industry, we can continue to break down barriers, raise standards and showcase Northern Ireland as a destination that everyone can enjoy.”

All the Embrace the Inclusive Spirit resources are available on the council’s website at belfastcity.gov.uk/tourism

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DO YOU SEE A CHANGE IN DECIDUOUS TREES?

As we enter the autumn season, our deciduous trees begin the annual, much-loved time of changing leaf colour and fall.

Why and how that happens deepens our understanding of trees, providing insights into how they live and function.

The reasons for leaf fall are relatively simple: leaves on deciduous trees are not frost-hardy and would be damaged and die in winter if the trees didn't have a mechanism to allow them to drop; in a sense, they die at a time of the tree's choosing, rather than be killed. Also, if trees didn't shed their leaves in autumn, they would be in greater danger from seasonal storms.

And the mechanism for leaf fall is also relatively simple: shorter days trigger hormones that start a process which results in the gradual weakening of a special layer of cells at the base of the leaf, allowing it to drop.

But where do the colours come from? The amazing fact is that colour pigments are already there, in the leaves, but we can't see them until autumn, because



they are hidden by the green of chlorophyll.

As most of us know, chlorophyll is the chemical which enables plants to use the sun's energy to convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates...the food that trees need to live and grow...and as the days shorten and trees prepare for dormancy, a bit like hibernation, they no longer need that food. However, nature wastes nothing, and as the trees break down and

reabsorb chlorophyll, and try to absorb final sugars, the yellow and orange of carotenoids are revealed (these are the pigments which also give carrots their colour), followed, at least in some trees, by red and even purple, signs of sugars trapped in the leaves.

Weather also plays a part. Low temperatures destroy chlorophyll, so frosty nights produce yellow leaves. Conversely, periods of warmer dry weather promote red

pigments, although these are also weakened by frosts, so we see fewer red leaves in cold seasons.

And the browns? These are the colours of the cell walls when the leaf is completely dried out and ready to fall.

The good news, of course, is that deciduous trees have already prepared the buds for next year's leaves before autumn, so the natural cycle goes on, and on, and on...

JVA

Festive Fun and Timeless Classics:Your Guide to the Belvoir Theatre's Winter Season

As the nights draw in, Belvoir Studio Theatre is preparing to light up the stage with a diverse and exciting line-up of shows, running from October through to the New Year.

From classic swing and rock tributes to beloved musical adaptations and festive family fun, here is a look at the productions scheduled to entertain audiences at Belvoir Studio Theatre during the late autumn and early winter months.

A Nod to Music Legends

The season kicks off with a dose of nostalgia, transporting audiences back to the golden age of music.

On October 24th, step back in time to 1960s Las Vegas with The Rat Pack Revisited. This visiting show promises an evening of glitz, glamour, and timeless classics, delivering the iconic swing and laughter associated with Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis Jr.

Following in November, music lovers can celebrate a legendary rock band with Big Love: A Tribute to Fleetwood Mac, running from November 7th to 8th. Get ready for two nights dedicated to the complex harmonies and chart-topping hits that defined a generation in a cabaret setting where you can Bring Your Own Bottle.

As a pre-Christmas treat on December 4th, why not come and see perennial Belvoir Studio favourites



the PM Big Band? They will be back for their annual Christmas concert along with vocalists David Hamilton and Ceara Grehan. The band pays homage, through the great American song book, to legendary artists such as Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington and plays popular music from film and stage. The show will include fabulous music and songs made famous by great names such as Frank Sinatra and Michael Bublé.

Musical Merriment and Holiday Cheer

The festive season ramps up with two distinct musical productions hitting the stage in mid-to-late November.

First, the talented

younger members of the East Broadway Theatre Company showcase their skills in Guys & Dolls Jr. from November 13th to 15th. This classic musical comedy, set in the streets of New York, is sure to be a high-energy production filled with memorable tunes.

Next, get ready for a modern holiday classic as NISMAT Theatre Company presents Home Alone: the musical, running from November 25th to 29th. The stage adaptation of the much-loved film promises to bring the heart and humour of Kevin McCallister's chaotic Christmas to life.

The Crown Jewel of Christmas

No winter season is complete without a traditional pantomime, and Belvoir Players delivers with a captivating classic: Sleeping Beauty.

Running from December 17th, 2025, through to January 3rd, 2026, this pantomime is the perfect outing for the whole family, bridging the Christmas and New Year period. Expect plenty of boos, cheers, dazzling costumes, and a magical tale as the company wakes up the Princess from her long slumber

For full details on performance times and to secure your seats for these upcoming events, visit the official Belvoir Players website at www.belvoirplayers.org.

Methody Prep Open Day

On Tuesday 2nd December 2025, from 10am to 12pm, Methodist College Belfast Preparatory Department—affectionately known as Methody Prep—will open its doors to prospective pupils and their families for a special Open Day event.

This is more than just a tour; it's an invitation to experience the heart of a school that celebrates, diversity, opportunity and excellence.

Visitors will have the opportunity to explore classrooms alive with creativity, meet dedicated staff, and witness firsthand the vibrant learning culture that defines Methody Prep.

The Open Day also provides a chance to engage with current pupils, whose enthusiasm and pride in their school speak volumes. Parents will gain insight into pastoral



care, extracurricular opportunities, and the values that underpin Methody Prep's approach to education.

Whether you're

considering a place for your child or simply curious about what makes Methody Prep unique, this event promises a warm welcome and a wealth of information

and insight into the life changing opportunities on offer.

Mark your calendar—Methody Prep Open Day is not to be missed.

Gilnahirk Primary School

Today's Learning for Tomorrow's World

Open Morning

Friday 5th December from 11am – 12.30pm.

Principal's address at 11am followed by guided tours of the school by Year 7 children.

Principal: Mr D Corbett
BA(Hons), PGCE, PQH(NI)

www.gilnahirkps.org.uk/school-tour
148 Gilnahirk Road, Belfast, BT5 7QQ | T: 028 9040 1697
E: dcorbett546@c2kni.net

Bethlehem Nursery School

OPEN DAY

TUESDAY 6TH JANUARY 2026
9.30AM - 11AM

PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE INVITED TO VISIT.

If you have any queries, please telephone the school and speak to the Principal, Mrs Jacqueline Mallon.

028 9064 0406
514 Ravenhill Road, Belfast, BT6 0BW

ESCAPE TO THE COAST WITH OUR WINTER WARMER PACKAGE

As winter sweeps across the North Coast, The Causeway Hotel invites you to unwind with our signature Winter Warmer package with our perfect two night escape beside the world-famous Giant's Causeway.

Set against a dramatic backdrop of coastal cliffs and sea views, our historic hotel offers the ideal setting for rest and rejuvenation this season. Whether you're wrapping up for a beachside stroll, exploring the unique geology of the Causeway stones, or settling in our cosy bar with a drink in hand, The Causeway Hotel provides a timeless, peaceful retreat.

Available from £330 midweek and £350 at weekends, the package includes:

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Guests can enjoy hearty food, coastal views, and the kind of warm Northern welcome that turns a short break into something truly memorable.

The charm of our cliffside location, combined with the comfort of thoughtfully designed rooms and friendly service, makes this a winter stay to savour. So whether you're planning a quiet couple's getaway, a mid-season recharge, or a chance to explore one of Northern Ireland's most iconic landmarks, the Winter Warmer offers a little bit of everything.

To book, call us on 028 2073 1210 or visit our website at www.thecausewayhotel.com

Let the coast call you back this winter.

NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme – more childcare providers than ever helping parents reduce their childcare costs

While we are still waiting for the draft Early Learning and Childcare Strategy to be published, by the Education Minister Paul Givan in the coming weeks, it is positive to see that the expansion of the Northern Ireland Childcare Support Scheme (NICSS) is progressing.

Employers For Childcare

Many more childcare providers are signing up to the scheme, allowing the parents whose children attend those facilities to benefit from valuable savings on the cost of registered childcare.

As the cost of childcare remains a significant outlay for many households and is often a barrier for parents wanting to work, or to work more hours, it is vital that as many parents as possible are able access the is vital support towards childcare costs.

Often it is the registered childcare provider who is the first point of contact for parents to ask about financial support towards their costs, so don't be afraid to ask. Support towards childcare costs is available for eligible parents with an income of up to £100,000 per parent. So most working parents in Northern Ireland are eligible to some form of support, either through



NICSS, Tax-Free Childcare or Universal Credit.

Changes to the NICSS since its inception

Originally launched in September 2024, the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme gave eligible parents of children under Primary School age a 15% discount on their childcare cost. The maximum saving per child at that time was £167 per month or £2,000 per year.

From April 2025 the savings per child were increased to a maximum of £184 per month, or £2,208 per year.

From September 2025 the scheme was expanded to also include children of Primary School age, i.e. children aged 11 and under, attending nursery, primary, or special schools.

Number of childcare providers

This expansion of the scheme to include Primary

Applying for a School Place

Visiting a school is an important step in choosing a school, and this personal touch reflects Leadhill's approach in supporting families.

Text As a smaller, nurturing school in the Castlereagh area, working to support parents and children is central to what Leadhill has to offer. Leadhill parents recognise the value of a primary school setting where every adult knows every child. Leadhillwelcomes and supports children from all backgrounds and promotes inclusivity and child-centred approaches.

This year, Leadhill are offering a range of flexible opportunities to visit. Bring your nursery-age child to 'Stay and Play' sessions on Fridays from 2:30pm to 3:15pm on 21 and 28 November or 9 and 16 January. Come along to one or all the sessions – whatever suits best. Parents can enjoy a cuppa and a chat while children enjoy a range of activities in the P1 classroom.

Come along to our Open Days on 2 December or 9 January, or arrange for a visit at a time that suits you, throughout December and January. Mrs Millis, the Principal will take the time to tailor your visit to address the things that matter to your family. Visiting Leadhill during the school day gives a fantastic opportunity to experience the nurturing, family atmosphere and meet thefabulous staff and pupils.

For younger children, Toddler Time - Leadhill's toddler and adult group, meets every Wednesday during term time from 9 - 11am. The Leadhill Website provides a useful window into life in Leadhill. Visit us on www.leadhillps.com.

Leadhill would love to welcome you for a visit. Contact the school office on 028 90401101 or email Mrs Millis on amillis370@c2kni.net to arrange for a suitable date and time.



Looking for a Primary School?

We would love to welcome you to Leadhill Primary School. We have a range of ways to provide you with the information you need:

- Visit our school website.
- Come to our Stay and Play sessions from 2:30 - 3:15 on 21 & 28 Nov 2025 or 9 & 16 Jan 2026
- Attend our Open Days on 2 December 2025 or 9 January 2026
- Arrange to take a tour of the school. Visits can be arranged by appointment throughout the year.
- Take part in our Toddler Time group each Wednesday from 9 -11am.
- Find out about our Wrap-Around childcare solutions.
- Find out about our Pre-School Playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.

'Children are offered a range of opportunities to shine, which highlights all children's gifts. Leadhill is a great family school.'
(Parent comment)

Limited spaces available in playgroup and P1-7

Visit our school website for further information.
Casaldona Park, Belfast, BT6 9RD Tel: 028 90401101 www.leadhillps.com

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New Chapter for Braniel Primary School

Braniel Primary School, a dynamic educational institution in East Belfast, is embarking on an exciting new chapter under the leadership of its new Principal, Mr. Niall Manogue.

Mr. Manogue takes the helm of a school deeply committed to providing a caring, supportive, and stimulating environment for all its pupils, preparing them not just for the next stage of their education, but for life itself.

Braniel Primary School's mission and ethos are centred on nurturing the whole child and fostering a strong sense of community.

The school's Mission Statement is:

"We aim to establish an environment where the worth and value of each child is respected, children learn mutual self-respect, have a sense of belonging, and where children are equipped for today and empowered for tomorrow."

The school strives to create a happy, positive climate where everyone feels valued and encouraged. Key elements of their ethos include:

- Facilitating effective learning and teaching.
- Promoting learning for all the pupils.
- Enhancing the pupils' self-esteem and fostering self-respect and respect for others.

self-esteem and fostering self-respect and respect for others.

- Securing an environment in which the children's considerations and needs are paramount, ensuring they are supported physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually, and socially.

Braniel Primary School sets itself apart through its commitment to innovative learning spaces and its inclusive community focus.

One notable USP is its Nursery Unit attached to the school, which helps ensure a smooth and seamless transition for the youngest learners into primary education.

Furthermore, the school has shown a creative approach to maximising its campus, including transforming an unused, sloped woodland area into an engaging play space.

This area now features a custom-designed outdoor obstacle course (agility trail) that leads up to a robust climbing structure like the Jungle Dome. This innovative play space encourages physical challenge, mental engagement, and strengthens cross-coordination skills while seamlessly blending with the natural landscape. This focus on natural, adventurous play is a significant draw for the school.



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The curriculum at Braniel Primary School

provides a broad, balanced, and relevant education that caters to individual differences. Their stated aims indicate a strong focus on Holistic Development, Developing Key Life Skills, Literacy and Numeracy, Citizenship and Community and Inclusivity.

LYONS LAUNCHES £1M OLYMPIC LEGACY FUND

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has launched Northern Ireland's first Olympic Legacy Fund.

The £1million capital investment will modernise facilities at local clubs and community groups as part of a lasting legacy in honour of our athletes at the Paris Olympics.

Minister Lyons said: "Last year we all cheered on our athletes as they took home a record-breaking medal haul. It was a privilege to host a homecoming reception at the SSE Arena, a chance not only to pay tribute to our medallists, but also to recognise the incredible dedication of all our Olympians, Paralympians, coaches and support staff.

"During this celebration event, I was delighted to announce the Olympic Medallist Fund. Through this initiative £100,000 was invested in projects at six grassroots clubs across Northern Ireland, chosen by our medal winners to help inspire the next generation of athletes.

"To reaffirm my continued commitment to build on the successes at Paris 2024 and ensure a lasting legacy, I have secured funding of an additional £1million. This funding will mark the success of local athletes by creating new opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to take part in sport in their local area.

"The Olympic Legacy



Communities Minister Gordon Lyons pictured with Olympic Champion Daniel Wiffen and Richard Archibald, Interim CEO of Sport NI at the launch of the Olympic Legacy Fund.

Fund will modernise facilities and provide essential equipment so that everyone can enjoy all types of sports, at all levels."

The Fund is seeking to maximise the support and involvement of local communities through a crowdfunding model, delivered by Sport NI and Crowdfunder UK.

The Minister added: "The Fund's delivery partners will support and encourage clubs to engage with their local communities to develop ideas and proposals together, fostering a sense of ownership and pride."

Organisations can apply for grants from £1,000 up to £50,000 with 65% provided as a grant and the remaining 35% expected to be raised through community crowdfunding.

Richard Archibald, Interim CEO of Sport NI, said: "The Paris 2024 Olympics were an inspiration as athletes from Northern Ireland achieved their best ever performance at an Olympic Games.

"These performances have encouraged people of all ages to get involved in a wide variety of sports, not just Olympic or Paralympic sports. We want everyone

to find the sport or activity that suits them and to make the most of the physical and mental benefits of participating in physical activity.

"We are delighted to work alongside the Department for Communities to provide this funding to the sports sector, to break down the barriers that stop people from participating in sport and increase the number of opportunities to engage in physical activity."

You can apply for the Olympic Legacy Fund at <https://www.sportni.net/olympic-legacy-fund/>.

Braniel Primary & Nursery School

Open Day

Tuesday, 16th December

10.00am - 11.00am
1.15pm - 2.15pm
4.30pm - 6.00pm

Prospective pupils and their families are warmly invited to join us for a relaxed tour of the school. Come along and experience our whole school family in a way that only a personal visit can do.

Find out more!
www.branielps.co.uk

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An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost



alternative to flying.

The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel

option for a shopping trip. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers

and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at www.hannoncoach.com up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit www.hannoncoach.com

A Warm Welcome Awaits You This Autumn at the Station House Hotel, Letterkenny

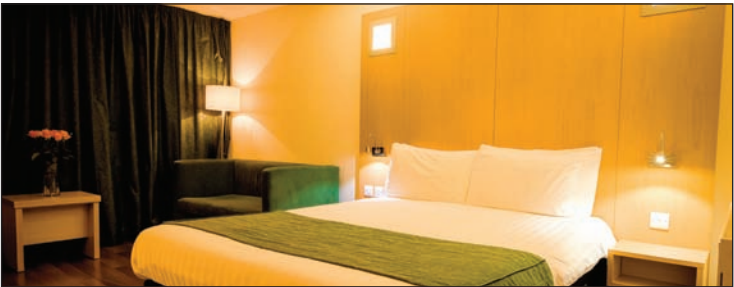
Make a break for it this autumn and discover the perfect getaway at the Station House Hotel, located in the heart of vibrant Letterkenny.

With its rich history, award-winning service, and unbeatable location, it's the ideal place to relax, explore, and reconnect.

Built on the site of the original Old Station House, this hotel combines historic charm with modern comfort. Since opening in 2004, it has become a beloved landmark in Letterkenny, offering 81 spacious bedrooms, the Depot Bar & Restaurant, and conference and banqueting facilities.

Proud winner of TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice and Certificate of Excellence for 14 years in a row, the Station House Hotel is recognised for delivering unforgettable guest experiences. With top ratings on Google and TripAdvisor, you can be assured of exceptional service every time.

Step outside and find yourself in the centre of everything – from shopping



and dining to culture and entertainment. Enjoy easy access to attractions like An Grianán Theatre, Century Cinema, and the best nightlife, or use the hotel as your base to explore all that Donegal has to offer. From Glenties National Park to Slieve League Cliffs and Blue Flag beaches, the Station House is your gateway to one of Ireland's most stunning counties. Whether you're in the mood for adventure, a round of golf, or peaceful walks in nature, it's all within reach.

The hotel offers a variety of room types to suit every need. Including Executive, Double, Twin, Triple, Family, Interconnecting, and Accessible rooms — all spacious and designed with your comfort in mind.

Dine Like a Local! Home to the Depot Bar and Restaurant, the Station House is proud to offer a warm, welcoming atmosphere paired with a menu full of mouth-watering choices. Known as one of Letterkenny's best spots to eat and unwind, it's a favourite among locals

and visitors alike.

Golden Years Offer – Exceptional Value. Take advantage of their exclusive Golden Years Offer – the perfect opportunity to enjoy great value with no prepayment required. Simply book now to secure your preferred dates and pay when you arrive.

Book today and experience the warmth, charm, and hospitality that makes the Station House Hotel one of Letterkenny's most loved destinations. A warm welcome awaits you.



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E: info@thepheasantrestaurant.co.uk
[THEPHEASANTRESTAURANT.CO.UK](http://thepheasantrestaurant.co.uk)

STARTERS

Curried Parsnip & Granny Smith Apple Soup
Mrs Patterson's homemade wheaten (gf)(ve)(v)

Larchfield Estate Salt and Chilli Pheasant
Korean vegetable remoulade, mango purée (gf)

Chinese Glazed Chicken Skewer
Toasted garlic flat bread, pickled cucumber, nut dukkah (gf)

Peppered Salmon & Local Caught Mackerel Pâté
Toasted butter brioche, beetroot, pear & horseradish (gf)

Mexican Style Mixed Bean Taco
Pico de Gallo, tequila guacamole (gf)(ve)(v)

MAINS

County Antrim Glazed Turkey & Belfast Ham
Sage & onion stuffing, Carnreagh Cottage Farm potatoes & vegetables, chipolatas, pan gravy, homemade cranberry compote (gf)

Boz Prime Irish Ribeye Steak
Watercress & pickled shallot, tobacco onions, peppercorn sauce, triple cooked chunky chips (£10 supplement) (gf)

Pan Fried Glenarm Salmon
Roasted baby potatoes, buttered greens, shellfish & orange saffron cream (gf)

Crispy Peking Half Duck
Sriracha pomme purée, teriyaki style bok choy, lime, ginger & lemon grass glaze

8hrs Slow Cooked Pork Belly
Celeriac pancetta & smoked cheddar, potato gratin, fricassee of cabbage, peas & pearl onion, compressed apple jus (gf)

Sweet Potato & Charred Baby Leek Risotto
Crumbled feta, sage oil, rose peppercorn (gf)(v)(ve)

Breaded Chicken Escalope
Tomato soprano sauce, parmesan, tender stem broccoli, rosemary & garlic parmentier potatoes

DESSERTS

Mrs Patterson's Homemade Christmas Pudding
Brandy Anglaise, muscat of fruit

'Trio of Desserts'
Raspberry & white chocolate profiteroles, chocolate nemesis, hot chocolate sauce, Baileys & salted caramel cheesecake

Gluten free dessert option available on request

(v) ... Vegetarian (ve) ... Vegan (gf) ... Gluten free

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10% Service charge for parties over 8 people



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PREPARING YOUR GARDEN FOR WINTER

As the vibrant colours of autumn fade, a gardener's work isn't done. The final months of the year are a crucial time for preparing your garden to survive the cold and lay the groundwork for a spectacular spring.

By taking a few key steps now—from thoughtful cleanup to strategic protection—you can ensure your plants emerge healthy and strong when warmer weather returns.

The Great Fall Cleanup
Think of this as putting your garden to bed. A thor-

ough cleanup now can prevent a host of problems later, from pests to diseases.

Remove Dead Material: Pull up spent annuals and any plants that showed signs of disease during the growing season. Composting healthy plant material is a great idea, but be sure to dispose of diseased foliage to prevent it from overwintering and re-infecting your garden next year.

Tackle the Weeds: Weeds may seem to die off in the cold, but their seeds can survive and sprout with a vengeance in the spring. Clear out as many weeds as possible, making sure to remove the roots.

Rake and Rake Again: A thick blanket of fallen leaves on your lawn can suffocate the grass and lead to fungal diseases. Rake up leaves and use them to make a valuable garden amendment called leaf mold, or shred them with your mower and add them to your compost pile or garden beds.

Don't Be Too Tidy: While some cleanup is essential, leaving a few spent plant stalks or seed heads provides shelter and food for beneficial insects and birds. This is a great way to support local wildlife through the colder months.

Protect Your Plants and Soil

The harsh combination of freezing temperatures, wind, and dry air can be lethal to vulnerable plants. Here's how to provide a protective blanket.

Mulch Your Beds: After the first hard frost, apply a generous 2- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch—such as shredded leaves, straw, or wood chips—around the base of perennials and shrubs. This acts as an insulating blanket, protecting roots from freezing and thawing cycles that can heave plants out of the ground. Be sure to keep mulch a few inches away from plant stems to prevent rot.

Protect Tender Plants: For plants that are not fully hardy in your climate, consider wrapping them. Use burlap or a breathable horticultural fleece to create a protective shield against windburn and ice. For container plants, move them to a sheltered spot, like against a warm wall, or bring them into a shed or garage for the winter. Grouping pots together can also provide insulation.

By investing a little time and effort in the fall, you're not just preparing your garden for winter; you're setting the stage for a healthier, more vibrant, and more beautiful garden in the spring.

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Regency Carpet Manufacturing: Weaving Quality, Innovation, and Community in Bangor

In the heart of Bangor's Balloo Avenue stands a business that has quietly become one of the UK's carpet manufacturing powerhouses.

Since 1994, Regency Carpet Manufacturing Limited has been blending traditional craftsmanship with cutting-edge innovation, producing carpets of exceptional quality that grace homes across the UK and Ireland.

Part of the long-established Furlong Flooring Group, Regency's 100-strong team operates 25 state-of-the-art tufting machines, creating products built to last. But this is no ordinary factory floor. Sustainability sits at the heart of the operation, with recycled yarn now woven into many ranges, showcasing how a local manufacturer can lead the way in shaping a greener future for the industry.

Equally important is the company's commitment to people. Regency offers apprenticeships in Electrical, Mechanical, and Joinery, opening doors for young people in the area to learn vital skills while building



Regency Staff raising funds for the Northern Ireland Hospice chosen Charity of the Year. Belfast Lagan Dragon Boat Race 2025

solid careers. The business also invests in its community, supporting local charities and groups, reflecting a belief that true success comes from giving back.

As one of Bangor's most substantial employers, Regency plays a vital role in the local economy. With significant turnover and an impressive scale of operations, the company's carpets are certified to the highest

standards — ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001 — and distributed throughout the UK and Ireland. From traditional wool styles to advanced performance synthetics, Regency brings comfort, durability, and style to homes nationwide.

Regency Carpet Manufacturing isn't a shopfront showroom; it's something far more powerful. It's a symbol of Bangor's indus-

trial strength, a story of skilled people and forward-looking innovation, and a company whose reach extends well beyond Northern Ireland's shores.

For nearly three decades, Regency has been more than a manufacturer. It has been a proud part of Bangor's fabric — weaving quality, sustainability, and community spirit into everything it does.



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BELFAST CHRISTMAS MARKET 2025

Get ready to step into a winter wonderland as the Belfast Christmas Market returns to the iconic City Hall grounds in 2025!

A cherished tradition, this market transforms the heart of the city into a festive spectacle, offering a truly enchanting experience for locals and visitors alike.

When is it Happening?
The Belfast Christmas Market generally runs from mid-November right up until December 22nd or 23rd. This allows ample time to soak up the festive atmosphere, whether you're looking for unique gifts, delicious treats, or simply a dose of Christmas cheer.

What to Expect: A Feast for the Senses

Prepare yourself for an immersive sensory experience that embodies the spirit of Christmas:

- A Global Culinary Journey: One of the market's biggest draws is its incredible array of food and drink. Expect to

find traditional German bratwurst, towering Yorkshire pudding wraps, French crepes, Dutch pancakes, and Spanish churros. For those with a sweet tooth, there's an abundance of fudge, chocolates, and festive pastries. And of course, no Christmas market experience is complete without a warming mug of glühwein or a pint of local craft beer.

- Unique Artisan Crafts and Gifts: Beyond the food, the market is a treasure trove of unique gifts and handcrafted goods from across Europe and beyond. Browse stalls offering bespoke jewellery, intricate wooden carvings, personalised ornaments, festive homeware, and luxurious clothing. It's the perfect place to find that special, one-of-a-kind present

that you won't find on the high street.

- Festive Ambiance and Entertainment: The City Hall grounds are beautifully adorned with twinkling lights, festive decorations, and a towering Christmas tree, creating a truly magical backdrop. Live music, carol singers, and occasional street performers often add to the vibrant atmosphere, filling the air with the sounds of the season.

- Family-Friendly Fun: The market caters to all ages. Children will delight in the sweet treats, vibrant stalls, and the general buzz. Keep an eye out for Santa's Grotto – a popular attraction where little ones can meet Father Christmas and share their wish lists.

Making the Most of Your Visit



To ensure you have the most magical experience at the Belfast Christmas Market 2025, here are some top tips:

1. Go Early or Late (on

weekdays): The market can get incredibly busy, especially on weekend evenings. If you prefer a more relaxed stroll, consider visiting on a

weekday morning or early afternoon. The market generally opens around 10:00 am or 11:00 am.

2. Dress for the

Weather: Belfasts winters can be chilly and damp. Wrap up warm with layers, a waterproof coat, hat, gloves, and comfortable shoes, as you'll be doing a lot of walking.

3. Bring Cash (and Card): While many vendors accept card payments, having some cash on hand can be useful for smaller purchases or if a particular stall only takes cash.

4. Plan Your Food Stops: With so many tempting options, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Take a walk around first to scope out what takes your fancy, then strategically plan your culinary journey. Don't forget to grab a festive drink to warm you up!

5. Embrace the Atmosphere: Don't just rush through. Take your time to soak in

the sights, sounds, and smells. Enjoy the festive buzz, listen to the music, and simply revel in the Christmas spirit.

6. Explore the City Hall: While you're there, take a moment to admire Belfasts City Hall itself. Its stunning architecture provides a magnificent backdrop to the market.

7. Combine with Other Activities:

The market is conveniently located in the city centre, making it easy to combine your visit with some Christmas shopping in Belfasts many stores or a visit to other local attractions.

The Belfast Christmas Market 2025 promises to be another unforgettable celebration of the festive season. Mark your calendars, gather your loved ones, and prepare to be enchanted by this truly magical experience!

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Specsavers Connswater optometrist receives award for Clinical Excellence

Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director at Specsavers Connswater has been honoured by Specsavers founders, Doug and Dame Mary Perkins with the Doug Perkins Medal for Clinical Excellence.



Paula has been an optometrist for 25 years and a store partner at Specsavers Connswater for 23 years, alongside store partner and dispensing director, Lynsey Caldwell. The store recently relocated from the shopping centre to the bustling retail park, enhancing its offering locally with a £600,000 investment.

In the past 10 years, Paula has completed professional courses in post-cataract care, medical retina and glaucoma. As well as running in-store clinics, Paula has also volunteered her time to

Simon Community, providing essential healthcare services to people experiencing homelessness locally, alongside support for the Macular Society with educational events.

Speaking of her award win, Paula commented, 'I enjoy the variety of patients I get to see as a Specsavers director. In Northern Ireland we have integrated provision for the diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of glaucoma patients and those with ocular hypertension. I enjoy caring for these patients as the service is convenient and offers them

reassurance that if they go on to develop glaucoma it will be caught early. I am immensely proud of our store and the clinical excellence that our team provide and am delighted to have been recognised through receiving this award.'

She adds, 'I'm proud that Specsavers Connswater is a key part of the neighbourhood health service. We have built strong relationships within the community, working closely with key healthcare providers and are working together to improve quality of life for local people.'

A's, B's, and C's told a clear story of academic prowess. Yet, as the complexities of the 21st century unfold, a growing chorus of educators, parents, and even employers are asking: is this enough? What about the crucial skills of self-awareness, empathy, and resilience – the very bedrock of emotional intelligence (EI)? Can schools, traditionally bastions of facts and figures, truly teach something as nuanced as navigating feelings?

The answer, increasingly, appears to be a resounding yes.

The Case for Emotional Literacy

Emotional intelligence, a term popularised by psychologist Daniel Goleman, refers to the ability to understand, use, and manage one's own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse

conflict. These aren't just "soft skills"; they are foundational life skills that influence everything from academic performance and social relationships to mental health and career success.

Children who can identify their feelings are better equipped to regulate them. Students who can empathize with peers are less likely to engage in bullying. Teenagers with strong emotional regulation are better able to handle exam stress and the pressures of adolescence. In a world grappling with rising mental health concerns among young people, teaching EI is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

Integrating EI into the Curriculum

So, how does one teach a child to be emotionally intelligent? It's rarely about adding "Emotional Intelligence 101" as a standalone subject. Instead, successful approaches weave EI into the very fabric of school life,



integrating it seamlessly into existing lessons and daily interactions.

One common method is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. These structured curricula teach skills like self-management (e.g., setting goals, managing impulses), self-awareness (recognising emotions, understanding strengths), social awareness (empathy, perspective-taking), relationship skills (communication, conflict resolution), and responsible

decision-making. These can be delivered through dedicated lessons, but more powerfully, through role-playing, group discussions, and reflective activities embedded within subjects like literature, history, or even science.

Teachers play a pivotal role. An educator who models active listening, expresses their own feelings appropriately, and creates a classroom where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities

is implicitly teaching EI. Discussions around characters' motivations in a novel, the consequences of historical decisions, or even collaborative science projects can become powerful vehicles for developing empathy and teamwork.

The future of education isn't about choosing between grades and emotions; it's about recognizing that they are profoundly interconnected, each enriching the other.

Boosting Your Immunity

As the days shorten and a crisp chill fills the air, cold and flu season inevitably descends. But instead of resigning ourselves to sniffles and sore throats, we can proactively fortify our body's natural defences.

A robust immune system is your best armour, and building it involves a holistic approach: smart food choices, targeted supplements, and healthy lifestyle habits.

Fueling Your Defences: Good Food Choices

Your plate is a powerful tool in immune defense. Prioritize

unprocessed foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

Vibrant Fruits and Vegetables: Think of these as your daily dose of immune-boosting powerhouses.

Citrus Fruits (Oranges, Grapefruits, Lemons): Packed with Vitamin C, crucial for white blood cell

function.

Dark Leafy Greens (Spinach, Kale, Broccoli): Rich in Vitamins A, C, and K, as well as folate and antioxidants.

Berries (Blueberries, Strawberries, Raspberries): Bursting with antioxidants that fight cellular damage.

Bell Peppers: Believe it or not, red bell peppers

have more Vitamin C than oranges!

Garlic and Onions: These pungent powerhouses contain compounds like allicin, known for their antiviral and antibacterial properties.

Ginger: A warming root with anti-inflammatory benefits that can soothe a sore throat.

Lean Proteins: Essential for building and repairing immune cells. Opt for chicken, turkey, fish, beans, lentils, and nuts.

Healthy Fats: Omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish (salmon, mackerel), flaxseeds, and walnuts can help reduce inflammation, which supports overall immune health.

Fermented Foods: Yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and kombucha introduce beneficial probiotics to your gut. A healthy gut microbiome is intimately linked to a strong immune system.

Targeted Support: Supplements That Can Help

While a balanced diet is foundational, certain supplements can offer an extra layer of support, especially during peak cold and flu season. Always consult with your doctor before starting any new supplement regimen.

Vitamin C: Perhaps the most well-known immune vitamin, it supports various cellular functions of the immune system.

Vitamin D: Often called the "sunshine vitamin," many people are deficient, especially in winter. Vitamin D plays a critical role in immune response.

Prioritize Sleep: Adequate

sleep is non-negotiable for immune function. Aim for 7-9 hours per night. During sleep, your body produces protective cytokines, crucial for fighting infection.

Manage Stress: Chronic stress suppresses the immune system, making you more susceptible to illness. Incorporate stress-reducing activities like meditation, yoga, deep breathing exercises, or spending time in nature.

Regular Exercise: Moderate, regular physical activity can boost immune cell circulation. Aim for at least 30 minutes of brisk walking, jogging, or cycling most days of the week. Avoid overtraining, as extreme exercise can temporarily suppress immunity.

Stay Hydrated: Water helps carry nutrients to your cells, flushes out toxins, and keeps mucous membranes moist, which is important for preventing pathogens from entering the body.

Practice Good Hygiene: Simple acts like frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after being in public places, can significantly reduce your risk of infection. Avoid touching your face to prevent transferring germs.

By consciously adopting these food choices, considering targeted supplements, and integrating healthy lifestyle habits, you can build a formidable defense against the cold and flu season. Empower your immune system, and enjoy a healthier, more vibrant 'fall into winter'.

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The Winning Way: Master Leo Maguire and the Taekwon- Do Northern Ireland Legacy

Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland, under the esteemed leadership of Master Leo Maguire, is a prominent force in the martial arts community, shaping the lives of children and adults across the province.

Master Maguire, a VI Degree Black Belt and President of the International Taekwon-Do Federation Northern Ireland (ITF N.I.), has established a network of schools dedicated to fostering confidence, discipline, and self-defense. His distinguished career as a national coach has led the Northern Ireland team to numerous medal victories at both national and international competitions.

The Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland schools offer a comprehensive program tailored to all ages, beginning with the "Little Tiger Cubs" for children aged 3 to 5. This "Learn Through Play" program introduces basic martial arts skills through a fun

mixture of games and fitness drills, helping children develop improved balance, coordination, and respect. For slightly older children, the "Active Tigers" class (ages 5 to 8) allows students to develop their Taekwon-Do skills at a more relaxed pace. The core "Taekwon Do" program, for students aged 9 to adult, is designed to be safe, practical, and fun. It focuses on the fundamental tenets of the art, including self-defense and self-discipline, while building confidence and physical fitness.

The organization's commitment to excellence was recently highlighted when Lisburn hosted the prestigious

2024 ITF Taekwon-Do Championships at the National Badminton Centre. The historic one-day event brought together Grandmasters, Masters, instructors, and competitors of all ages for a spectacular display of skill and spirit. Master Maguire, as President of Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland, was instrumental in bringing the event to the region.

With a wide range of classes available across Northern Ireland, anyone interested in experiencing the benefits of Taekwon-Do can easily get involved. To find a full list of classes and begin your journey, visit the official website at www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk or contact Leo Maguire directly at 07891 191494.

Beyond Turkey: Catering Trends for a Modern Holiday Meal

Already planning your Christmas meal?

While the classic roast turkey and familiar fixings will always hold a cherished spot, today's festive catering scene is moving beyond tradition to embrace global flavours, sustainability, and personal dietary needs. For hosts and caterers alike, this shift presents a fantastic opportunity to craft a holiday meal that is both spectacular and inclusive.

Here some catering trends transforming the modern festive menu:

The Rise of the Plant-Forward Feast

The most significant trend influencing modern menus is the massive demand for creative, satisfying plant-based and vegan options. No longer relegated to a sad side dish, vegetable-centric meals are taking their rightful place as the show-stopping centrepiece.

• **The Impressive Vegan Roast:** Forget the simple nut roast. Caterers are crafting elaborate mains like Mushroom Wellington wrapped in flaky pastry, Stuffed Whole

Roasted Cauliflower with herb gremolata and pomegranate, or a rich Butternut Squash Lasagna.

• **Creative Comfort:** Look for hearty, nourishing dishes that use whole grains and legumes, such as a Truffle Mac and Cheese made with cashew cream, or a savoury Shepherd's Pie topped with celery root mash.

• **Root-to-Stem Cooking:** A focus on sustainability means chefs are minimizing food waste by incorporating traditionally discarded parts of vegetables, adding complex, earthy flavour to side dishes and stocks.

Interactive Food Stations & Personalization

Guests want an experience, not just a meal. Buffet lines are evolving into engaging stations that encourage mingling and allow for personal customisation, a practical way to cater to diverse dietary needs without hassle.

• **Build-Your-Own Bars:** Stations like a "Gourmet Mashed Potato Bar" with

mix-ins (truffle oil, caramelized onions, smoked cheese, chives) or a Taco/Grain Bowl Station with fresh salsas and various proteins make the meal fun and personal.

• **Dessert Decorating:** Interactive dessert stations, where guests can decorate mini cakes,

cookies, or create their own sundaes, are a huge hit.

• **The Elevated Appetizer:** Many gatherings are ditching the formal sit-down meal altogether in favour of a lavish spread of small plates and upscale appetizers (often referred to as "mezze"

or "tapas" style) served throughout the evening.

By embracing these trends, hosts can move beyond the traditional turkey without abandoning the spirit of the festive season, crafting a memorable, modern, and utterly delicious holiday celebration.

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COUNTING DOWN TO JOY: 10 WAYS TO GET INTO THE FESTIVE MOOD

The Christmas season is about anticipation, warmth, and a little bit of magic

As the days tick closer to December 25th, it's the perfect time to trade the stress of the everyday for the spirit of the holidays.

If you need a spark to ignite your festive cheer, here are 10 essential activities to help you embrace the joy and make your countdown to Christmas truly memorable.

1. Curate the Perfect Holiday Soundtrack

Nothing shifts your mood faster than music. Start your countdown by creating a Christmas playlist that blends the classics, modern hits, and maybe a few sentimental favorites. Whether it's carols while you clean or upbeat tunes during a commute, let the sounds of the season become the backdrop to your month.

2. Dive Into Decoration Day

Make a dedicated day or weekend to deck the halls. Pull out the boxes of ornaments, untangle the lights, and fill your home with festive cheer. The act of decorating, especially with loved ones, is a tradition that instantly boosts the festive feeling.

Don't forget to light some holiday-scented candles or use diffusers for an extra sensory layer!

3. Host a Cozy Christmas Movie Marathon

Grab a big blanket, a thermos of hot chocolate (extra marshmallows are mandatory), and settle in for a night of festive films. From the nostalgic classics to modern holiday comedies, a movie marathon is a low-effort, high-reward way to bask in the Christmas spirit.

4. Bake Your Way to Bliss

The aromas of Christmas

are just as important as the sights and sounds. Baking holiday treats—gingerbread cookies, sugar cookies, or mince pies—will fill your home with a welcoming, festive scent. Plus, you get to enjoy the delicious results (and maybe leave some for Santa).

5. Plan a Random Act of Kindness

Embody the true spirit of giving. Dedicate some time during your countdown to a random act of Christmas kindness. This could be donating a toy, volunteering at a local charity, shoveling a neighbor's driveway, or simply leaving a generous tip for a service worker. Giving back is one of the most heartwarming parts of the season.

6. Get Lost in the Lights

Bundle up, grab a hot drink, and take a drive or a walk through your local neighborhood to admire the Christmas lights. There's something undeniably magical about seeing houses transformed into sparkling winter wonderlands. Many towns also host special lighting displays or festivals—make it an annual outing!

7. Send Out Holiday Cards

Take an hour to sit down and write personalized Christmas cards. While digital messages are easy, a handwritten card arriving in the mail is a truly special gesture. It gives you a moment to reflect on the important people in your life and spread a little extra cheer.

8. Set Up a Festive Reading Nook

The darker, colder days are perfect for curling up with a good book. Create a cozy corner with twinkly lights, a soft cushion, and a stack of Christmas-themed stories or novels. Slowing down and savoring a holiday story can be a much-needed break from



the seasonal hustle.

9. Create a Christmas Countdown Tradition

Start a simple daily tradition, like opening an Advent calendar (chocolate, toy, or even a scratch-off activity calendar). The small, daily moment of anticipation helps build excitement and makes the countdown feel more intentional.

10. Indulge in Some Holiday Crafting

Get creative and make a few homemade decorations or gifts. This could be anything from simple paper snowflakes to salt dough ornaments or a DIY wreath. Crafting engages your hands and mind in a fun, festive way, and the resulting decorations will carry a special, personal meaning.

The countdown to Christmas is your opportunity to press pause on the ordinary and enjoy the extraordinary joy the season brings. Pick a few items from this list, light a fire, and let the festive mood take over!

What's the first festive activity you're planning to check off your list?

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Integrated Advice Partnership Launches to Support Lisburn and Castlereagh Communities

A new collaborative initiative, the Integrated Advice Partnership, has officially launched in Lisburn and Castlereagh, led by Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh (formerly Citizen's Advice Bureau). This innovative partnership brings together a diverse range of local organisations to offer coordinated, community-based advice and support services to those most in need.

The project includes key partners across Lisburn and Castlereagh such as the Simon Community NI, Atlas Women's Centre, Lisburn Social Supermarket, Resurgam Trust, Ballybeen Women's Centre, Ballybeen Improvement Group, and Housing Rights. Together, they aim to improve access to services relating to advice on benefits, housing, debt, budgeting and general wellbeing which is delivered through trusted local organisations.

At the heart of the Integrated Advice Partnership is a shared vision: to increase awareness of, and access to, free regulated debt advice services. By working collaboratively, Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh offers comprehensive, person-centred financial advice that is tailored to the specific needs of individuals.

"This partnership is holistic; it supports improvements in financial health, well-being, and empowerment for individuals accessing the programme," said Carol McCabe, Manager for Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh. "Very often financial challenges can have a negative impact on mental health. World Mental Health Day which takes place on the 10th October 2025 aims to raise awareness of positive mental well-being. We're proud to be working alongside such a committed group of partners in addressing debt through financial health and mental well-being initiatives to meet the growing needs in our area."

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact communities across Northern Ireland as well as the onset of colder days looming, this partnership offers a timely and much-needed response, building a stronger and more integrated network for everyone in Lisburn and Castlereagh.

For more information or to access support, contact Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh based at Bridge Community Centre, 50 Railway Street, Lisburn, BT28 1XN.
E: calc@calcni.com T: 028 9266 2251

A Stargazer's Guide to Northern Ireland's Celestial Shows

As the nights draw in and the crisp autumn air settles over Northern Ireland, the cosmos offers a spectacular array of celestial events.

Away from city lights, our dark skies become a canvas for meteor showers, planetary alignments, and shimmering aurorae. Grab a warm drink, look up, and prepare to be amazed!

The Draconids Meteor Shower (Early October)

Kicking off the autumn astronomical calendar is the Draconids Meteor Shower, usually peaking around October 8th. This shower is unique because it's best viewed in the early evening, shortly after dusk, rather than in the pre-dawn hours like many other showers. While often a modest display, the Draconids can occasionally surprise with bursts of activity. Keep an eye towards the constellation Draco the

Dragon in the northern sky.

Orionids Meteor Shower (Late October)

Following close behind are the Orionids, active throughout October but peaking around October 21st-22nd. These swift and bright meteors are fragments of Halley's Comet and are famous for leaving glowing trains. To spot them, locate the constellation Orion (which gives the shower its name) rising in the eastern sky after midnight. The later you stay up, the better your chances of seeing these cosmic fireworks.

Planetary Parade: Jupiter and Saturn Shine Bright (All Autumn)

Throughout autumn, the gas giants Jupiter and Saturn will be prominent fixtures in the night sky.

- Jupiter, the largest planet in our solar system, will be exceptionally bright and easily visible to the naked eye, appearing like a brilliant, steady star. Through binoculars, you might even glimpse its four largest moons.
- Saturn, with its iconic rings, will also be visible, though appearing less bright than Jupiter. While you'll need a telescope to resolve its rings, even binoculars can hint at its elongated shape. These planetary giants will be observable in the southern sky during the evening hours for much of the season.

Taurids Meteor Shower (November)

November brings the

Taurids Meteor Shower, active throughout the month with two peaks: the South Taurids around November 5th and the North Taurids around November 12th. The Taurids are known for being slow-moving but occasionally very bright meteors, sometimes called "fireballs." They radiate from the constellation Taurus the Bull, which rises in the eastern sky.

Leonids Meteor Shower (Mid-November)

One of the most anticipated meteor showers, the Leonids, peaks around November 17th-18th. These meteors are famous for their historical "storms," though most years offer a more modest but still impressive display. The Leonids are fragments of the comet Tempel-Tuttle and are known for their speed and bright trails. Look towards the constellation Leo the Lion, which rises in the late evening.

Geminids Meteor Shower (Early December)

Often considered one of the best meteor showers of the year, the Geminids peak around December 13th-14th. Unlike most showers which originate from comets, the Geminids come from an asteroid, 3200 Phaethon. They produce numerous, bright, and multi-coloured meteors. This shower is best viewed after midnight, with meteors appearing to radiate from the constellation Gemini the Twins, visible high in the southern sky.

The Northern Lights: Aurora Borealis (Potential Sightings)

While not a guaranteed event, autumn and winter can offer increased chances of seeing the Aurora Borealis from Northern Ireland, especially in areas with low light pollution such as the Antrim Coast or parts of County Fermanagh. Solar activity can cause geomagnetic storms, leading to these ethereal green and pink lights dancing across the northern horizon. Keep an eye on space weather forecasts from sites like the Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre for aurora alerts.

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Unearthing Halloween’s Hidden Traditions

Halloween, with its spooky costumes, pumpkin carving, and quest for sugary treats, feels like a holiday we all know. But beyond the familiar rituals, a world of lesser-known traditions, steeped in history and folklore, awaits discovery.

This year, why not delve deeper into the past and unearth some of these fascinating, forgotten, or simply unusual Halloween customs?

Snap-Apple Night (Ireland & Scotland)

Forget bobbing for apples in a bowl of water – imagine them dangling from a string! This lively tradition, particularly popular in Ireland and Scotland, involves apples and sometimes treacle-covered baps (bread rolls) tied to strings. Participants, with hands clasped behind their backs, must try to take a bite.

It’s a messy, competitive, and utterly hilarious way to celebrate! The origins are thought to be linked to ancient harvest festivals and divinatory games, where the first to bite into the apple might be the first to marry.

Souling (England)

Long before “trick or treat,” there was “souling.” Dating back to medieval times in parts of England, especially the North and West Midlands, poor folk

and sometimes children would go from door to door on All Hallows’ Eve, singing and praying for the souls of the dead. In return, they would receive “soul cakes” – small, round cakes often spiced with nutmeg, ginger, or cinnamon. This beautiful tradition was a charitable act, offering comfort to the living and prayers for the departed.

Dumb Supper (Various Cultures)

For those seeking a more introspective and spiritual Halloween, the “dumb supper” is a captivating tradition. Performed in silence (hence “dumb”), participants set an extra place at the table for the spirits of their ancestors. Food is served, and no one speaks, creating an atmosphere of reverence and communion with the other side. The idea is to honour and remember those who have passed, and some believe it can even provide glimpses into the future.

Nut Cracking and **Fortune Telling** (Celtic Traditions)

Many ancient Celtic Halloween customs



revolved around divination, particularly concerning love and marriage. One such tradition involved nuts. Couples would place two nuts on a fire – if they burned steadily together, it signified a harmonious future. If they hissed and popped apart, it suggested a more tumultuous path.

Another variation involved throwing nuts into a fire and making a wish; the way they burned or burst was thought to indicate the wish’s success.

Carving Turnips, Not **Pumpkins** (Ireland &

Scotland)

While the pumpkin is now king, its predecessor in Halloween carving was the humble turnip. When Irish and Scottish immigrants brought their Halloween traditions to America, they found pumpkins to be far more abundant and easier to carve. But originally, terrifying faces were etched into turnips and potatoes, lit from within by candles, to ward off mischievous spirits and “Stingy Jack.” It’s a reminder of Halloween’s protective, rather than purely playful, origins.

WINTER SKIN CARE

As the days grow shorter and the temperature drops, the season brings more than just cozy sweaters and hot cocoa.

The cold, dry air outdoors combined with the often-harsh, low-humidity air from indoor heating systems can wreak havoc on your skin. This one-two punch strips your skin of its natural oils, leading to dryness, flakiness, irritation, and a compromised moisture barrier.

Fortunately, with a few simple changes to your daily routine, you can create a protective shield that keeps your skin healthy and hydrated all winter long.

The Foundation: Gentle Cleansing

The first step to a successful winter skincare routine is rethinking how you cleanse. Your summer cleanser may be too harsh for the colder months.

Ditch the Hot Water: While a steamy shower feels great, hot water strips your skin of its natural oils more quickly than lukewarm water. Opt for shorter, lukewarm showers and baths to prevent excessive moisture loss.

Switch to a Gentle Cleanser: Avoid harsh, foaming cleansers that can leave your skin feeling tight and dry. Instead, look for cream, milk, or oil-based cleansers that remove dirt and makeup without stripping your skin’s protective barrier.

The Core: Moisturise and Lock It In

This is the most critical component of your winter

routine. You need to shift from lightweight lotions to richer, more nourishing formulas. The goal is not just to hydrate, but also to create a barrier that locks moisture in.

Look for moisturizers that contain a combination of the following ingredients:

Humectants: These ingredients attract water from the air and deeper layers of the skin. Key examples include hyaluronic acid and glycerin.

Emollients: These ingredients fill in the gaps between skin cells, making the skin feel soft and smooth. Look for nourishing plant oils like squalane, jojoba oil, and shea butter.

Occlusives: These ingredients create a physical barrier on the skin’s surface to prevent moisture from evaporating. Common occlusives include petroleum jelly and dimethicone.

Barrier-Strengthening Ingredients: Ceramides are lipids that act as the “glue” holding your skin cells together. Products with ceramides help to repair and strengthen your skin’s natural barrier, which is essential for retaining moisture.

For best results, apply your moisturiser immediately after cleansing or bathing while your skin is still slightly damp. This helps to trap the surface moisture before it can



evaporate.

The Supporting Cast: Serums and Treatments

To give your skin an extra boost, consider adding targeted treatments to your routine.

Hydrating Serums: A serum with hyaluronic acid can be applied before your moisturizer for a powerful dose of hydration that penetrates deeper into the skin.

Facial Oils: A few drops of a rich facial oil can be pressed on top of your moisturizer to provide an extra layer of occlusion and nourishment.

Overnight Treatments: A thick, rich night cream or a sleep mask can help your skin repair itself and rehydrate while you sleep.

It’s also important to listen to your skin. If you are experiencing increased sensitivity, you may want to temporarily reduce or pause the use of active ingredients like retinoids or strong exfoliating acids, as they can sometimes exacerbate dryness and irritation in the winter.

Run a Humidifier: Combat the dry indoor air by using a humidifier in your home, especially in your bedroom at night. This adds moisture back into the air, which in turn helps your skin stay hydrated.

Stay Hydrated from Within: The cold weather can make you forget to drink water, but staying hydrated from the inside is just as important. Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

Wear Sunscreen: The sun’s UV rays are present all year round and can still damage your skin, even on cloudy days. Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher to all exposed skin, especially if you’re in a snowy environment where the sun’s rays reflect off the ground.

By following these tips, you can transform your winter skincare routine from a chore into an act of self-care. With a little extra attention, your skin will thank you with a healthy, glowing complexion that can stand up to anything the season throws its way.

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Dermot Kennedy latest world-class artist to shine at Waterfront Hall & Ulster Hall

Belfast is cementing its reputation as a city of music, comedy and culture, with a stellar line-up of world-class artists lighting up the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall.

From local legends Snow Patrol to international icons such as Bob Dylan and Van Morrison to contemporary stars including Dermot Kennedy, Jade, and Riley Green, the venues have played host to some of the biggest names in music this year, with sold-out shows drawing audiences from across the region, the UK and far beyond.

The impact of this influx of global talent goes well beyond the stage. With fans travelling from across the world, including as far afield as Australia and America for Van Morrison's recent 80th birthday celebrations the venues are providing a significant boost to Belfast's hospitality, retail and tourism sectors. Restaurants, hotels, and local businesses all benefit as the city welcomes thousands of concertgoers eager to experience both the



performances and the vibrancy of Belfast itself.

Pete McKevitt, Head of Entertainment at Waterfront Hall & Ulster Hall, said:

"It's an incredibly exciting time for Belfast. To have legendary figures like Bob Dylan and Van Morrison alongside chart-topping artists such as Dermot Kennedy shows just how strong our city's appeal has become as a

live music destination."

"These sold-out shows don't just deliver unforgettable nights of entertainment; they bring real economic value, filling hotels, restaurants, and supporting local businesses. The fact that we had visitors from America and Australia coming to celebrate Van Morrison's 80th with us underlines the global reach of Belfast

as a cultural city. We're proud that the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall continue to play a central role in that story."

As Belfast continues to welcome world-class artists and sold-out shows, the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall stand as pillars of the city's cultural life, stages where global talent meets local passion, and where Belfast shines brightly on the world stage.

GIVAN WELCOMES START OF PHONE-FREE SCHOOL PILOT

Education Minister Paul Givan has today welcomed the beginning of a new phone-free pilot scheme in schools, which will involve more than 8,000 young people across Northern Ireland.

The phone-free pilot will run in nine schools until March 2026. It will explore the potential benefits of restricting mobile phone use during the school day, with a focus on supporting student wellbeing and improving concentration in the classroom.

During a visit to St Ronan's College, Lurgan, one of the schools taking part in the pilot programme, Paul Givan said: "Since becoming Education Minister, I've taken time to carefully review the evidence and listen to the concerns of parents, teachers and school leaders about mobile phone use in schools. There is growing unease about the amount of time young people spend on smartphones, and research increasingly points to a link between excessive use and declining mental health among adolescents.

"In response, I committed to piloting a phone-free solution that would prevent pupils from using their devices during the school day—helping them to fully engage with learning, social interaction, and all aspects of school life."

The Minister continued: "Countries around the world are taking action to reduce phone use in schools. While some schools here in Northern Ireland have already introduced their

own policies, I believe we need a consistent, evidence-based approach. This pilot will help us understand what works best and how we can support schools to make changes that benefit pupils—boosting wellbeing, focus and academic achievement."

Following a procurement process, Odyssey Education was appointed in June 2025 to supply the lockable mobile phone pouches for the pilot and provide associated training, guidance and support for the school pilot project.

Explaining how the pilot scheme will operate, Paul Givan said: "Pupils involved in the pilot scheme will place their phones in a pocket-sized fabric pouch with a magnetic latch that is sealed at the beginning of the school day and opened using a special unlocking base. This will ensure pupils cannot use their phones during the school day and will allow us to evaluate the impacts of reduced usage.

"I want to provide reassurance that flexibility will be provided for those students who need access to their smartphone during the school day, for reasons of health, disability or other needs."

To help to understand the impact of the study, King's College London has been appointed to carry-



Pictured at St Ronan's College (L-R) are pupils Abigail, Dylan, Dylan, Jamie and Lucy with Principal Mrs Fiona Kane and Education Minister Paul Givan.

out an external evaluation of the phone-free pilot. The research will provide independent and objective insights into the pilot's effectiveness and outcomes, and the research findings will provide the evidence to inform future decisions.

Paul Givan concluded: "This is a pilot initiative, and every aspect of using lockable pouches during the school day will be independently evaluated by King's College London. Their research will help us understand the real impact of reduced phone use in schools. I encourage everyone involved—students, staff, and parents—to share their experiences openly and honestly over the coming months. I look forward to the valuable insights this review will bring, which will help shape future policy decisions."

A report about the evaluation of the phone free pilot is due to be published in June 2026.

Five of the nine schools will go live with the pilot from September. The four remaining schools, Hazelwood IC, Larne HS, Markethill HS and St Joseph's Boys' are planning to start in the coming weeks. The nine schools participating in the pilot are:

- Glenlola Collegiate, Bangor
- Friends' School, Lisburn
- Hazelwood Integrated College, Belfast
- St Genevieve's High School, Belfast
- St Joseph's Boys', Londonderry
- St Fanchea's College, Enniskillen
- Larne High School
- Markethill High School
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EVs in the Cold:A Guide to Winter Performance and Range

As the days get shorter and the temperatures plummet, a common question arises for electric vehicle (EV) owners and prospective buyers: How do EVs perform in the cold?

The answer is nuanced, but with a bit of knowledge and preparation, an EV can be a reliable and even advantageous choice for winter driving.

The Science Behind the Winter Drop

The primary challenge for EVs in winter is the lithium-ion battery. These batteries are an intricate system of chemical reactions, and like many chemical processes, they are sensitive to temperature. The optimal operating temperature for an EV battery is typically around 21.5°C. When the mercury drops, the chemistry slows down.

• **Reduced Range:** In cold weather, the electrolyte fluid inside the battery becomes more viscous, which hinders the movement of lithium ions. This means the battery's ability to store and release energy is less efficient, leading to a noticeable reduction in range. Studies and real-world data suggest that a drop of 15-20% is common, though this can be more significant in extreme cold.

• **Slower Charging:** Just as discharging is less efficient, charging also slows down. A cold battery has higher internal resistance, so it can't accept the same rate of charge as a warm one.



This is why you might notice that a fast-charging session takes longer in winter, as the car's thermal management system must first use energy to warm the battery to an optimal charging temperature.

Winter-Proofing Your EV: Practical Tips

Driving an EV in winter doesn't have to be a struggle. With these simple tips, you can maximize your car's efficiency and stay safe.

1. **Pre-Condition While Plugged In:** This is perhaps the most important tip. Most modern EVs have a pre-conditioning feature that allows you to warm the cabin and the battery while the car is still plugged into the charger. This uses energy from the grid, not the battery, ensuring you start your journey with a warm battery at its peak

efficiency.

2. **Use Heated Seats and Steering Wheel:** If your car has them, use these features instead of blasting the cabin heater. They are much more energy-efficient and directly warm the occupant, conserving battery power.

3. **Charge Smartly:** Don't let your battery level drop too low in cold weather. Keeping it topped up, especially above 20%, allows the car's thermal management system to maintain a healthy temperature for the battery. It's also best to charge immediately after a drive while the battery is still warm.

4. **Drive Smoothly:** Just like with any car, smooth acceleration and gentle braking are key to safety and efficiency in winter. For EVs, this is even more critical as it helps conserve

battery power and can make the most of regenerative braking, which recovers energy during deceleration.

5. **Park Indoors:** If you have access to a garage, park your car inside. This simple action can help keep the battery from reaching extreme low temperatures overnight, improving its performance and reducing the energy needed to warm it up in the morning.

In conclusion, while electric vehicles do face a unique set of challenges in cold weather, they are by no means unsuitable for winter. With an understanding of how the cold affects their performance and by implementing a few proactive habits, EV drivers can navigate the winter months with confidence and efficiency.

THE RISE OF THE ELECTRIC SUV

The trend towards electric SUVs continues unabated, and this autumn will introduce several significant new players to the segment.

BMW iX3 (Neue Klasse): BMW's next-generation iX3 is one of the most anticipated EVs of the year. Based on the brand's "Neue Klasse" design language, it promises enhanced battery technology, cutting-edge infotainment, and a fresh aesthetic. This new iX3 aims to build on the success of the current model, providing an exciting electric option for those who favor the popular X3 SUV.

Range Rover EV: For those seeking luxury and zero-emission driving, the fully electric Range Rover is finally set to arrive. This model is expected to maintain the brand's reputation for opulence and refinement, while offering a powerful and smooth electric powertrain. It will be a direct competitor to high-end EVs like the Tesla Model X and the Mercedes-Benz EQS SUV.

Kia EV5: Following the success of the EV6 and EV9, Kia is expanding its electric lineup with the EV5. This mid-sized SUV is expected to be a practical and stylish family car, competing with models like the Tesla Model Y and Skoda Enyaq. With a focus on sustainable materials and advanced technology, the EV5 is set to be a strong contender in the competitive family SUV market.

Hyundai Ioniq 9:



Hyundai is expanding its Ioniq family with the Ioniq 9, a large seven-seat SUV. This futuristic model is expected to offer a generous range and all the advanced features that have made the Ioniq lineup so popular.

The push for more accessible electric cars is gaining momentum, and several new models are poised to make EV ownership more attainable.

Skoda Epiq: Skoda's new small electric SUV, the Epiq, is designed to be a budget-friendly option for urban drivers. Sharing parts with the upcoming Volkswagen ID.2 and Cupra Raval, it promises over 248 miles of range

and a price tag that will appeal to a wide range of buyers. The Epiq's distinct styling and practical interior are set to make it a standout in the affordable EV market.

Fiat Grande Panda: Reviving the iconic Panda nameplate, the new Fiat Grande Panda is a versatile and efficient city car. It will be available in both hybrid and electric versions, catering to a diverse set of needs. With its retro charm and accessible price point, the Grande Panda is an excellent choice for eco-conscious city dwellers.

Renault Twingo: The Twingo is making a comeback as an affordable electric city car. Targeting

a price point under £20,000, it aims to fill a crucial gap in the market for budget-friendly EVs. With its compact size and cheerful design, it's set to be a popular option for those seeking a fun and efficient car for daily urban use.

This autumn's new car lineup in the UK showcases a clear direction for the industry: a rapid shift towards electrification across all segments, from family-friendly SUVs to high-performance supercars. With a diverse range of models set to arrive, there's something for every type of driver looking to get behind the wheel of a brand-new car.

Winter Tyres in the UK:Are They Worth It?

As winter sets in, many UK motorists begin to question whether investing in winter tyres is worthwhile.

Unlike standard tyres, winter tyres are designed with a softer rubber compound and deeper tread patterns, allowing them to grip the road more effectively in cold, icy, or snowy conditions. They remain flexible even when temperatures drop below 7°C, improving braking distances and overall handling.

In countries such as Germany, Austria, and Sweden, winter tyres are a legal requirement during colder months. However, in the UK, where winters are often less severe, there is no law mandating their use. This has led to a mixed approach among drivers. In areas prone to snow and ice, particularly rural and northern regions, winter tyres can provide an extra layer of safety and peace of mind. Meanwhile, drivers in milder southern areas may see them as an unnecessary expense.

Cost is a key consideration. A full set of winter tyres can be expensive, and some drivers choose to invest in all-season tyres as a compromise. These offer improved performance year-round without the hassle

of changing tyres twice annually. It's also worth noting that switching tyres can help extend the lifespan of both sets, as each is used only during the appropriate season. Proper storage of off-season tyres, ideally in a cool, dry place, is also important to maintain their condition and performance.

Winter tyres also provide better traction on wet roads and slushy surfaces, not just snow and ice. This improved grip translates to shorter stopping distances and more stable cornering, which can make a significant difference during sudden braking or evasive manoeuvres. The tread design, with numerous small grooves known as sipes, helps channel water away and reduce the risk of aquaplaning — a common hazard on cold, rainy UK roads.

However, there are some drawbacks to consider. Winter tyres tend to wear out faster in warmer weather due to their softer rubber composition, so they should be swapped back to summer tyres once temperatures consistently rise above 7°C. This seasonal changeover adds another task — and cost — for vehicle owners, although many tyre retailers



offer storage services and discounted changeovers to make the process easier.

Drivers covering long distances or commuting early in the morning when roads are at their coldest may particularly benefit from the added control and

safety winter tyres offer. Similarly, those living in hilly or rural regions, where untreated roads can remain icy for days, will notice a significant difference in vehicle performance and confidence. On the other hand, urban motorists who

mostly drive on gritted and well-maintained roads may find all-season tyres a more practical balance between cost and performance.

Another point worth noting is the impact on insurance and safety

assessments. While UK insurers do not typically offer discounts for fitting winter tyres, some may view their use positively in the event of an accident during adverse weather. Additionally, many safety experts and motoring organisations, such as the RAC and AA, recommend winter tyres for enhanced control and accident prevention when temperatures drop.

Ultimately, the decision to invest in winter tyres depends on individual circumstances. Factors such as location, driving frequency, road conditions, and budget all play a part. While not essential for every driver, they offer significant

safety and performance benefits for many. Taking the time to evaluate your driving habits and local weather patterns will help you decide whether they're a worthwhile investment.

Even though they are not legally required in the UK, winter tyres remain one of the most effective ways to improve grip, stability, and confidence when driving through the colder months.

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PRACTICAL WAYS TO PREVENT HEAT LOSS FROM YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

Staying warm and keeping energy bills down during the winter is a major concern for many homeowners.

A significant amount of a home's heat is lost through various weak points, making it harder and more expensive to maintain a comfortable temperature. Fortunately, there are several practical and affordable ways to prevent heat loss. Sealing Drafts and Gaps

One of the most effective and cheapest ways to prevent heat loss is to tackle drafts. Air leaks can account for a significant portion of your home's heat loss.

Windows and Doors: Inspect the seals around all your windows and doors. You can use a lit incense stick or a thin piece of paper to check for drafts.

If the smoke wavers or the paper flutters, you have a leak. Use weatherstripping to seal gaps around doors and windows. For larger gaps or cracks in the window frame, caulk is an excellent sealant.

Mail Slots and Pet Doors: These can be major sources of drafts. Consider installing a brush seal on mail slots or insulating your pet door with a cover when not in use.

Electrical Outlets: Gaps around electrical outlets and switch plates on exterior walls can be surprisingly drafty. You can easily install foam gaskets behind the plates to seal these leaks.

Insulating Key Areas: Insulation is critical for keeping heat inside your home. While a professional may be needed for major projects, there are smaller, DIY-friendly options.

Attic and Loft: A properly insulated attic can save you a lot of money on heating. Heat rises, so a significant amount of heat escapes through an uninsulated or poorly insulated attic. You can add more layers of insulation, like rolls of fiberglass batting or blown-in cellulose, to increase the R-value (a measure of thermal resistance).

Pipes and Water



Heaters: Insulating your hot water pipes and water heater can reduce heat loss, meaning your boiler doesn't have to work as hard to heat the water. You can buy pre-slit foam pipe insulation and simply wrap your pipes.

Optimizing Windows

Windows are a notorious source of heat loss. Even double-glazed windows can be improved upon.

Thick Curtains: Installing thermal or insulated curtains is a simple and effective solution. These curtains have a special lining that

acts as an extra layer of insulation, trapping heat inside and blocking cold air from the outside.

Window Film: You can apply a DIY window insulation film kit to your windows. This clear plastic film creates an insulating air pocket between the film and the glass, similar to double-glazing, and can significantly reduce heat loss.

Mindful Heating Habits

Simple changes in how you use your heating system can also make a big difference.

Radiator Reflectors: Place radiator reflectors (panels of foil-

backed foam) behind radiators on external walls. This reflects heat that would otherwise be lost into the wall back into the room.

Close Off Unused Rooms: Don't waste energy heating rooms you aren't using. Close doors to spare bedrooms, studies, or other unused spaces and turn off the radiator.

By implementing these practical and often low-cost measures, you can create a warmer, more comfortable home this winter while also seeing a noticeable reduction in your heating bills.

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THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF WINTER: A GUIDE TO PREVENTING MOULD, CARBON MONOXIDE, AND FIRE HAZARDS

Winter brings a desire for warmth and cosiness, but this season also ushers in a set of often-overlooked household dangers.

As we seal up our homes to keep the cold out, we can inadvertently create conditions ripe for mould growth, carbon monoxide poisoning, and house fires. Being aware of these risks and taking preventative steps can keep your family safe all season long.

Mould: The Silent, Spore-Producing Invader

Mould thrives in damp, humid environments, and while we often associate it with summer, winter can be a prime time for it to flourish. When cold air hits warm, moist indoor surfaces—like windows, walls, and pipes—it creates condensation.

This moisture is a perfect breeding ground for mould. Poor ventilation from closed windows exacerbates the problem, trapping humid air inside.

Prevention is key:

Improve Ventilation: Regularly open windows for a few minutes to air out rooms, even when it's cold. Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens.

Manage Humidity: Use a dehumidifier in basements or other damp areas. Maintain indoor humidity levels between 30% and 50%.

Check for Leaks: Inspect pipes, roofs, and window seals for leaks that can introduce

moisture.

Clean and Dry: Promptly clean up any spills or condensation and use mold-killing cleaners on surfaces where mold has been found.

Carbon Monoxide: The Invisible Killer

Known as “the invisible killer,” carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas produced by the incomplete burning of fuel. In winter, the risk increases as we use furnaces, fireplaces, gas stoves, and generators more frequently. Blocked chimneys or faulty appliances can cause CO to build up to dangerous levels



indoors, leading to flu-like symptoms that can quickly escalate to unconsciousness or death.

How to stay safe:

Install CO Detectors: Place CO detectors on every level of your home, especially near sleeping areas. Test them

monthly and replace them every five to seven years.

Maintain Appliances: Have a professional inspect and service your furnace, water heater, and other fuel-burning appliances annually.

Clear Vents: Ensure all vents and flues for

fireplaces, furnaces, and dryers are clear of snow and debris.

Never Use Appliances Improperly: Never use a gas oven for heating or a generator inside your home or garage.

Fires: The Most Common Winter Hazard

Winter is the peak

season for home fires, with cooking, heating, and holiday decorations being the primary culprits. Clogged chimneys, improperly maintained heating systems, and electrical issues from overloaded outlets are significant risks. A single spark or a flammable item placed too close to a heat source can lead to a devastating fire.

Fire safety tips:

Inspect Heating Systems: Have your fireplace and chimney professionally cleaned and inspected before the heating season begins. Ensure all heating sources are in good working order.

Give Space Heaters Space: Keep space heaters at least three feet away from anything flammable, including curtains, furniture, and blankets. Never leave a space heater unattended.

Mind the Kitchen: Stay in the kitchen while cooking and never leave a stovetop or oven unattended.

Check Smoke Alarms: Test all smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries at least once a year.

Don't Overload Outlets: Use surge protectors instead of overloading outlets with multiple plugs, and inspect cords for frays or damage.

The Best Ways to Prevent Mould and Moss Out of Doors

As the colder, wetter months approach, gardens become susceptible to the growth of mould and moss.

These growths not only make surfaces unsightly and slippery but can also cause damage over time. However, with some preparation and a bit of effort, you can protect your outdoor spaces.

Pre-Winter Cleaning

The single most effective step you can take is a thorough clean-up before winter begins. Using a pressure washer is the quickest way to remove existing dirt, moss, and algae from hard surfaces like patios, paving, and walls. For a deeper clean, consider using a specialized outdoor cleaner or a solution of water and white vinegar. For wooden surfaces like garden furniture or sheds, a stiff brush and a wood-specific cleaner are recommended. Ensure all surfaces are completely dry before moving to the next step.

Improve Drainage and Reduce Moisture

Mould and moss thrive in damp conditions.

Improving drainage is a key preventative measure. Check that your gutters and downpipes are clear of debris, and ensure that water is draining away from your patio and the base of your shed. Rake leaves and sweep away other organic matter from surfaces, as they hold moisture and provide a food source for mould.

Apply Protective Sealants or Treatments

Once surfaces are clean and dry, applying a protective sealant or treatment can prevent future growth. For paving and patios, a patio sealer creates a barrier that makes it harder for moss and weeds to take root. For wooden furniture and sheds, a wood preservative or stain will repel water and protect against fungal growth. Some treatments contain biocides that actively inhibit mould and moss growth. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.



Ensure Good Air Circulation and Sunlight Exposure

Mould and moss prefer shady, still

environments. Pruning back overhanging branches or shrubs that shade your patio, walls, or shed will allow more sunlight and air to reach the surfaces. This helps them dry out more quickly after rain. If possible, rearrange

garden furniture so it's not permanently in the same damp spot.

Regular Maintenance

Even with all these preventative steps, regular maintenance is crucial. A simple sweep of the patio and paths a few times over the winter will help to remove any new organic debris. Keep an eye out for any new moss or mould and treat it promptly with a spot cleaner to stop it from spreading.

Following these steps will not only keep your outdoor areas looking great through the winter but will also save you time and effort come springtime.



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