

Fellowship Programme 2025/26



The
fellowship

Building better
leaders for a
better tomorrow



fellowship.democracyandpeace.org

An opportunity to reimagine leadership

Since 1998, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement has provided a template for political progress in Northern Ireland.

Yet, governance arrangements in Northern Ireland continue to be fragile and the legacy of the Troubles remains divisive. Geo-political instability, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK's exit from the EU, and the cost-of-living crisis have simultaneously introduced additional complexities that require non-traditional skills for political, business, and civic leaders to navigate.

Leaders are being scrutinised more than ever as their character and competency are consistently called into question from various corners of society. According to research from

Jon Stokes and Sue Dopson at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, trust in leadership is at an all-time low and leaders must prove themselves to gain respect. The complex decision-making skills that leaders need to prevent higher levels of distrust, fear, and conflict, are more critical than ever.

Since 2021, the Fellowship Programme has provided the opportunity to reimagine complex political, business, and civic leadership in Northern Ireland through innovation and capacity building to address the challenges of today for the prosperity of tomorrow.

**Building better
leaders for a
better tomorrow**





The Fellowship Programme

The Fellowship Programme empowers political, business, and civic leaders to address Northern Ireland's unique historical, social, and economic challenges.

By fostering innovation, sustainable growth, and collaboration across sectors, we aim to build an inclusive, prosperous, and resilient society for generations to come.

Our vision is a society where capable, credible leaders who embody integrity, creativity, and effectiveness work together to build thriving communities rooted in a shared commitment to a better future.

Our mission is to develop a vibrant network of 1,000 political, civic, and business leaders across Northern Ireland over the next decade, instrumental in driving change and shaping the policy agenda for years to come.

The Fellowship Programme is led by the Centre for Democracy and Peace in collaboration with stakeholders, policymakers, and academic institutions, including the University of Oxford, with guidance from its advisory board.

Programme Outcomes



Lead with agility and purpose

Fellows will strengthen their adaptive leadership skills to inspire change, respond to uncertainty, and mobilise others across political, civic, and business sectors.



Navigate through complexity

Fellows will develop the ability to understand and respond to complex challenges using systems thinking and a strategic, whole-systems approach.



Communicate and collaborate across sectors

Fellows will build advanced communication and collaboration skills to influence stakeholders, build trust, and co-create solutions in cross-sector environments.



Deliver better outcomes for the public good

Fellows will enhance their governance, financial literacy, and ethical leadership to drive improved outcomes, steward resources responsibly, and build a culture of integrity.



Build enduring relationships and networks

Fellows will join a unique network of over ninety leaders from across political, business, and civic society sectors.

What to Expect

The Fellowship is designed to be an immersive yet manageable experience alongside professional and personal commitments.

Fellows will meet one full day per month from September to March for in-person workshops and seminars. In addition, the programme includes two residential sessions (one in Oxford and one in Dublin), providing space for deeper learning, reflection, and connection.

Between sessions, Fellows commit 2 to 4 hours per month to group projects, reflective practice, and optional readings.

There will also be an opportunity to engage in alumni events once a quarter.

CPD Certified



**The Fellowship Programme is CPD certified through
The CPD Certification Service.**



Programme Outline



24 leaders

political, business, public
sector and civic society



Duration: 7 months

September – March



Undertake a Design Thinking project



Symposium days

across Northern Ireland



Residentials

in Oxford and Dublin



Graduation

at Hillsborough
Castle



Time for self-reflection and self-development



Access to the Good Friday Agreement Online Course

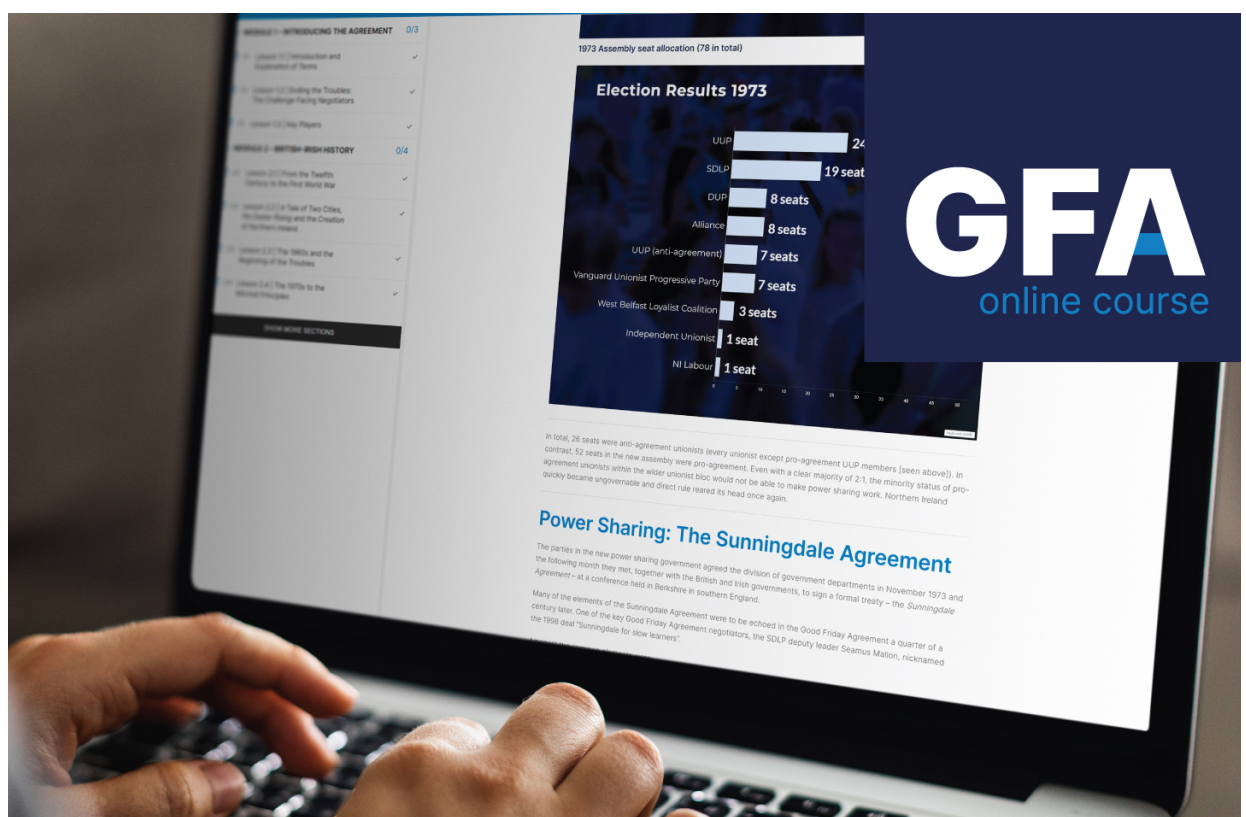


CPD certified

The Good Friday Agreement Online Course

Fellows will receive free access to CDP's Good Friday Agreement Online Course (RRP £199).

This interactive course, which is CPD certified (16 hours), introduces you to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement: its historical context; the negotiation process from which it emerged; its architecture and content; and its implementation.



The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

ONLINE COURSE

gfa.democracyandpeace.org

**SIGN UP
TODAY**



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The Fellowship Programme would not be possible without the generous support from our patrons and sponsors.

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Programme Schedule 2025 – 2026

Date	Location	Theme
Wed, 27 Aug	Online	Orientation
Wed, 3 Sept	Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Stormont	Programme Launch
9 – 12 Sept Residential	Worcester College, Oxford	Leadership and Systems Thinking <i>Group Projects</i>
Thurs, 9 Oct	Belfast	Governance, Finance and Policy Design <i>Group Projects</i>
Thurs, 13 Nov	Belfast	Powering Through Uncertainty: Building Resilience, Sustainability and Trust <i>Group Projects</i>
Thurs, 13 Nov	Belfast	Annual Alumni Reception
Thurs, 4 Dec	Belfast	Effective Communication Strategies <i>Group Projects</i>
20 – 22 Jan 2026 Residential	Dublin	From Local to Global: Leading through Complexity <i>Group Projects</i>
Thurs, 19 Feb 2026	FinTrU, Belfast	Entrepreneurship and Innovation <i>Presentations of Group Projects</i>
Tue, 10 Mar 2026	NI Assembly	Policy in Action
Thurs, 26 Mar 2026	Hillsborough Castle	Graduation
Thurs, 16 Apr 2026	Online	Reflection Session



The Oxford Experience

Fellows will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the history of Oxford, the oldest university in the English-speaking world.

Here in the 'city of dreaming spires,' Fellows will enter an oasis of learning, where the world's greatest leaders and thinkers have studied for over nine hundred years and where research breakthroughs continue to be made today.



The Dublin Experience

The Dublin residential offers Fellows a unique opportunity to deepen their learning in the heart of the island's largest city.

Through immersive sessions and conversations with colleagues from Trinity College Dublin and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Fellows will explore diplomacy and innovation. The experience fosters reflection and connection as the Fellowship journey nears its conclusion.

Design Thinking

As part of the Fellowship experience, Fellows will participate in a group project focused on addressing a strategic challenge facing Northern Ireland.

During the Oxford residential, Fellows will spend a day learning about Design Thinking from industry experts, where they will be divided into groups (based on a diversity of sectors) to identify a societal challenge and then seek to begin to address that challenge. This activity will have dedicated time during various programme sessions, and Fellows will also work in their groups outside of programme hours.

Design Thinking in action

Nuala Toman, Head of Policy, Communications, Information, and Advocacy at Disability Action, Class of 2023

The persistent cost-of-living emergency, political impasse, and public finance crisis were the backdrop to my group's work. Together as a group of cross-sectoral leaders, we considered how the current societal context would impact upon disabled people and disabled person's organisations. The process identified that while funding and investment were important, disabled people wanted credible employment opportunities and ways to develop entrepreneurship. From this the seeds of the Empower programme were planted. Empower is a £4.6mn programme funded by the UK government and will support two thousand disabled, autistic, and/or neurodivergent people to secure careers across all sectors and all levels of careers.



Cahir Hughes, Head of Electoral Commission NI, Class of 2025

Over the past number of years, we have seen a growing trend of elected representatives and campaigners being perceived as legitimate targets for intimidation, harassment, and abuse. More alarmingly, younger people are more likely to view bullying behaviour as acceptable when directed at a politician rather than a member of the public. Through the Design Thinking project, we explored what could be done to build a healthier democracy in Northern Ireland. This was a unique opportunity to work collaboratively with leaders from across the business, civic, and political sectors to examine how we could bring about cultural change in our society to tackle this threat. The impact was immediate. Shortly after we presented our findings, a significant number of MLAs came forward to share their experiences of abuse and intimidation. This provided me with a public platform to raise awareness of the effects of such behaviours. Looking ahead, the project's recommendations on education and improving political literacy will play an important role in promoting healthier political discourse.

Alumni Network

Entering its fifth year, the Fellowship Programme's alumni network comprises over ninety leaders from a wide range of sectors across Northern Ireland.

In the realm of politics, alumni include the Minister for the Economy, an MP, MLAs, and local councillors. The network also features several senior leaders from the public sector, business, and the community and voluntary sector.

Members of the 2025/26 cohort will join this extensive and unique network, gaining countless opportunities to build relationships and engage with Fellows from previous cohorts through alumni-only events and seminars.

What do our alumni say?



**Jason Bunting,
Parliamentary Assistant for
Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
Class of 2024**

The Fellowship Programme has had a profound impact on my personal ambitions. After attending the Oxford residential in September, I made the decision to apply for the Master of Public Policy. Six months later, I accepted the offer with the assistance of a full scholarship. This would not have been possible without the help of the Fellowship Programme, and I am profoundly grateful.



**Deborah Erskine,
MLA for Fermanagh
and South Tyrone
Class of 2024**

The Fellowship Programme gives political, business, and civic leaders from across Northern Ireland the opportunity to learn from each other and share experiences, which are away from the normal day to day interactions. It is a perfect opportunity to grow and develop leadership qualities, as well as challenging thought, ideas, and how we can collectively work for the betterment of Northern Ireland.



**Gina Savage,
Principle, Abbey Christian
Brothers' Grammar School
Class of 2023**

The Fellowship Programme was crucial to developing me as an individual and as a leader. There are many stand out moments that contributed to my growth and leadership development. However, it is the co-design session at the Oxford residential and the subsequent group project that opened my eyes to the potential not only within my diverse project group, but within myself and gave me the confidence to believe in myself, resulting in my decision to apply to lead my own school. By the time of graduation, I'd just been appointed as the first female principal of an all boy 900+ school.



**Dorinnia Carville,
Comptroller and Auditor
General for Northern Ireland
Class of 2024**

The Fellowship Programme offers the unique opportunity to build long lasting and important networks across political, civic, and business leaders in Northern Ireland, whilst also gaining insight and knowledge from many world leading experts.

The structure of the programme recognises the importance of leaders taking time away to focus on developing their leadership skills further and focusing on shared priorities for Northern Ireland.



Declan Barry,
CEO of ExportExplore
Class of 2025

Being part of the Fellowship Programme has been a really meaningful experience. It has given me time to step back, think differently, and learn from people with a wide range of views and backgrounds. Having finished the programme, I feel more hopeful, more focused, and very grateful to have been part of this journey.



Vincenta Leyden,
Service Development Manager
at the MND Association
Class of 2025

The CDP team, along with its supporters and sponsors, demonstrate unwavering dedication to the programme and its Fellows. I leave with a renewed sense of hope, a strong network of conscientious leaders, and a clearer path for my own growth and development, with a curiosity for what comes next.



Máirtín Mac Gabhann MBE,
Founder of Donate4Dáithí
Class of 2025

The Fellowship has been invaluable. It has reinforced my commitment to creating change and moving forward with confidence. It's not just about the learning; it's about the relationships and the shared experiences that will continue to support me in the work I do, both professionally and in the community.



Blaithnid Hughes,
Head of Service for
Anaesthetics, Theatres
& Critical Care Services,
at the Southern HSC Trust
Class of 2025

The wide range of experience from both the public and private sector across our cohort really challenged my thinking on how the Health sector gets its business done. The Fellowship has created pathways for me to explore how Health can benefit from working across all sectors.



Aidan Sloane,
Chief Operating Officer &
Executive Director of Belfast
Metropolitan College
Class of 2025

The Fellowship Programme has been a transformative experience. I have built lasting relationships with remarkable leaders across Northern Ireland. The diverse learning environment, guided by world-class experts, broadened my horizons and significantly supported my leadership development.



Jane McCooey,
Executive Director & Chief
of Staff at Morgan Stanley
Class of 2025

The Fellowship Programme is an extraordinary professional experience unlike any other. The ability to network, learn from, and ultimately befriend people from across multiple civic, political, and business communities in a setting that facilitates intentional, action-based, and positive discussion, is a truly unique forum that I will forever cherish.



Padraig Delargy,
MLA for Foyle
Class of 2023

The wide range of experience from both the public and private sector across our cohort really challenged my thinking on how the Health sector gets its business done. The Fellowship has created pathways for me to explore how Health can benefit from working across all sectors.

Based in New York, being the first "international" participant was a huge honour for me and the programme has encouraged me to maximise diaspora engagement to assist with the continued development of NI's peace and prosperity.

Fellowship Advisory Board



Darragh McCarthy

CEO & Founder
FinTrU (Chair)



Peter Cunningham

CEO
Camlin Group



Derek Hynes

Managing Director
NIE Networks



Melanie McMordie

Client Managing Director
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Christina Bates

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Manager
Ulster Carpets



Gordon Parkes

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Maylor**

Academic Advisor
Saïd Business School
University of Oxford



Zachary Hutchinson

Programme
Manager



Nicole Fintel

Programme
Coordinator &
Harvard's Pforzheimer
Public Service Fellow

How to Apply

The Fellowship Programme is designed for leaders from political, business, public sector and civic society backgrounds with a passion for Northern Ireland. To apply, please complete the application form at fellowship.democracyandpeace.org by **5 June 2025**. You will be asked to upload the following:

1. Up-to-date resumé or CV (maximum 2 pages A4 PDF)

2. Two essays in PDF format (up to 500 words each excluding footnotes)

- » As part of your Fellowship experience, you will participate in a group project focused on addressing a major strategic challenge facing Northern Ireland. In your view, what is the most significant strategic challenge Northern Ireland will face in the next decade, and why?
- » By outlining your immediate and long term career goals, how will the Fellowship Programme help you achieve these goals?

Fees

The Fellowship Programme is a heavily subsidised initiative, made possible through the support of our partners and sponsors. The fees reflect a commitment to making the programme accessible across all sectors while maintaining the highest quality experience for all participants.

Business sector Fellows: £3,000

Public sector, NGOs, and political Fellows: £1,500

The programme fee includes:

- » Accommodation during the residencies in Oxford and Dublin.
- » Programme materials and resources.
- » Full access to the Good Friday Agreement Online Course.

Please note:

Fellows are responsible for covering the cost of their travel to and from Oxford and Dublin.

Financial Support

We are committed to ensuring the Fellowship Programme is accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstances. A range of financial support options are available, including:

Full scholarship (including fees and travel costs)

Fees scholarship (full or partial)

For more information and to discuss available support, please contact fellowship@democracyandpeace.org.

Contact Us



fellowship.democracyandpeace.org



fellowship@democracyandpeace.org



Centre for Democracy and Peace



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