



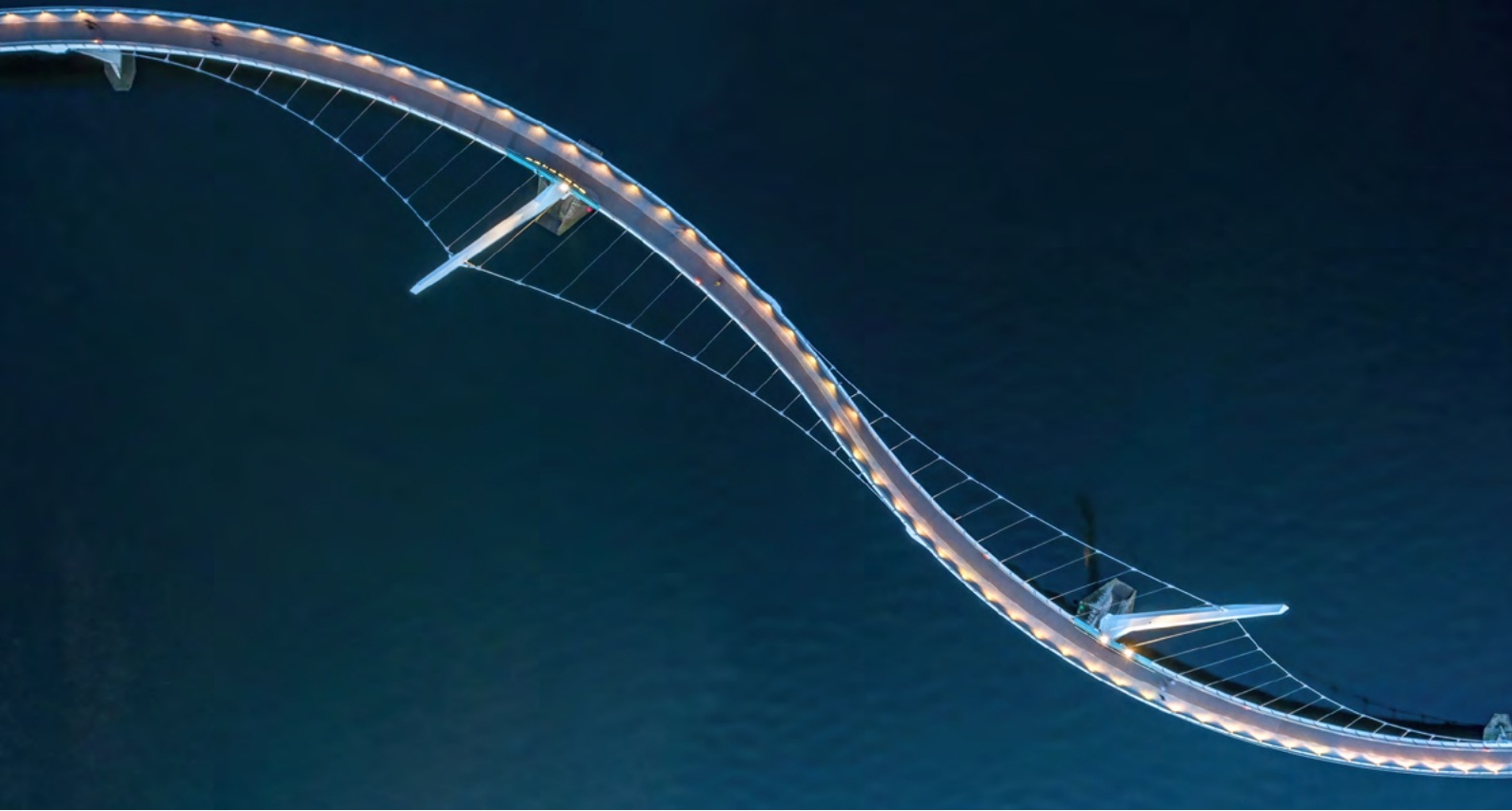
The  
**fellowship**

**Building** better  
leaders for a  
better tomorrow

**Fellowship  
Programme  
2026/27**



[fellowship.democracyandpeace.org](https://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 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 leadership in Northern Ireland through innovation and capacity building to address the challenges of today for the prosperity of tomorrow.

# The Fellowship Programme

The Fellowship Programme empowers political, business, public sector, 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, business, public sector, and civic 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 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 one hundred and twenty leaders from across politics, business, the public sector, and civic society.



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

## 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 four to eight hours per month to group projects, reflective practice, and optional readings. There will also be an opportunity to engage in online alumni events once a month and in-person events once a quarter.



# Programme outline



**28 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**

**GFA**  
online course

**Access**  
to the Good Friday  
Agreement Online Course

**CPD  
CERTIFIED**  
The CPD Certification  
Service

**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.



**GFA**  
online course

[gfa.democracyandpeace.org](http://gfa.democracyandpeace.org)

# Supported by

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

## Principal funder



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
RECONCILIATION FUND

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# Programme schedule

## 2026 – 2027

Date	Location	Theme
Tues 25 Aug, 2026	Online	Orientation
Tues 8 Sept, 2026	Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Stormont	Programme launch
Thurs 17 Sept, 2026	Belfast	Session 1
22 – 25 Sept, 2026 Residential	Harris Manchester College, Oxford	Leadership and systems thinking <i>Group projects</i>
Thurs 15 Oct, 2026	Belfast	Session 2 <i>Group projects</i>
Thurs 19 Nov, 2026	Belfast	Session 3 <i>Group projects</i> Followed by the annual alumni reception
Thurs 10 Dec, 2026	Belfast	Session 4
19 – 21 Jan, 2027 Residential	Dublin	From local to global: Leading through complexity <i>Group projects</i>
Thurs 18 Feb, 2027	FinTrU, Belfast	Presentation of group projects
Thurs 11 March, 2027	Belfast	Session 5
Thurs 1 April, 2027	Hillsborough Castle	Graduation
Thurs 8 April, 2027	Online	Post-graduation reflection



## 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.

To give you an idea of what a typical day at the Oxford residential looks like, have a look at last year's Wednesday itinerary. →

Wednesday, 10 September

### Breakfast

**Systems Thinking and Major Projects**  
Professor Harvey Maylor, Saïd Business School,  
University of Oxford

### Tea/Coffee

**Reframing leadership in the context of wicked problems**  
Joanne Murphy, Professor of Inclusive Leadership,  
University of Birmingham

### Lunch

**Principles of Public Life**  
Daniel Greenberg CB  
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Guided walking tour of Oxford and punting**

Dinner



## The Dublin experience

**Through immersive sessions and conversations with colleagues from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the British Embassy, Fellows will explore diplomacy and innovation.**

As the Fellowship journey nears its conclusion, Fellows will engage with North–South and East–West relationships while taking time to reflect on their experience and deepen the connections they have built.

To give you an idea of what the Dublin residential will entail, have a look at part of last year's itinerary. →

Tuesday, 20 January
<b>Meet in the Lobby</b>
Transfer to IMMA, Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin 8
<b>Irish Museum of Modern Art</b> <i>Presentations by artist Amanda Dunsmore and Johanne Mullan, Curator of Collections at IMMA</i>
Transfer to the British Ambassador's Residence, Glencairn House
Reception hosted by the British Ambassador to Ireland <i>HE Kara Owen</i>
Wednesday, 21 January
Walk to University of Notre Dame, O'Connell House, 58 Merrion Square, Dublin
<b>Opening Remarks</b> <i>Notre Dame, Dublin</i>
<b>Presentation on Shared Island</b> <i>Fionnuala Callanan, Principal Officer, Shared Island Unit, Department of Taoiseach</i>
<b>Tea/Coffee</b>
Briefing on 'Sharing the Island: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities Report Overview' (April 2025) and 'Economic trends in Ireland and Northern Ireland' (December 2025) <i>Dr Adele Bergin, Economic and Social Research Institute</i>

# 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 begin to address that challenge.

## 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 people'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

**Now entering its sixth year, the Fellowship Programme's alumni network comprises over one hundred and twenty 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 2026/27 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?



**Gareth Wilson**  
MLA for Newry and Armagh  
Class of 2026

The CDP Fellowship Programme was a great opportunity to be immersed in problem solving methods and networking. The 2026 cohort was an excellent mix of public, political, civic and private sector individuals who each brought and shared their own unique perspectives. Having the space to debate and discuss important and dynamic issues and work collectively on a chosen challenge provided a great foundation for further personal development.



**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.



**Pádraig Delargy**  
MLA for Foyle  
Class of 2023

One of the things I find particularly beneficial is being able to work with people who have vast amounts of experience and people who are quite new to their field. So, you get both breadth and diversity.



**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.



**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.



**Rhyannon Blythe**  
**Director (Legal) at the**  
**Northern Ireland Human**  
**Rights Commission**  
**Class of 2026**

The Fellowship Programme has been a unique opportunity to learn from leaders across NI. I have been inspired by the energy and commitment of Fellows to making NI a better place. It has also allowed time for personal and professional reflection and a renewed focus on my own next steps in leadership. The increasing strength of the alumni network will allow the relationships and networks created this year to continue to influence my development and I am proud to be part of it.



**Máirtín Mac Gabhann MBE**  
**Founder of Donate4Dáithí**  
**Class of 2025**

I found myself stepping outside of my comfort zone when we tackled topics like green thinking, energy, sustainability, and innovation. But I'm delighted to be learning from my fellow Fellows and the amazing team at the Centre for Democracy and Peace... It's all about keeping the spirit of possibility at the heart of what we do as we challenge ourselves to grow and innovate.



**Blaithníd 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.



**Anna McClung**  
**Deputy Principal at the**  
**Department of Justice**  
**Class of 2026**

For me, the Fellowship goes beyond what you could even begin to imagine. It embeds a culture of curiosity in you, and it challenges your thinking in a way that stretches your capabilities further than you expect. The content, the connection, and the clarity it brought me has been life-changing. I've come away from it feeling much more fulfilled, with a clearer sense of myself, how I want to move forward and understanding what my part to play is. The impact this will have in Northern Ireland as it evolves beyond five years will be invaluable.



**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. 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.



**Gina Savage**  
Principal, 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.



**Kyle McMullan**  
Meter Reading Manager  
and member of the Senior  
Management Team at NIE  
Networks, Class of 2026

The Fellowship Programme brings leaders from across Northern Ireland to learn from one another and share experiences away from normal day-to-day interactions. It is a unique opportunity to pause, grow, and develop as a leader and more importantly, as a person. I had a fantastic experience, and it has challenged my thinking and perceptions of how I work and how we can all work together to create a better Northern Ireland. I was supported by an amazing cohort with whom I learnt so much from and we have remained in close contact. The learning was both excellent and varied, with strong support throughout from fantastic facilitators and business partners.



**Alfred Abolarin**  
Manager, Strategic  
Partnerships, at the Northern  
Ireland Housing Executive,  
Class of 2023

A pivotal experience and space for rethinking, learning and transformative exchanges. It has re-ignited my passion and commitment to do better and to be better, as well as enhanced my skills and capacity. I am better equipped to continue to contribute more effectively to a peaceful, progressive and prosperous Northern Ireland.



**Claire McBride**  
Communications and Social  
Value Manager Fujitsu (NI)  
Class of 2026

My confidence has transformed over the course of the Fellowship. While imposter syndrome still lingers, it no longer shapes my decisions or holds me back. I now lead with greater purpose and intention in all aspects of my work. The experience has also ignited a strong sense of civic duty that I hadn't previously recognised. I've undergone a profound shift in mindset, one that has changed how I see myself and how I lead. I now fully recognise myself as a leader and have adapted my behaviours in ways that will enable me to deliver better outcomes, both professionally and personally.



**Jason Bunting**  
Advocacy Manager at the  
Fairness Foundation  
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.



**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.

# Fellowship advisory board



**Darragh McCarthy**

CEO & Founder  
FinTrU (Chair)



**Peter Cunningham**

CEO  
Camlin Group



**Helen Sullivan**

Chief People and Culture  
Officer, NIE Networks



**Nick Coburn**

Managing Director  
Ulster Carpets



**Dalreen Buchanan**

Business Support  
Manager  
Ulster Carpets



**Melanie McMordie**

Client Managing Director  
Fujitsu NI

# Fellowship team



**Eva Grosman**

Programme  
Director



**Zachary Hutchinson**

Programme  
Manager



**Christina Bates**

Treasurer  
CDP Trustee



**Professor Harvey  
Maylor**

Academic Advisor  
Saïd Business School  
University of Oxford

# How to apply

The Fellowship Programme is designed for leaders from political, business, public sector, and civic society backgrounds with a passion for and commitment to Northern Ireland. To apply, please complete the application form at [fellowship.democracyandpeace.org](https://fellowship.democracyandpeace.org) by **Thursday 4 June 2026**. You will be asked to upload the following:

- 1. Up-to-date resumé or CV (maximum 2 pages A4 PDF)**
- 2. Three essays in PDF format (up to 250 words each excluding footnotes)**

- » Using a specific example from your own experience, what does courageous leadership mean to you in the context of Northern Ireland today?
- » As part of your Fellowship experience, you will participate in a group project focused on addressing a 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 and meals during the residentials 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. For more information about possible payment plans, please contact [fellowship@democracyandpeace.org](mailto:fellowship@democracyandpeace.org).

## Financial support

We are committed to ensuring the Fellowship Programme is accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstances. Financial support options include:

**Fees scholarship (full)**  
**Fees scholarship (partial)**

For more information and to discuss other available support, please contact [fellowship@democracyandpeace.org](mailto:fellowship@democracyandpeace.org).

## Contact us



[fellowship.democracyandpeace.org](https://fellowship.democracyandpeace.org)



Centre for Democracy and Peace



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[fellowship\\_ni](https://www.instagram.com/fellowship_ni)

