

Northern Ireland Secretary signals plans to drive forward integration for a future-proofed NI

- Secretary of State for Northern Ireland opens Wilton Park conference on “a more confident and inclusive Northern Ireland”.
- Builds on the NIO’s work to build a future of prosperity, integration and opportunity for the young people of Northern Ireland,
- Secretary of State speaks about an upcoming programme from the UK Government to support greater integration through education.

Today (Wednesday 22 June), Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP will commit to stepping up his support for greater integration through education in Northern Ireland.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State will indicate that the UK Government is preparing a programme to support greater integration through education.

He will say:

“It is clear there is a demand for integrated education which is not being met by the current provision of education in NI.

“That is why I have been considering my options as Secretary of State, and can confirm today that the UK government will shortly set out a programme to support greater integration through education in Northern Ireland.

“This programme will help promote the benefits of integrated education to parents, teachers and pupils, and support schools considering the transformation process.

“The programme will reflect this Government’s belief that parents should have a genuine choice of schools, so that families can choose the right school for their children.”

Attendees at the conference will discuss how integrated education is a key driver of opportunity and empowerment for young people, an essential part of the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, and a key tenet of the Government’s commitment to Levelling Up.

The conference, titled ‘A More Confident and Inclusive Northern Ireland’ is the first of its kind, delivered jointly by the Northern Ireland Office and Wilton Park. It will be attended by representatives of key sectors from the UK, Ireland and America who are the architects of policies that shape Northern Ireland and its future.

Discussion will centre on realising Northern Ireland’s potential and on questioning what needs to change in Northern Ireland over the coming years,

with a particular focus on the views of the next generation, their involvement in the peace building process, and the progress that can be made to empower young people through education and the provision of high-skilled jobs.

The Secretary of State will also reiterate the UK Government's commitment to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, as it approaches its 25th anniversary. He will say:

"A quarter century on from that Agreement, the Northern Ireland of today is a symbol to the world of what can be achieved through cooperation and reconciliation. Yet all too often, Northern Ireland's remarkable journey is not shared widely or loudly enough with the rest of the world.

"So as we approach that landmark anniversary, now presents an opportunity for us to change that. To show the world how far Northern Ireland has come since 1998.

"Now must be our moment to sharpen our focus on that vision, to test ideas and embrace new thinking, be it in education, skills, community programmes and projects, or social innovation."

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Wilton Park was established as part of an initiative inspired by Winston Churchill to help re-establish peace and democracy in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. Discussions on how to promote peace, reconciliation and understanding have been a core mandate of Wilton Park ever since.
- The conference will be operating under Chatham House rules.
- Find our more about the conference at:
<https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/event/a-more-confident-and-inclusive-north-ern-ireland/>