

## **FINAL Release: Immediate Access Learning**

Press Release issued on behalf of Belfast Charitable Society, the Halifax Foundation, UCIT, Ulster University and The National Lottery Community Fund

Issued Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2020

### **Funders pull together to support North Belfast students**

We are currently in unprecedented times, which often leads to unprecedented responses. In the last few days, several funders have come together in a unique partnership to release at least £50,000 of funds to local post primary schools in North Belfast in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Led by Belfast Charitable Society, funding will also be provided from the Halifax Foundation, UCIT, the Ulster University (Santander Universities Fund) and The National Lottery Community Fund. This funding will quickly and directly support the immediate needs of over 225 students across five secondary schools.

Schools have been frantically putting in place systems to facilitate home learning. This is already stressful and difficult but learning is further hampered for those who don't have computers or laptops at home. This unique funding opportunity will allow for the purchase of hundreds of computers and other resources for those students who don't have access to online learning.

This funding is part of a project entitled '**Immediate Access Learning**', as Paula Reynolds, CEO of Belfast Charitable Society explains *"As a long-standing charity, we continue to work hard to address disadvantage in Belfast. The current situation is unprecedented, and on a number of levels further accentuates issues in north Belfast. It came to our attention last week that a high proportion of students within post primary schools were currently without access to online learning. This funding will allow for 225 students to access a fully refurbished laptop, in order for them to meet all of the educational requirements needed, and also give the schools some support to resource its wider body of students"*.

Five schools have been selected to receive this support. They are the Belfast Model School for Girls, Belfast Boys Model School, Mercy College, Hazelwood Integrated College and Blessed Trinity College, all of which have a high percentage of students entitled to Free School Meals. The students who will receive the laptops will benefit quickly and directly, and come from diverse backgrounds and across all of North Belfast.

The project also provides long term benefits too, as these same students will become more comfortable about using IT at home, something that will be extremely useful for future jobs and education as remote working becomes the new norm. In addition, these schools will continue to act as a conduit to re-use this equipment for the next few years to come, allowing for future students to benefit also.

Speaking on behalf of the schools in receipt of this support, Paula Stuart from the Belfast Model School for Girls said *"We are delighted and relieved to be able to offer this support to our students who need it most, in this current crisis. We are aware of so many students from the area currently not able to access online learning, because they don't have access to a computer at home. Short term, this will be a huge help in preventing the attainment gap widening further for those from deprived areas. Longer term, the benefit of these students being more confident with technology will*

*also boost their further education and career opportunities in the future. On behalf of all the schools and students, I'd like to thank Belfast Charitable Society, the Halifax Foundation, UCIT, Ulster University and The National Lottery Community Fund for this much needed funding".*

The first batch of laptops will arrive within the next couple of days, allowing for identified students to access them by the end of the week.

*"We are extremely thankful to the other funders for their support and agility in responding to this need so quickly. These laptops will be a lifeline for students, allowing them to access their school community and learning resources, however we are acutely aware that the need will likely be greater still. If other funders or organisations would like to join this project, we would love to hear from you."* Paula Reynolds, CEO of Belfast Charitable Society.

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**Media Spokespersons:** Paula Reynolds, Chief Executive of Belfast Charitable Society. To arrange interview, please contact 07788146251.

## **Notes to Editor**

### **Belfast Charitable Society**

The Society was founded in 1752 to help those in poverty; it built a Poor House and first infirmary in Belfast. 265 years later it still works to tackle disadvantage by encouraging philanthropy, through direct intervention and collaborative working for the benefit of the community. It promotes and protects its vast heritage and provides high quality care for older people. [www.belfastcharitablesociety.com](http://www.belfastcharitablesociety.com)

### **UCIT**

Established in 2001, UCIT is a registered charity which provides loan support to a broad range of third sector organisations including sports clubs, community associations, charities, green energy, enterprise agencies, faith-based organisations, social housing schemes and the arts.

UCIT has supported in excess of 600 organisations with loan commitments totalling over £90 million. In many (perhaps most) instances projects would not have been possible without the flexible, but professional approach adopted by the Trust in its lending. All profits generated by UCIT are retained and recycled for the benefit of its clients.

UCIT provides affordable, flexible, loan support ranging from £1,000 to £500,000 plus. It can also provide small unsecured loans through the Building Better Futures Loan Fund which has been developed in conjunction with Belfast Charitable Society & Building Change Trust.

UCIT also manages the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund on behalf of Invest Northern Ireland. [www.ucitltd.com](http://www.ucitltd.com) / [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIT) / Twitter: @UCIT\_Ltd

### **About the Halifax Foundation**

The Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland is one of four independent grant-making trusts, covering England & Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. They are shareholders in Lloyds Banking Group and together receive 0.5% of the Group's pre-tax profits. The Foundation is independent of the Group. Its policies are determined by a Board of Trustees.

The Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland is committed to supporting underfunded, grassroots charities that enable people, especially disabled and disadvantaged people, to play a fuller role in society.

### **About University of Ulster**

As Northern Ireland's civic university, Ulster University is grounded in the heart of the community and strives to make a lasting contribution to society as a whole. Renowned for its world-class teaching, Ulster aims to transform lives, stretch minds and develop the skills required by a growing economy. The outcomes of our research have global significance with local relevance, and contribute to the social, economic and cultural betterment of our region.

Ulster University is proudly supporting this project with financial support from Santander Universities.

### **About The National Lottery Community Fund**

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK – we're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, we have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people. We are passionate about funding great ideas that matter to communities and make a difference to people's lives. At the heart of everything we do is the belief that when people are in the lead, communities thrive. Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, our funding is open to everyone. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.