

BRING I.T. ON

IT's exciting
IT's growing
IT's well paid
IT's open to you

Your future in IT awaits





How Bring IT On can help you

Bring IT On is a programme funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and delivered throughout Northern Ireland on their behalf by Belfast Metropolitan College. We promote pathways into IT careers to future IT professionals, from primary school pupils through to people considering a career change.

We seek to showcase the opportunities and benefits of careers in IT and raise awareness on the great diversity of options in this exciting, ever changing sector.

We run events, speak at schools, attend job fairs and work with employers, careers and IT teachers, parents and carers to raise awareness of the opportunities available in IT. We build links between schools and IT employers through our Bring IT On Ambassadors programme, which gives teachers and pupils access to industry expertise and mentoring.

If you're a student, potential career changer, parent or IT professional and would like to get further information about Bring IT On, please get in touch through our social media channels or email: bringiton@belfastmet.ac.uk

“STEM related subjects will be in most demand reflecting the anticipated growth in the ICT, professional services and advanced manufacturing sectors. STEM qualifications will also be demanded by a wider range of sectors across the economy.”

– Skills in Demand 2019-2028, DfE.



Contents

How Bring IT On can help you	1
Bring IT On in Numbers	2
IT's for you	3
Why IT?	4
Different routes into IT	5
Understanding IT pathways	6
Apprenticeships	7
Foundation degrees	8
IT at university	10
Changing careers & returning to work	12
Assured skills	13
STEM summer camps	14
Bring IT On ambassadors	16

Bring IT On in numbers

Our 2019/20 Bring IT On programme blended real-world events and digital media to help us reach as many people as possible with information about the benefits of IT careers.



10,688
pupils engaged
with Bring IT On



2.8 million
people reached
via digital media



56%
of our digital
media followers
are female



80%
increase in social
media followers



155
school
presentations
delivered



42,410
people attended
our talks and
events



31
events hosted
or attended

IT's for you



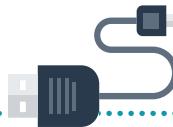
Careers in IT come with great salaries, exciting opportunities and growing demand. All of that — and much more — is available to you. Whatever stage you're at, there are pathways for you to build your career in IT.

Employers in Northern Ireland and further afield are looking for people with the IT skills they need. There is a skills gap: many high-growth businesses in industries such as cyber security, software development and artificial intelligence (AI) struggle to find enough people with relevant skills to fill all the jobs they would like to create.

On the following pages you'll find advice and information on how you can develop skills that are in demand, put yourself in a great position to secure one of those jobs and start your IT career.



Why IT?



It's all very well us urging you to consider a career in IT... but what's in it for you? Well, quite a lot actually.

You'll get paid more

The median tech salary in Northern Ireland is £40,000. A graduate software developer can expect a starting salary from £24,000–£32,000. That compares to an average salary of £26,232 across all jobs in Northern Ireland.

Great jobs on your doorstep

There are lots of job opportunities in IT in Northern Ireland, but IT skills will also open doors for you to travel and work around the world. IT skills will allow you to work across different industries and take many different career paths.

A diverse range of opportunities are open to you across different specialisms

More than 100 leading tech companies operate in NI, including Allstate, PwC, Neueda, Microsoft, First Derivatives, Kainos, Novosco, Fujitsu, SAP, Broadsoft, Xilinx, Rapid7 and Whitehat Security.

Build transferable skills

IT jobs often need you to be creative and analytical. The skills you build will transfer easily to any career or business you want to follow in the future.

Relaxed and Informal working environment

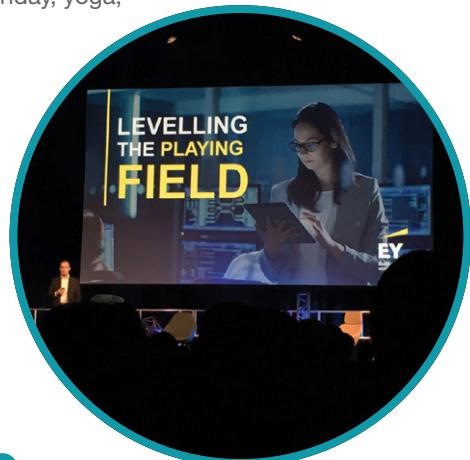
The IT sector is inclusive, diverse and team-orientated. Around 81% of IT professionals have flexible working arrangements. With IT skills in such high demand, employers offer good conditions to help keep their team happy and motivated. Perks can include free tea, coffee, snacks and lunches, free beer Friday, yoga, social gatherings and well-being initiatives.

Thrive personally

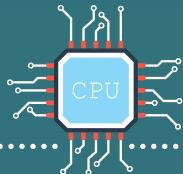
IT projects involve working in a team of enthusiastic and like-minded people. You'll help each other to develop and fulfil your potential. This makes for a rewarding career.

IT for social good

You'll get many different opportunities to use your IT skills for social good. Big data is being used to help fight climate change and predict the spread of diseases such as COVID-19.



Different routes into IT



There is no ‘right’ way into the IT sector. Whether you leave school after your GCSEs or follow an academic path all the way through to a master’s degree, you can build a successful career in IT.

You could get an apprenticeship, join an employer’s school leavers scheme or change your career path completely through an Assured Skills Academy. It’s just about finding the path that’s best for you.



Here are some of the pathways you can follow:

Post GCSE

- A Levels - any subjects but Maths is a preferred subject
- BTEC Diploma (Equivalent to 2 A Levels)*
- BTEC Extended Diploma (Equivalent to 3 A Levels)*
- OCR Level 2 Diploma in IT

* In a range of subjects including Broad based IT, Games Development, Creative Media Production, Software Development, Networking and IT Infrastructure and Cyber Security.

Post A levels and other Level 3 Qualifications

- Full-time Degree in IT related subject
- Part-time Degree course in IT related subject
- Foundation Degree / HND in IT related subject
- Higher level Apprenticeship in IT subject
- Level 3 Apprenticeship
- Employer sponsored Degrees and employment programmes

Post Degree

- Professional qualifications at an FE college
- Graduate Traineeship
- Graduate employment from IT non-IT related Degrees
- Assured Skills Academy
- Masters Degree in an IT related subject
- Masters conversion course



Understanding IT pathways



One of the easiest ways to put yourself in contention for IT jobs is to get some relevant qualifications. But with so many different types of qualifications available, it can be confusing trying to work out what's best for you. Let's look at some of the pathways you can follow.

After your GCSEs



A-levels are still the best-known pathway towards an IT career after your GCSEs, but they are by no means the only route. There are lots of qualifications you can choose, including:

A-levels

STEM subjects are sometimes encouraged, depending on what you want to do next in IT. However A-levels in any subject will help you take the next step.

BTEC Diploma

You can take a BTEC Diploma (equivalent to two A-levels) in a range of subjects, including IT, games development, creative media production, software development, networking and IT infrastructure and cyber security.

BTEC Extended Diploma

You have the same options as the above, but the extended diploma is equivalent to three A-levels.

OCR Level 2 Diploma in IT

Gives a solid foundation in a range of IT skills and an understanding of the core skills needed to progress to higher level qualifications.

After your A-levels and other Level 3 qualifications

After completing your A-levels or another Level 3 qualification, your next step might involve studying for a higher level qualification or combining your IT studies with work. Your options include:

- **Level 3 or Level 5 apprenticeship in an IT-related subject**
- **Foundation degree or Higher National Diploma in an IT-related subject**
- **Full-time degree in an IT-related subject**
- **Part-time degree in an IT-related subject**
- **Employer sponsored degree or employment programme**

We'll look at those options in more detail on the following pages.



Apprenticeships



Level 3 and Level 5 IT apprenticeships are available if you're aged 18 or over and employed by a participating company. An apprenticeship will give you the opportunity to work towards a recognised IT qualification, while also earning and building your practical experience in a real job.

Some examples of apprenticeships you could take are:

- **Cyber Security and Networking Infrastructure**
- **Software Development**
- **Computing Infrastructure**
- **Cloud and Application Development**
- **Computing**



Check with employers and Further Education Colleges to see which apprenticeships are currently available.



Foundation Degrees



If you're interested in getting both the qualifications and experience you need to get started in the IT sector, a foundation degree is a great option.

Foundation degrees are delivered by the Open University and the six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland:

- **Belfast Metropolitan College**
- **Northern Regional College**
- **North West Regional College**
- **South Eastern Regional College**
- **Southern Regional College**
- **South West College**

Depending on the specific course you choose, you'll spend around a year-and-a-half building the knowledge and practical skills you need to work in IT. You'll then do work experience with an IT company for the final semester of your two-year course.

A foundation degree is a level 5 qualification, which puts it just below an Honours degree. The qualification will give you the skills you need to pursue a career in IT or study for a degree at university.





Strong foundations for an IT career



Michael Sage is a talent and development officer for software business Allsop in Belfast. He took a foundation degree in software engineering at Belfast Met.

“

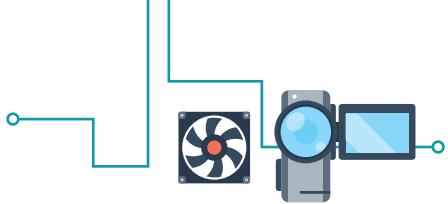
Initially, when I was studying the foundation degree, my intention was to do a top-up course full-time to get my bachelor's degree. It was only by attending a Bring IT On talk that I realised the idea of staying on to work after my placement semester sounded really appealing. That led to me taking the placement offered by Allsop a few months later.

“After working part-time before my placement even started (bit eager!) and completing my placement, I then got a full-time contract with the company. I've gone on to speak at the NI Dev Conference and was shortlisted for Young IT Professional of Year at the BCS NI awards. Alongside my job, I currently study part-time in Ulster University Jordanstown and the company's flexibility allows me to do that.

“The sky's the limit when it comes to the tech sector. There are so many fantastic opportunities in Belfast and in Northern Ireland as a whole. Going to Belfast Met and getting involved with Bring IT On enabled me to do so many things before I would have even finished a full-time degree!

“I hold Belfast Met in high regard for teaching me in such a hands-on practical way and being able to show me that.”

IT at university



Studying a relevant subject at university is a well established way of building your IT knowledge before pursuing a career in the sector.

In Northern Ireland, Queen's University Belfast offers a variety of technology degrees, including in computer science, software and electronic systems engineering and software development. Alternatively you can study computer science, interactive computing, games design, business information technology, artificial intelligence and other IT courses at Ulster University.

There are other IT-related courses available at universities in England, Wales and Scotland that you might want to consider.

Perhaps you want to further increase your knowledge of a specialism or get an IT qualification after completing an undergraduate degree in a different subject. In those cases, there are a number of postgraduate options available at local universities. For example, Queen's University's MSc (Master of Science) in Software Development or Ulster University's MSc in Professional Software Development is open to graduates of non-computing disciplines.

Employer sponsored degrees and employment programmes

Some IT employers in Northern Ireland offer school leaver programmes, including:



Check each organisation's website for the latest information on their programmes, as well as details of how and when to apply.





Best of both worlds

Victoria Porter is part of PwC's degree apprenticeship programme. Her journey towards a career in IT started at Bring IT ON's Belfast IT Girls summer camp.

“I had already applied to study software engineering at Queen’s when the degree apprenticeship programme was launched. To come out of university with no student debt, four years’ experience with a prestigious company, and a degree in a subject I’m passionate about was an offer that I couldn’t refuse.

“I was most attracted to the arrangement where we only work over the summer and as a result we have the full student experience during term time. The difference between work and school or university is colossal, so I feel that we as apprentices will stand out in comparison to a student who has no work experience at the end of their degree.

“Once a month we have one-hour engagement sessions with employees from various teams and levels in PwC. These are really useful because, if we ever have a query with our projects in uni, we have a wide network of people we could contact for help. “I’m currently working on an internal project aimed at developing a website to display bot simulations and documents for teams giving presentations. AI is the exact area I want to pursue.

“There are a number of programmes aimed at getting young females involved in technology and I would highly recommend availing of these. Technology is the foundation on which the majority of careers are built and being a technology-enabled individual is an extremely employable and valuable trait in this day and age.

“My week at Belfast IT Girls allowed me to develop my problem-solving and creativity skills which definitely aided me in my decision to follow a technology career path.”

Changing careers & returning to work

A fresh start in IT

Careers in IT are open to everyone. Even if you've spent years working in another industry or out of the workplace entirely, there are opportunities for you. Here are some tips on maximising those opportunities.

Build industry contacts

See what is happening on platforms like Meetup and Eventbrite so you can start to network with Northern Ireland's tech community. Talk to those working in the industry and get insight into what opportunities might be open to you.

Start upskilling

Online courses, such as those provided by Coursera and the Open University's free Open Learn platform, offer great opportunities to start building the skills you'll need for your IT career. Explore accredited courses at your local college or university, too.

Use transferable skills

Your experience in a totally unrelated sector might have equipped you with transferable skills that will be useful in your new career. Teamwork, problem solving and communication skills are among those that are important to IT employers.

Return to work schemes

Some larger employers offer schemes aimed at people returning to work after a career break. These are worth investigating, particularly if you've got relevant skills and experience from a previous role.

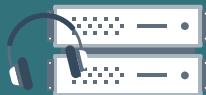
Apprenticeships, masters degrees, conversion courses and more

The options discussed on other pages are not only available to school leavers and university graduates.

Apprenticeships, masters degrees and conversion courses are all great options for sparking a career change. Or you might consider the Assured Skills training programme featured on the next page.



Assured Skills Academy?



If you're unemployed, underemployed or want to change careers, the Department for the Economy's Assured Skills training programme offers pre-employment training to get the skills you need for the job you want.

You'll get a weekly training allowance, childcare and travel allowance, and 8-12 weeks training with a company that is recruiting. At the end of the training, you'll be offered a job interview with the company.

Employers involved in the programme are exciting, high-growth companies looking for people with drive, a positive attitude and determination to succeed.

The Assured Skills programme has proven successful for people wanting to start careers in IT. Previous graduates have secured full-time jobs in data analytics, software development, software testing, cyber security, games development and other IT roles. Over 1200 degree graduates have gained employment in the IT sector in NI over the last 7 years through this programme.

To look at current opportunities and apply for the Assured Skills programme, visit: nidirect.gov.uk/assured-skills



STEM Summer Camps



Get a headstart in your IT career

Boost your chances of building a career in IT or a host of other sectors by getting involved in one of the many STEM Summer Camps held across Northern Ireland. STEM summer camps give young people the opportunity to develop new skills and build on existing skills that will be valuable in their education and future careers. It also gives a chance to meet new and like-minded people.

Science, technology, engineering and maths knowledge is vital for coders, game developers and robotics engineers. It is also at the core of healthcare, manufacturing, food production and other industries.

There is a huge demand for people with STEM skills to fill jobs in Northern Ireland, including in the IT sector. Even jobs that don't immediately appear to fall into STEM fields will require STEM knowledge, so take the opportunity to build the skills you will need in the future.

Check bringitonni.co.uk for information on summer camps and other events you can attend.





Belfast IT Girls

Women should feel welcome and included in the technology sector. But the IT industry recognises that women remain underrepresented in IT and other STEM fields. We're working to change that through summer camps like Belfast IT Girls.

This week-long event sees more than 30 girls aged 15 to 18 gather at Belfast Met to develop their IT skills. This includes workshops on games development, cyber security and creating digital content. Girls who have attended previous summer camps have been able to chat to successful women working in the tech industry for organisations such as Hays, Liberty IT, EY, Options, PwC and the NI Civil Service.

“Some of the things I learnt at Belfast IT Girls underpin the real-life work that I do on a regular basis. The programme gave me an insight into various careers in IT. I was introduced to software that is used by the company I work for, so having that headstart was useful. I enjoyed the game and web development portion of the programme the most and this helped me decide that I wanted to pursue a career in technology.”

- Victoria Porter, PwC

Bring IT On Ambassadors



Building links between the IT sector and the next generation

A Bring IT On Ambassador is anyone in the tech space who has the energy and enthusiasm to spread the message to the next generation that it is a great place to work. Our Bring IT On Ambassadors programme pairs schools with IT businesses and professionals to give pupils access to expert IT careers advice, mentoring and work experience.

Ambassadors also work with ICT, digital media and careers teachers to give support and guidance on the latest changes in the fast-paced technology sector, as well as information on the various IT career pathways open to young people.

We currently have ambassadors who are working with schools and are committed to providing the next generation with the support, encouragement and inspiration they need to join Northern Ireland's IT sector.

Dominican College and Liberty IT

Our ambassadors Liberty IT have been paired with Dominican College, in Belfast. Their partnership has included IT career talks, attending school careers events, work experience opportunities and tours and workshops at the Liberty IT offices. Pupils have also taken part in mock interviews, interview technique sessions and talks on a variety of tech topics.

St Joseph's College and Civica

Civica is working with St Joseph's College, in Donaghmore. Our ambassadors met the school's head of ICT to discuss ways of improving retention rates of digital technology students between GCSEs and A-levels. The partnership has also included a design session looking at real-word applications of syllabus technologies, coding workshops and careers advice.





Ashfield Girls' High School and Unosquare

Ashfield Girls' High School, in Belfast, has been partnered with our ambassadors at tech firm Unosquare. Roisin Hughes, Mel Keenan and Michaela Cromie, from Unosquare, visited the school to talk to Year 12 girls about IT career pathways, how they got into the industry and women in tech.

“Some of our senior ICT students were given the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of what is involved in working in the IT industry, and the many pathways and opportunities available. Having a link with a well-known, local IT company means our girls can discuss opportunities for work experience and gain invaluable advice about specific roles in IT. The girls enjoyed hearing about the world of work and truly were inspired by the IT professionals from Unosquare. We are looking forward to the many opportunities that this programme will bring in the future.”

Colette Walker, Head of ICT, Ashfield Girls' High School

“Working as Bring IT On Ambassadors is a fantastic opportunity to inspire more young women to join the IT sector. It was great to see the pupils at Ashfield Girls High School showing a keen interest, and we look forward to welcoming some of these young students into the IT sector in the near future.”

Roisin Hughes, Human Resources Manager, Unosquare

If you're an IT professional who would like to become a Bring IT On ambassador or a teacher who would like an ambassador to partner with your school, please email: bringiton@belfastmet.ac.uk

**BRING
IT.
ON**



For more details on Bring IT On, or to get involved, please get in touch.

bringiton@belfastmet.ac.uk | [02890 205069](tel:02890205069) | bringitoni.co.uk



Belfast Telegraph IT Awards 2019 nominated - Best 'Not for Profit' Sector IT Project of the Year