



Member
Global Network of
Learning Cities

unesco Waterford

WATERFORD UNESCO LEARNING CITY STRATEGY 2025-2027

Lead Partners



Supporting Partners





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Member
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Learning Cities

Waterford

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FOREWORD FROM MAYOR



As Mayor of Waterford City and County, I am delighted to introduce Waterford's first UNESCO Learning City Strategy.

Waterford is a proud member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and has joined a worldwide movement that recognises lifelong learning as a powerful driver of inclusion, opportunity and sustainable development. Our designation as a Learning City reflects the strength of the local partnerships that exist across the city and county, and our shared ambition to create a city where lifelong learning is visible, connected and accessible to everyone, at every stage of life.

This strategy sets out our vision for Waterford as a city of learners, makers and innovators. It shows clear objectives and a pathway for how we will make this vision a reality. As a region, we face challenges in lifelong learning participation, education attainment and awareness of the learning opportunities that are already available

across our communities. However, we also have the opportunity to address these challenges. Through stronger connections, partnerships, and a shared commitment to lifelong learning, we can work together to create a city and region that champions lifelong learning, innovation and sustainable growth, with active citizenship at its heart.

Our Learning City designation belongs to all of us. I encourage citizens, communities, employers, educators and organisations to play their part in helping make lifelong learning visible, connected and accessible for all.

Together, we can continue to build a Waterford that is open to learning, open to opportunity and open to the future.

Councillor Liam Brazil
Mayor of Waterford City and County

WHAT'S GOING ON & WHERE?

WHAT IS A LEARNING CITY?

(IT'S A BIT OF EVERYTHING)



TODAY...



OUR WORK:

APPRENTICESHIPS

SUPPORTING
LIFE-LONG
LEARNING!

EDUCATION FOR
BUSINESS...



PLANNING



PLACE-
MAKING

FESTIVAL
AFRICA DAY!

COMMUNITY

SUPPORT
& OUTREACH

MUSIC
& ARTS

RESEARCH

FUNDING
& GRANTS

URBAN



LEARNING CITIES

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1 ABOUT THIS STRATEGY



This three year strategy sets out the direction of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City for the period 2025-2027. It provides a clear framework that will guide collaboration between partners and relevant stakeholders, with the aim of strengthening lifelong learning participation, visibility, and impact across the city.

Learning already takes place across Waterford through schools, further and higher education, libraries, community organisations, workplaces, cultural venues, and civic spaces. Waterford as a Learning City provides a clear focal point for this existing activity, bringing people, organisations and learning opportunities together across sectors. In doing so, it creates new opportunities for cross sector collaboration, shared learning, and progression.

The Strategic Priorities highlighted in this strategy are organised around four interconnected pillars: **Community, Culture, Collaboration, and Commitment.** Together, these pillars set out both the outcomes that Waterford aims to achieve as a Learning City and the conditions required to sustain progress over time.¹

¹ This document sets the strategic direction for Waterford Learning City. Detailed actions, responsibilities, timelines and performance measures are outlined in a separate Implementation Plan used to support delivery and monitoring.

DREAM BIG...

ENVIRONMENT

PEACE

CONNECTED & SUPPORTED COMMUNITY

EQUALITY

WELFARE

FOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE

RIVER

SERVICES & EDUCATION

WALKABLE

ACCESS

CLEAR & EASY PATHS

HISTORY

INTERNATIONAL APPRECIATION

TECHNOLOGY

RECOGNITION OF SKILLS

LEARNING FOR THE JOY OF IT!

HERITAGE

... WATERFORD!

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DREAM BIG...

ENVIRONMENT

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LEARNING FOR THE JOY OF IT!

WATERFORD!

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2 VISION AND MISSION

Vision

A city of learners, makers and innovators, where lifelong learning is visible, connected and accessible for all.

Mission

To develop Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City by connecting people, communities and partners and fostering a culture of inclusive lifelong learning for all. Through collaboration and partnership, we will champion and advance lifelong learning across Waterford, creating opportunities for people to learn, develop and thrive at every stage of life. This will support a more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous future for Waterford and contribute to the development of the South East Learning Region.

What do we mean by learners, makers and innovators?

“LEARNERS, MAKERS AND INNOVATORS”

reflects Waterford’s unique identity as a UNESCO Learning City.

LEARNERS Reflects a commitment to lifelong learning in all its forms, recognising that learning takes place throughout life and across formal, non-formal and informal settings.

MAKERS Acknowledges Waterford’s rich heritage of craft, creativity, manufacturing and traditional skills. It also reflects a practical “make it happen” approach, valuing hands-on knowledge, creativity and problem-solving.

INNOVATORS Reflects Waterford’s future-focused ambitions, embracing entrepreneurship, community-led action, emerging industries, enterprise and commerce, STEM, social innovation and Smart City development.



3 LIFELONG LEARNING AND LEARNING CITIES

WHAT IS LIFELONG LEARNING?

Lifelong learning is the process of gaining knowledge, skills and understanding throughout our lives. It can be formal, non-formal and informal.

Learning happens in many places, including schools and colleges, workplaces, community settings, volunteering, hobbies, training courses and everyday life experiences.

Some forms of learning offer qualifications like diplomas, degrees, or certificates. Other forms may not lead to a formal qualification but are valuable in supporting personal development, wellbeing, active citizenship and the development of new skills.

Lifelong Learning helps us adapt to a changing world and can also make life more enjoyable, social, curious, and fun.

WHAT IS A LEARNING CITY?

A Learning City promotes lifelong learning for all.

It brings together education providers, community organisations, businesses, public services and citizens to increase learning opportunities, strengthen inclusion, support sustainable development and improve quality of life. By mobilising resources to support different pathways to lifelong learning, a Learning City contributes to a more inclusive, prosperous and thriving society.

A Learning City helps to build and sustain lifelong learning through:

- **INCLUSIVE LEARNING:** From early years to higher education, learning is for everyone.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** supporting learning within families, neighbourhoods, and local spaces.
- **WORKPLACE DEVELOPMENT:** Supporting skills growth and career pathways for and in the workplace.
- **DIGITAL TOOLS:** Using technology to expand access to learning.
- **QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE:** improving the impact of education.
- **A CULTURE OF LIFELONG LEARNING:** Celebrating and promoting learning at every stage of life.



4 WHY WATERFORD LEARNING CITY MATTERS

The development of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City was informed by the Southern Regional Assembly's 2022 report, Towards a Learning Region. The report found that lifelong learning participation in the South East region lagged behind both national and European benchmarks, presenting a challenge for the region's future development.

It became a call to action, with a clear ambition emerging: for Waterford to become a UNESCO Learning City and to help lead the development of a learning region across the Southern Region of Ireland.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THE REGION AND WATERFORD CITY

Low Lifelong learning participation in the South East

12.1% Lifelong Learning Participation
in the South East region
7th out of 8 national regions²

This limits workforce competitiveness, restricts innovation capacity, and poses a threat to long term economic resilience of the region.

Third-level Attainment
45% Adults aged 25-64 with a tertiary qualification
Lowest rate nationally³

Fragmented Learning Ecosystem

Learning opportunities exist across education, community, enterprise and cultural sectors but are often disconnected. This limits awareness, progression pathways and participation.

² SETU Assessment of Lifelong Learning Needs in the South East of Ireland 2024 p.24

³ SETU Assessment of Lifelong Learning Needs in the South East of Ireland 2024 p.8

4 WHY WATERFORD LEARNING CITY MATTERS

WATERFORD LEARNING CITY - ADDING VALUE AND IMPACT

During the lifetime of this strategy, Waterford Learning City will play a key role in delivering a range of benefits across the region that will support lifelong learning now and into the future, including:

A Coordinated Citywide Approach

A structured, collaborative framework aligning education providers, enterprise, community organisations, and public bodies around a shared lifelong learning vision. This strengthens pathways, streamlines existing efforts and maximises collective impact, supporting the ongoing evolution of the city's learning ecosystem.

Strong Civic Engagement

Active participation from citizens, community groups, and employers in shaping and delivering lifelong learning initiatives, fostering ownership, inclusion, and social cohesion, leading to stronger participation in learning and community life.

Embedding a Culture of Lifelong Learning

Embedding lifelong learning across public, private and community settings through continuous professional development, workforce learning and accessible opportunities for all citizens. This represents not simply the provision of learning, but the cultivation of an adaptive, future-ready city.

A Shared Identity

Establishing Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City is a unifying civic narrative that shows Waterford as a connected, ambitious, and inclusive learning city

aligned with the values of the Global Network of Learning Cities. Waterford is not only participating in national and global learning networks – but positioning itself as a regional anchor for lifelong learning development.

Strategic Alignment

Collaboration is central to the work of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. This strategy and the work stemming from it, is informed by and works in tandem with other relevant regional strategies including:

- WWETB Strategy statement 2023-2027
- Waterford Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 –2029
- Waterford City & County Library Service Development Plan 2025-2028.
- SETU Connecting for Impact in Lifelong Learning 2025-2028
- SETU Sustainability Strategy 2026-2028
- Southern Regional Assembly, Working Towards a Learning Region.

Through cross-sector coordination, Waterford Learning City will also collaborate with initiatives such as Healthy Waterford, Age Friendly Waterford, Active Cities, Music Generation, Waterford Chamber Skillnet and the EU CONNEXUS network, strengthening shared outcomes in wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability and lifelong learning.



Waterford is a UNESCO Learning City



We are all lifelong learners, let's stay curious. What's your story?



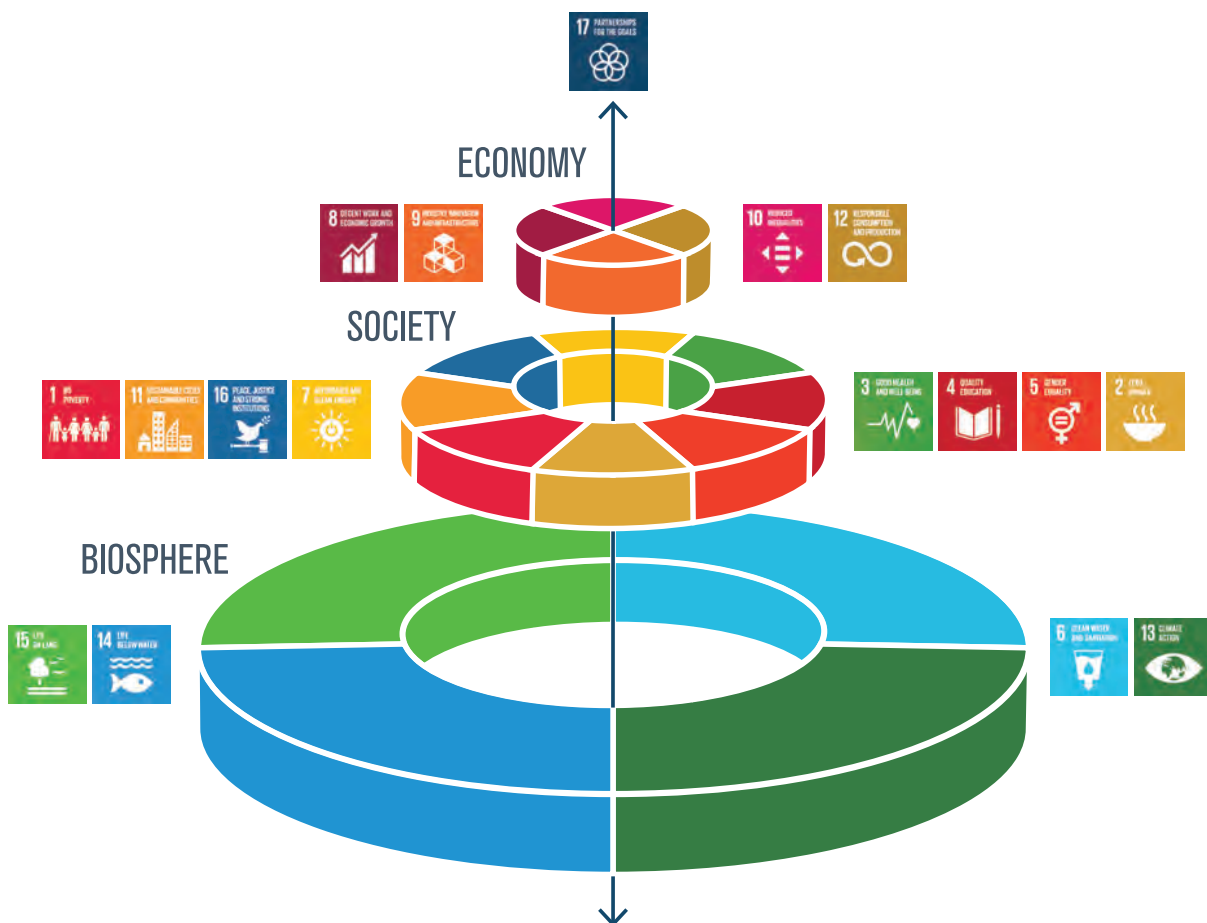
LIFELONG
LEARNING
FESTIVAL
Festival Programme April 14th - 18th 2026



waterfordlearningcity.ie

Join the Lifelong Learning Festival
With Free Events Open To All

#IAmALifeLongLearner



5 CONNECTING GLOBAL TO LOCAL

GLOBAL NETWORK OF LEARNING CITIES

Waterford Learning City is a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC).

The GNLC provides a platform for learning cities and lifelong learning experts to connect and share common interests and issues. Learning cities and regions strive to be inclusive and resilient and to promote sustainable development.

Our work is aligned to the United Nation's Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Waterford Learning City is focussed on the following goals in particular; Goal 4. Quality Education - this aims to

ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Our work also contributes to Goal 3. Good Health and Wellbeing, whereby positive mental health and wellbeing enable learning. The work of partners in upskilling and formal education contributes to Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and learning in all its forms contributes to Goal 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.

THE IRISH NETWORK OF LEARNING CITIES

Waterford Learning City is also a member of the Irish Network of Learning Cities (INLC).

The INLC is an all-island collaboration between six cities/regions – Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Belfast, Northwest Learning City Region, and Midlands Ireland Region.

The INLC works together to promote lifelong learning and to strengthen co-operation between communities across Ireland. The network shares

best practice, celebrates learning, and coordinates cross sectoral knowledge sharing across Ireland.





6 LEARNING CITY ECOSYSTEM

Our designation as a UNESCO Learning City is a testament to the strength of partnership and shared commitment to lifelong learning across Waterford.

Waterford Learning City operates through a partnership-based governance model that emphasises shared leadership, collective responsibility and sustained collaboration. Through this model, lifelong learning is embedded within

existing strategies, structures and partnerships across the city.

Partners represent local government, education, community development and the business sector, which all have a role in lifelong learning. Their collaboration reflects a shared commitment to recognising and celebrating existing learning opportunities across Waterford, while strengthening and expanding opportunities for the future.

Lead Partners



Supporting Partners



WORKING TOGETHER

Steering Group

The Waterford Learning City Steering Group is composed of a senior representative from each of the lead partner organisations. The group meets twice each year. It is chaired by the Mayor of Waterford City & County Council.

The Steering Group is responsible for:

- Setting the strategic priorities for the Learning City initiative
- Approving the Waterford Learning City work programme
- Committing organisational resources
- Reviewing progress on the execution and impact of the work programme on an annual basis.

Working Group

Waterford Learning City Working Group is made up of senior managers from the main stakeholder organisations involved in the work programme. Members include, but are not limited to SETU, WCCC, WWETB, Waterford Chamber, Kilkenny County Council, the Southern Assembly and Buíon Phortláirge. Membership of this group is limited to 15 people, and it is chaired by one of the lead partner organisations.

It meets quarterly and is responsible for:

- Managing the Waterford Learning City work programme
- Setting and monitoring the KPIs for the programme

- Supporting the Project Manager in working with their respective organisations to ensure the effective delivery of the work programme.
- Supporting funding applications to assist in the delivery of the work programme.

Communities of Practice

A Community of Practice has been established to focus on key aspects of on-the-ground delivery of the work programme, while promoting knowledge sharing and cross-sector collaboration. The community supports wider stakeholder participation and fosters peer-to-peer networks that enhance and drive activities under Waterford as a Learning City. The Community of Practice is made up of, but not limited to, representatives from working group organisations whose work is connected to lifelong learning.

Partner Organisations

Partner organisations are organisations that contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Waterford and whose missions align with the objectives of Waterford Learning City.

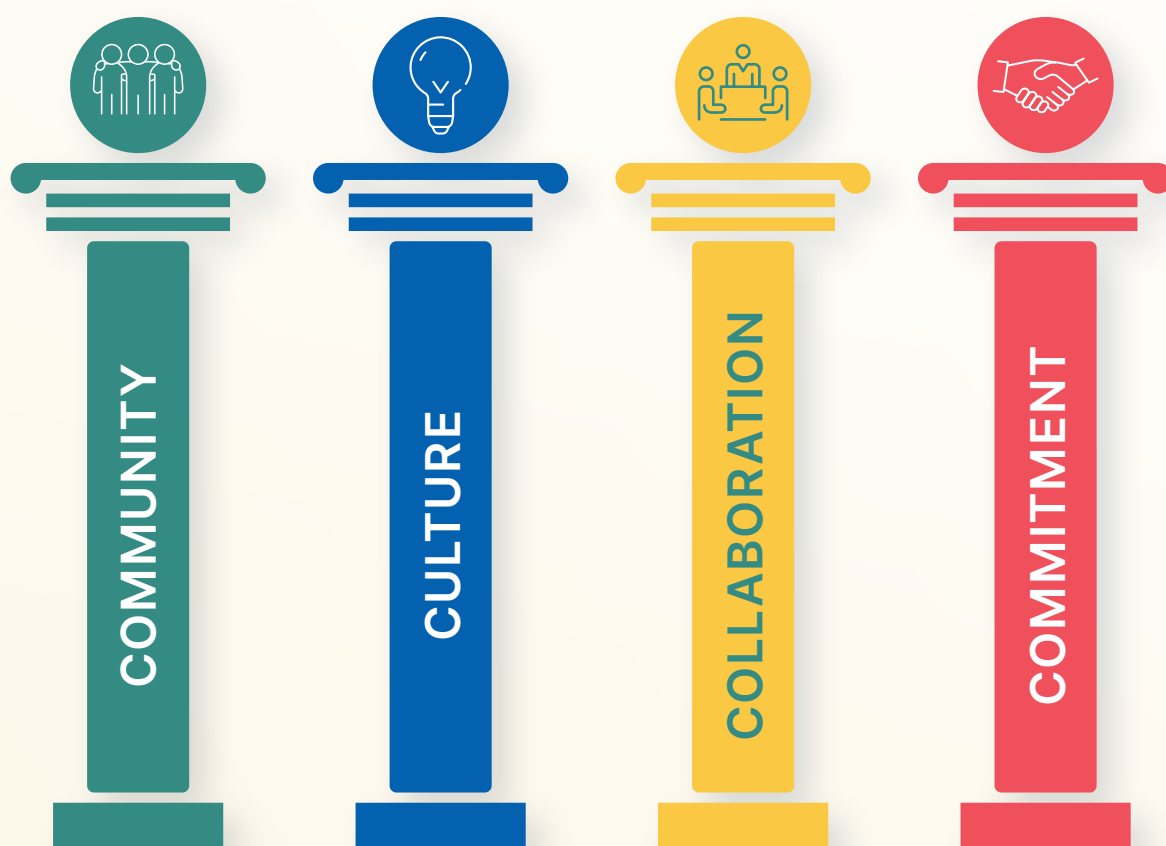
Citizen Engagement

Learner voice is central to Waterford's approach as a UNESCO Learning City, ensuring that lifelong learning reflects community needs and priorities through ongoing storytelling, feedback and active participation by the people of Waterford.



The Strategic Priorities highlighted in this strategy are organised around four interconnected pillars: **Community, Culture, Collaboration, and Commitment.**

Together, these pillars set out both the outcomes that Waterford aims to achieve as a Learning City and the conditions required to sustain progress over time.



7 OUR FOUR PILLARS

PILLAR 1 – COMMUNITY

WHY THIS MATTERS

Community- based learning is essential to improving inclusion, wellbeing, and engagement among adults, families, and underrepresented groups.

OUR AMBITION

People of all ages and backgrounds can access and benefit from lifelong learning opportunities that support participation, wellbeing and social inclusion within their communities.



Strategic Objective	Desired Outcomes by 2027
1 Increase participation in lifelong learning opportunities within communities across Waterford.	1.1 Learning Neighbourhood model operating across target communities. 1.2 Increased participation in lifelong learning within target communities. 1.3 Strong local learning partnerships supporting participation and progression.
2 Improve awareness and accessibility of local lifelong learning opportunities.	2.1 Greater visibility of learning opportunities at neighbourhood level. 2.2 Increased public awareness of learning pathways. 2.3 More residents engaging with local learning initiatives.
3 Strengthen community engagement and learner voice within lifelong learning initiatives.	3.1 Learner stories and experiences are visible and valued across Waterford. 3.2 Learners have meaningful opportunities to contribute to Learning City activities and initiatives. 3.3 Community feedback informs Learning City planning and delivery.
4 Support inclusive learning environments that foster community connection, wellbeing and knowledge sharing.	4.1 Increased opportunities for community-based knowledge sharing and lifelong learning. 4.2: Stronger intergenerational and peer-to-peer learning connections across communities.

PILLAR 2 – CULTURE

WHY THIS MATTERS

A strong learning culture builds confidence, curiosity, and lifelong engagement. Shifting perceptions about who learning is for, and where it can happen is critical to increasing participation and strengthening Waterford's identity as a Learning City.

Creating a culture of lifelong learning requires more than promoting opportunities; it requires learners and citizens to actively shape how learning is celebrated, shared and experienced across the city.

OUR AMBITION

Lifelong learning is visible, valued, and celebrated across the city. Waterford has a strong, shared Learning City identity. The value and impact of lifelong learning are clearly understood and actively promoted by citizens and partners.



Strategic Objective	Desired Outcomes by 2027
1 Increase the visibility and celebration of lifelong learning across Waterford.	1.1 Lifelong learning is celebrated through high-profile city-wide initiatives and events. 1.2 Lifelong learning achievements and contributions are recognised and valued across communities, organisations, and workplaces.
2 Strengthen awareness, understanding, and recognition of Waterford Learning City and lifelong learning opportunities.	2.1 Coordinated Learning City communications are active across digital and public platforms 2.2 Increased engagement with Learning City communications across digital and traditional media. 2.3 Increased public awareness of lifelong learning opportunities available across Waterford. 2.4 Increased recognition of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City among citizens, partners, and stakeholders.
3 Promote a citizen-led culture of lifelong learning through diverse and inclusive learner voices.	3.1 Diverse learner voices and experiences are visible across Learning City activities and communications. 3.2 Citizens actively contribute to Learning City campaigns, events and storytelling initiatives. 3.3 Learner perspectives help shape and influence the promotion of lifelong learning across Waterford.
4 Improve public engagement with learning spaces and places.	4.1 Greater awareness of libraries, campuses, community centres and cultural venues as places for lifelong learning. 4.2 Increased participation in place-based learning opportunities.

PILLAR 3 – COLLABORATION

WHY THIS MATTERS

Waterford has a rich learning ecosystem, but it is fragmented. Stronger collaboration between education, community, enterprise and public partners is needed to maximise impact and create a more coordinated lifelong learning ecosystem.

OUR AMBITION

Education, community, enterprise and public partners work as an integrated learning ecosystem around shared lifelong learning priorities.

Lifelong learning activity is informed by community and citizen insight, supporting more responsive approaches to social, cultural, and economic needs.

Waterford actively participates in and benefits from regional, national and international learning networks, including UNESCO Learning City networks.



Strategic Objective	Desired Outcomes by 2027
1 Strengthen Waterford's lifelong learning ecosystem through cross-sector collaboration and partnership development.	1.1 Regular cross-sector collaboration, knowledge exchange and shared learning are embedded across the Learning City partnership. 1.2 Clearer progression pathways exist for learners across learning providers and sectors. 1.3 Collaborative approaches contribute to wider outcomes in areas such as sustainability, inclusion and skills.
2 Position Waterford Learning City as an active contributor within regional, national and international learning networks.	2.1 Active participation and collaboration with UNESCO Irish Learning City networks, and emerging Learning Cities. 2.2 Waterford actively shares, exchanges and promotes learning, good practice and innovation regionally, nationally and internationally. 2.3 Waterford Learning City contributes to the development of a connected Learning Region for the South East. 2.4 Increased external recognition of Waterford's Learning City work locally, nationally, and internationally.
3 Ensure lifelong learning priorities are informed by community, stakeholder and international insight.	3.1 Learner and stakeholder perspectives regularly inform activity planning. 3.2 Local learning needs and priorities are identified and communicated through ongoing engagement and consultation. 3.3 Learning City planning and practice are informed by participation in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

PILLAR 4 – COMMITMENT

WHY THIS MATTERS

Sustained progress requires clear leadership, accountability, and shared responsibility. A strong governance and delivery framework ensures the Learning City initiative delivers real outcomes over time.

OUR AMBITION

Learning City leadership is embedded within the strategic leadership of key partner organisations.

Partners are accountable for shared goals and outcomes.

The initiative is well resourced and sustainable.



Strategic Objective	Desired Outcomes by 2027
1 Ensure effective senior-level leadership and governance of Waterford Learning City.	1.1 Effective strategic leadership is provided through the Waterford Learning City Steering Group. 1.2 Senior representation maintained across lead partner organisations. 1.3 Strong organisational commitment to Learning City priorities is reflected across partner strategies and plans. 1.4 Strategic priorities are regularly reviewed, monitored and advanced.
2 Support strong governance and oversight structures for delivery.	2.1 Effective coordination of Learning City delivery across partner organisations. 2.2 Governance structures operating effectively and support implementation. 2.3 Communities of Practice actively contributing to delivery and outcomes. 2.4 Effective reporting mechanisms supporting decision-making and continuous improvement.
3 Secure sustainable resourcing for the initiative.	3.1 A sustainable resourcing model supports the long-term delivery of Waterford Learning City. 3.2 Core Learning City functions adequately supported and resourced. 3.3 Partner organisations contribute resources, expertise and capacity to delivery. 3.4 Additional funding opportunities secured where appropriate.





8 ENABLERS FOR SUCCESS

The successful delivery of this strategy will depend on a number of cross-cutting enablers that support progress across all four pillars.

Stakeholder Commitment

Lifelong learning remains a shared priority across partner organisations, with active leadership, advocacy and resource commitment supporting delivery.

Effective Communication

Consistent and coordinated communication raises awareness of lifelong learning opportunities, strengthens understanding of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City, and ensures citizens understand how to engage.

Citizen and Partner Engagement

The Learning City is shaped through ongoing dialogue with citizens, communities and partners, ensuring initiatives remain relevant, inclusive and responsive to local needs.

Strategic Network Engagement

Active participation in local, national, and international networks, including the Irish Network of Learning Cities and UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, supports knowledge exchange, innovation and continuous improvement.

Learning and Improvement

Regular monitoring, evaluation and shared learning support evidence-based decision-making, demonstrate impact and drive continuous improvement.

GET IN TOUCH

The success of Waterford Learning City depends on the ongoing commitment, participation and collaboration of learners, communities, organisations and stakeholders across the city and county.

We welcome opportunities to connect, collaborate and share ideas that support lifelong learning for all.

TO FIND OUT MORE

www.waterfordlearningcity.ie

Email: laura.power@setu.ie

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