

Education, education, construction activity in Belfast dominates

Students and universities are dominating major development projects in Belfast as the city maintains a relatively strong level of construction activity, a new report has found.

Deloitte's Annual Crane Survey revealed that new university buildings and student accommodation were the key drivers of activity over the year with one million square feet of space opening at the city's two main universities and an additional 1,850 new student beds under construction.

The sector accounted for a large part of the 23 major schemes completed or under construction in Belfast in 2022, the same as the previous year. The survey showed nine new schemes broke ground during the year.

Deloitte said the commencement of two new residential projects – the first in the city since 2019 – suggest slowing growing demand for such accommodation, a trend which would help Belfast City Council in its aim to boost city centre living.

Of the other new developments completed in Belfast last year, there were four Grade A offices totalling 571,000 square feet, although only two new major projects were started.

In the leisure space, 120,000 square feet of city centre space was created through the redevelopment of the former Debenhams department store in Castle Court, and work as started on the former BHS store site.

Simon Bedford, partner in real estate at Deloitte, said there

is a diversity of projects which were started, completed or progressed throughout the year.

He said the education sector has had the biggest impact.

“The impact of the Ulster University campus fully opening will be fascinating to watch – especially with the potential development sites on and around Royal Avenue and the continued demand for new accommodation for students of both Ulster and Queen’s University,” Mr Bedford said. “The strategic aim for increasing the residential population of the city centre continues to be a challenge and tactical steps being taken alongside the increasing city centre student population will hopefully move Belfast closer to unlocking this potential.”

This Deloitte report measures the volume of development taking place across Belfast and its impact. The Crane Survey monitors new schemes or schemes undertaking significant refurbishment with a minimum size of 25,000 square feet for offices, of at least 35 beds for hotels, at least 10,000 square feet for retail and leisure, at least 25 units for residential and over 10,000 square feet for education.