



# INSPIRING TOMORROW'S FEMALE LEADERS



**SistersIN**

## IMPACT REPORT 2025



## SistersIN Board



Peter Dobbin (Chair)



Aisling Press



Oonagh O'Reilly



Peter Cochrane



Ciara Mageean



Professor  
Karen Morrison



## FOREWORD

### FROM PETER DOBBIN, CHAIR OF SistersIN

It is with great pride that I reflect on what has been a landmark year in the SistersIN journey. Now in completing our third year, the growth of this programme has been both remarkable and organic, fuelled by an unwavering belief in the potential of our young women and the power of meaningful mentorship. What began as a bold idea is now a proven model, empowering almost 700 girls this year across 49 schools - each one inspired, equipped, and ready to lead.

This year we also welcomed two significant additions to our leadership team. Gillian McKeown joined as our Director of Operations and Development at the beginning of the programme year, bringing strategic vision and tireless energy to our mission. As the year closed, we were delighted to bring Hannah Fitzsimmons onboard as our first Educational Programme Manager - a vital role as we deepen our impact in classrooms and build resources for the future.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, SistersIN is entering an exciting new phase. We are ready to transition from a start-up mindset to a model of sustainable growth. This means strengthening our foundations through long-term partnerships, expanding opportunities for our girls and mentors, and actively exploring ways to broaden access and impact. From potential accreditation routes to new resource offerings and programme enhancements, the possibilities are vast. We will also continue to evolve at governance level, welcoming new Board members who bring fresh insights and help us steward this next chapter with ambition and care.

To all our mentors, partners, educators, and supporters—thank you for believing in this vision. Your commitment is changing lives. Together, we are shaping not just futures, but a more equal and inspiring society.

Peter Dobbin,  
Chair of SistersIN



# 2024/2025 HIGHLIGHTS



## SistersINSPIRE Event

Queen's University Belfast hosted another SistersINSPIRE event. This is an initiative designed to inspire and empower young women by showcasing leadership, career pathways, and education opportunities.



## Inspiring Entrepreneurs Day

Over 350 SistersIN girls gathered at The Inspiring Entrepreneurs event in City Hall to be inspired by the leadership journeys of two phenomenal female entrepreneurs, Alice Thompson and Dr. Pragya Sharma. Thanks to the unwavering support of our Founding and Platinum Sponsor, Danske Bank UK.



## ICC Closing Celebration

First Minister, Michelle O'Neill, Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly delivered keynote speeches at the SistersIN celebration event.

**They also pledged to become mentors in the 25/26 SistersIN cohort!**



## Secretary of State visit

Fleur Anderson MP, Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, met with a SistersIN cohort at SistersIN, Victoria College Belfast. She engaged in inspiring conversations about how the programme is shaping their confidence, skills, and future aspirations.



## 2048: The Future Starts Now

12 incredible SistersIN pupils stood in the Senate Chamber at Stormont, delivering powerful, thought-provoking speeches on their vision for Northern Ireland in 2048. With no notes, they spoke passionately for five minutes each on vital issues, their confidence, passion, and composure were truly inspiring!



## Women in STEM Summit

We are incredibly proud of Romy, Mackenzie, Emily and Katie, some of our 23/24 SistersIN participants who took the stage at the Women in STEM Summit at Titanic Belfast.

The celebration event was fantastic and seeing the mentees speaking on the stage was so impressive, I was in awe of their confidence.

Mentor

It is the cumulative impact of the various strands of the programme that collectively make the experience so worthwhile. The girls that have been through the programme highly commend it and each note a different 'highlight'.

Teacher

SistersIN amplifies and empowers young female voices and I have observed such a change in our participants throughout the year. The programme has developed their leadership skills, personal autonomy and confidence, and given them opportunities to utilise these skills. As a lead teacher, I have found the programme has inspired me as I have seen the development of young female leaders in my school.

Teacher

I have learned that not only do I have to confidence and ability to stand up and share my opinions, but that there are people who are willing to listen to what I have to say. I have learned that my words, opinions and actions have value not only for me, but for others around me.

Pupil



## THE CHALLENGE

Why SistersIN focuses on gender parity

Because according to the latest Gender Gap Index, we're going backwards and it'll take 134 years to reach gender parity.

## Why does it matter?

Diverse & Inclusive leadership teams:

make better business decisions up to **87%** of the time

have a **47%** higher rate of return on equity of their business

are **27%** more likely to outperform the national industry average

Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a thriving society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys.

At **13.6%** NI has the lowest rate of women-led companies in the UK

Gender Index NI

NI has the lowest female labour force participation rate in the UK at **69.7%** compared to **75%** UK-wide (PwC Work Index)

**35%** of NI funding deals go to startups with at least one female executive. However, none of the deals went to all-female teams.

(Catalyst Deal Tracker)

Women are more than **2.5** times less likely to be self-employed than men.

(WRDA)

## We know...

**that girls at 14 are 20% more confident now** than they were 5 years ago but their confidence levels drop steadily from ages 14-18

**36% of 13 year old girls** describe themselves as confident compared to only **23%** of 18 year olds

### DEI Schemes On The Ropes

DEI and ESG professionals weighed the fallout of the Supreme Court's affirmative action ruling

Concerned about the future of DEI at their company

**65%**

Already see a decreased commitment to DEI at their firm

**9%**

Are talking about DEI differently to outsiders

**60%**

Send out fewer press releases about DEI work

**26%**

© AP / REUTERS / Getty Images / The Federalist Society

### Gender inequality across Europe visualised

Aggregate gender inequality score across European workplaces in 2016 (1.0=best, 0=worst)\*

0.9-1.0  
0.7-0.8  
0.5-0.6  
0.3-0.4  
0-0.2

\* Scores refer to factors including employment rates, cost of motherhood, education, job position, etc.

@StatistaCharts Source: Glassdoor

INDEPENDENT statista

## Why this focus is more important than ever

**This year, it feels like the work we do at SistersIN is becoming more important than ever as the landscape of DEI is shifting and many organisations are feeling pulled in different directions.**

In the US, we're seeing a backlash fuelled by anti-DEI lawsuits, presidential executive orders and social media campaigns. This is prompting some companies to step back from DEI initiatives altogether while others are toning down their outward facing messaging while continuing to do the right thing for their employees internally.

In Europe, legislation is increasing, and companies are asked to do more to show they are creating more equitable workplaces. In March this year, the European Commission adopted the Roadmap for Women's Rights which outlines a long-term vision for achieving gender equality, based on core principles and policy objectives. It aims to uphold and advance women's rights and to address new gender equality challenges, such as technology-facilitated bias, discrimination and violence.

And in Northern Ireland, one of the Equality Commission's key objectives is to promote gender equality and is calling for government to: promptly implement a gender pay strategy and action plan for Northern Ireland to address structural factors within society and the workplace which impact on employment equality; to implement gender pay reporting; and to deliver actions to support advancing equality in employment.

At SistersIN we recognise that DEI and gender equality is a long-term game, a journey that requires a steady hand to navigate the inevitable ebbs and flows. We know leaders set the tone and standard for their organisations and we are very grateful to each of the 257 different organisations who've stepped up and shown their support for SistersIN.

# THE SOLUTION

How SistersIN is  
advancing gender parity

## OUR MISSION

At SistersIN we believe that empowering schoolgirls with leadership skills is key to creating a more equitable future. Our approach combines hands-on leadership training, real-world project experience, and mentorship from industry professionals to build confidence, expand career horizons, and unlock each girl's potential.

## THE PROGRAMME

SistersIN has created the signature SistersIN Leadership Programme, an 8-month development journey for sixth form girls to help build their confidence and broaden their career perspectives.

### As part of the SistersIN programme:



#### We build skills

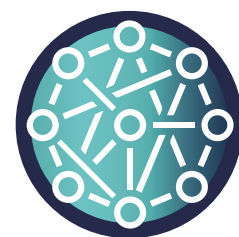
The Leadership Skills Curriculum, is delivered by teachers in schools. This 10-week programme was intensive and challenging for the students involved.



#### We give opportunities

The Leadership Project, undertaken by each girl, unearthed a wealth of innovation, creativity, and talent. The wide range of projects enriched the school curriculum and had an impact on both the school and the local community.

#### We build networks



Each girl was matched with a female mentor in a leadership role. This mentoring was to prove as powerful and rewarding for the female leader as it was for the student.

Regular virtual and face-to-face meetings took place, including a job shadowing day, when the girls followed the role of a senior leader in each organisation. This sparked professional conversations between mentors and mentees leading to connections that we hope will endure.



## WE BUILD CONFIDENCE

My mentor showed me that no matter how much you think you can't do something, there is always a way.

Pupil



The biggest topic featuring in the pupil's applications is confidence. Some really struggle with confidence, social anxiety and self-esteem and for them, this programme is a massive step outside of their comfort zone. Even the first engagement with their mentor can be a real stretch. Helping them break down some of these barriers was key, right down to having them deliver their end of programme speech to the next cohort, something many would not have thought possible at the start of the journey.

Teacher



Our organisation is mainly engineering focused, and our leadership team is only 23% female. We're committed to driving a culture change but it's not enough to just talk about things, we have to take action. SistersIN is a very practical way to help us make a difference and create greater awareness of both STEM roles but also roles in STEM organisations.

Mentor





# THE PROGRAMME IN NUMBERS 3 YEAR TRENDS

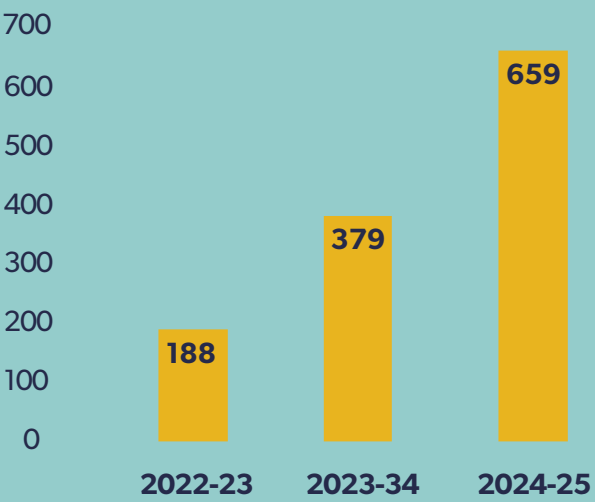
Since launching in 2022, SistersIN has grown into a powerful movement, creating more opportunities for girls across Northern Ireland. In just three years, we've dramatically increased our reach, empowering more young women than ever to lead with confidence and purpose.

## REACHED MORE SCHOOLS



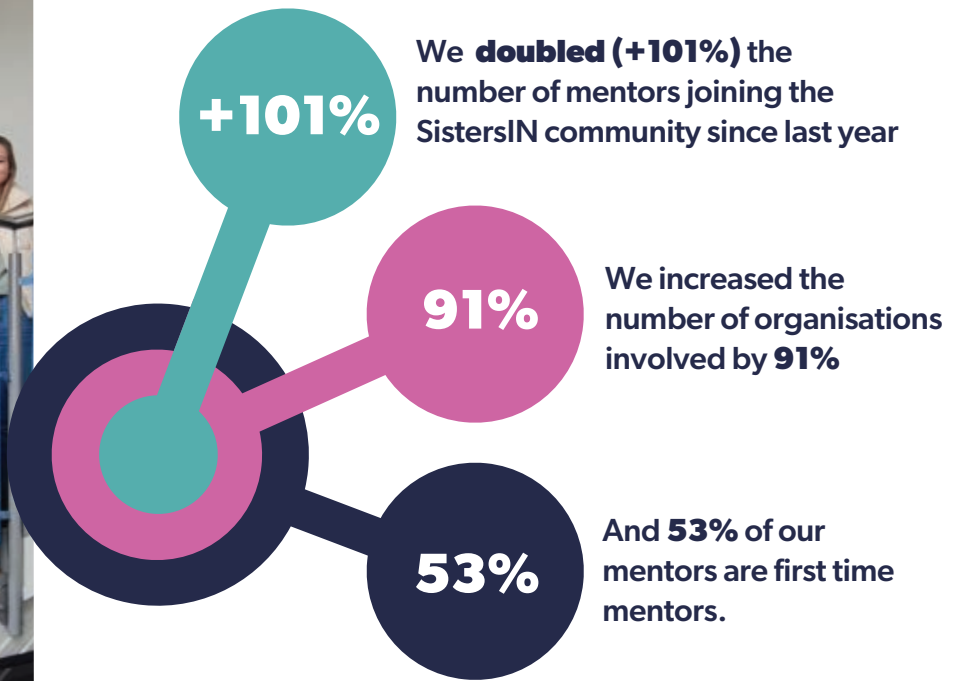
SistersIN has reached **5 times** the number of schools participating since its inception in 2022 and increased the number of pupils from west of the Bann by **32%** since last year.

## REACHED MORE PUPILS



We have increased the numbers of pupils accessing SistersIN by **250%** since 2022.

## SUPPORTED BY MORE MENTORS AND MORE DIVERSE ORGANISATIONS

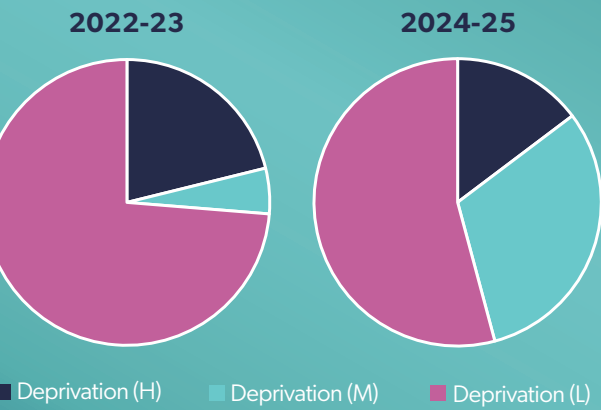
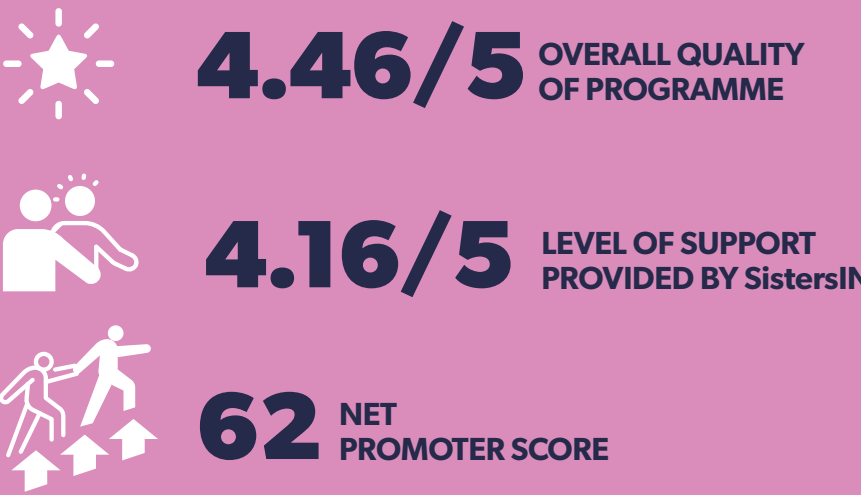


In 2025 we had **659** pupils engaged in the programme. Together, they received **7600** hours of leadership lessons, **3240** hours of mentoring and each participated in a job shadow day hosted by their mentor.



## THE SAME GREAT EXPERIENCE

While growing significantly, we're also still creating a great experience for our Pupils, Mentors & Teachers involved in the programme.



We're also delighted to see more pupils from diverse backgrounds participating in the programme. We've seen a **77%** increase in schools with medium & high numbers of pupils receiving free school meals in the last 3 years.









# OUR IMPACT - ON PUPILS



There was an uplift of  
**47%**  
in pupils' levels of confidence

**97%**  
of pupils have applied the leadership skills from lessons

**86%**  
pupils felt the investment was worthwhile

Pupils saw a  
**47%**  
increase in levels of insight into the world of work

**30%**  
of pupils say their level of clarity of career options has improved

It was such a privilege to be paired with such an insightful and knowledgeable mentor, who not only was able to teach me so much about law as a potential career path, but who also was just such a joy to work with and speak to. Gillian has become such a role model to me and I am so inspired by her.

Pupil

Shauna is a strong female leader and has greatly helped me in many concepts including gaining confidence in myself and making me believe that I can achieve anything I put my mind to she's not only a mentor but also a role model.

Pupil

My mentor helped me to improve my confidence by helping me realise I already have confidence it just needs to be strengthened. She taught me to pick out the most inspiring qualities from my role models and apply them to myself.

Pupil

**84%**  
of mentors &  
**97%**  
of teachers saw an improvement across all 10 leadership skills

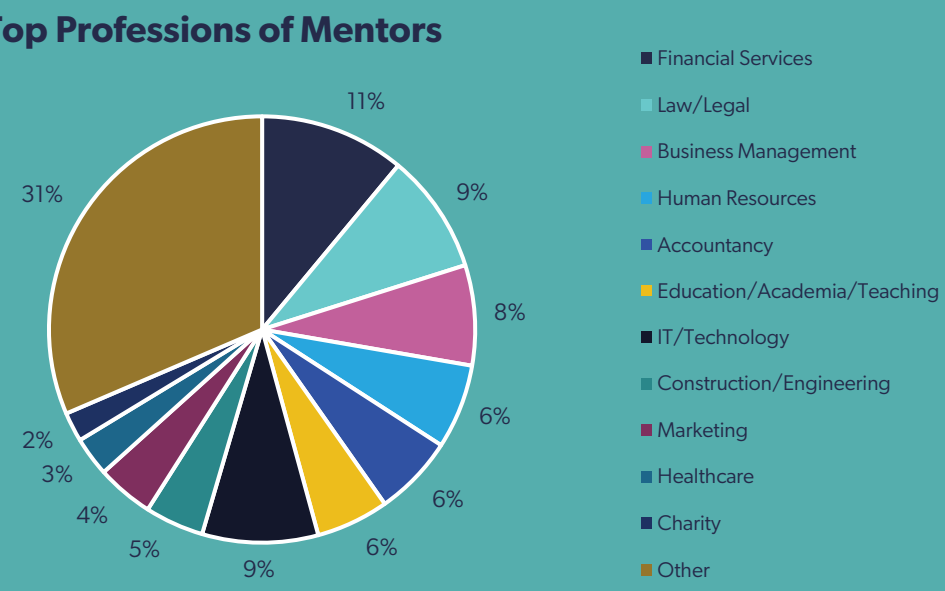
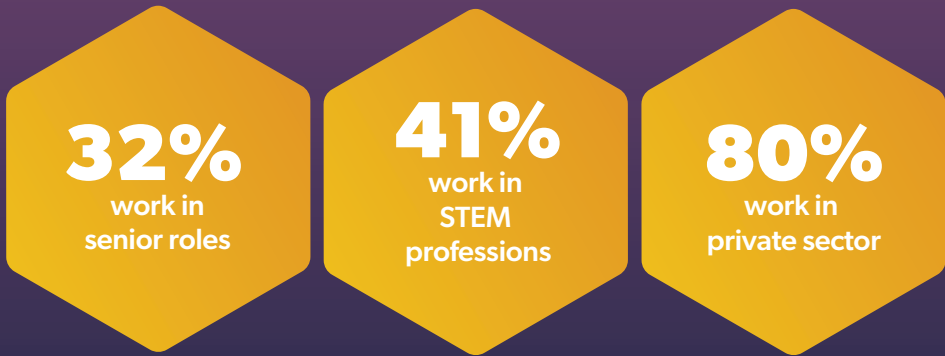




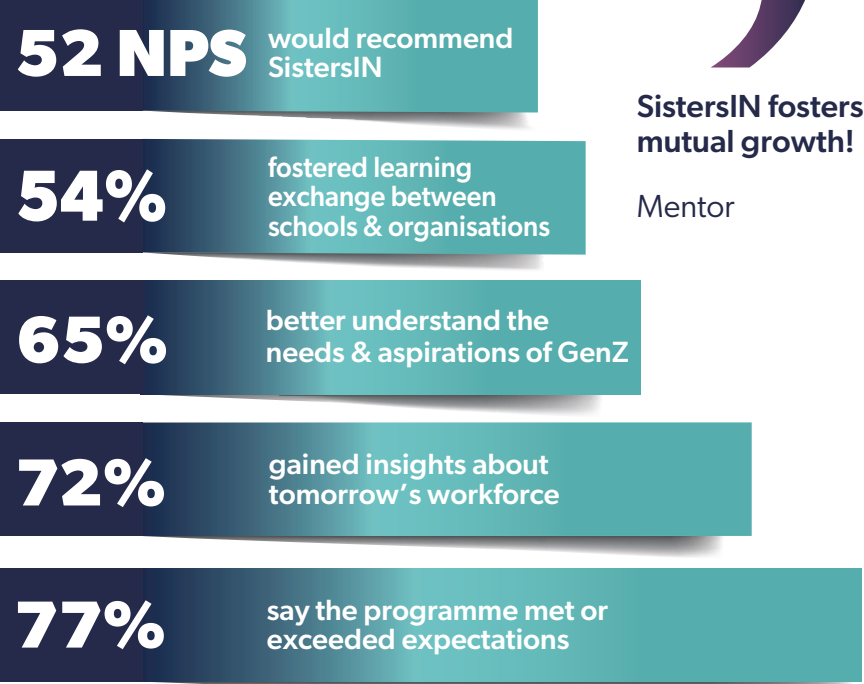
# OUR IMPACT

In 2025, 649 mentors joined us in championing the SistersIN mission - each playing a vital role in shaping the next generation of female leaders. From first-time mentors to seasoned professionals, they all share one powerful truth: the experience can be transformative not only for the girls, but for the mentors themselves.

## ABOUT OUR MENTORS



# ON MENTORS



SistersIN fosters mutual growth!

Mentor



Being part of SistersIN has been equal parts heartwarming and eye-opening, I came in hoping to make a difference, but I think I've learned just as much from my mentee as she has from me. It's been an absolute joy to watch these brilliant young women find their voices and grow in confidence, the future's in very good hands!

Mentor

This was a great opportunity for me to develop my own skills and to hear more about what it's like to be a young woman in today's world.

Mentor

# ON ORGANISATIONS

## SistersIN helps organisation



## What our Partners find most valuable about Sponsorship



Involvement with SistersIN, has driven us to seek out our female leaders in the business, helping us build our networks and connections internally. This has helped us see that we have a group of really talented senior leaders in our business, who can help us with internal mentorship and development programmes.

Partner

## Video Links: Hear from our Partners



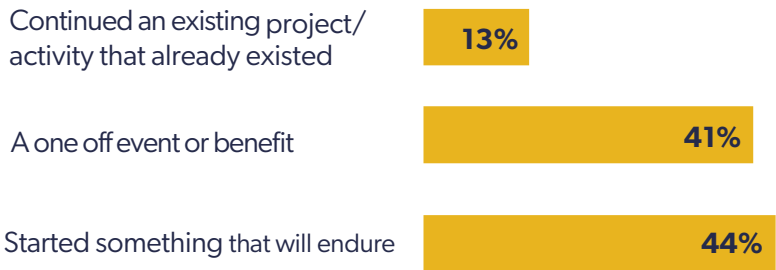


# OUR IMPACT - ON COMMUNITIES

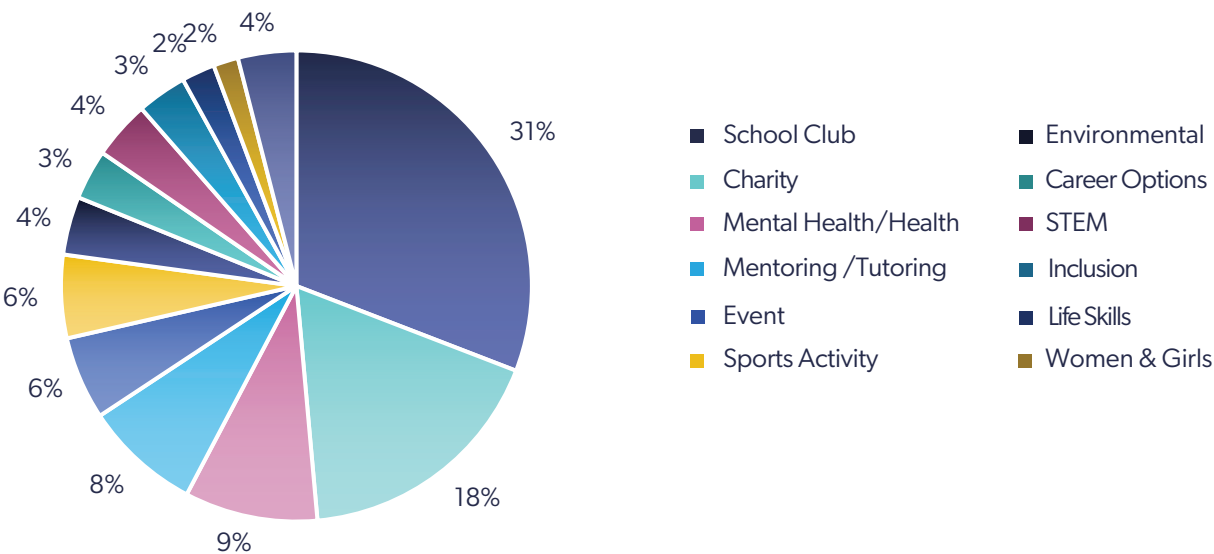
As part of the SistersIN Leadership Programme, each girl leads a project, either in school or the community. This year, we took a deep dive to understand the impact these projects are having on the wider school population and the communities they live in.

## ABOUT THE PROJECTS

### Types of Projects



### Project Topics the Students Led



The quality of the projects produced by the girls was impressive. I was very impressed at the thought put into the projects and the ability of each of the girls to turn an idea into a project which was delivered effectively and impactfully in such a short space of time. It was also very encouraging to see so many projects with a desire to assist or help others. Credit to the lead teacher for her work with the girls and her dedication to, and enthusiasm for, the SistersIN Programme.

Mentor

What most impressed me about the programme was the girls' passion for their projects.

Mentor

SistersIN highlights that our young women are a force to be reckoned with, and it breaks all stereotypes about teenagers.

Mentor

### Support for the Homeless

The girls decided to support a local homeless shelter and support men with addiction problems. They organised a fundraising event through the school and then bought lots of toiletries, pyjamas, and other things and made packs. The whole classroom was full of supplies and the girls delivered 20 packs to the men at Christmas and also gifts for those who have children. There was even money left over which they then donated. The girls believe they really made a difference and were so passionate about the project from start to finish. Even the shy girls have developed and grown their confidence and are feeling really proud of the impact they've had on the local community. The homeless shelter was also really excited about it being a group of girls who supported the men as that doesn't really happen.

Teacher, Ballymena Academy, Ballymena

### Creating Bridges across generations - The Intergenerational Project

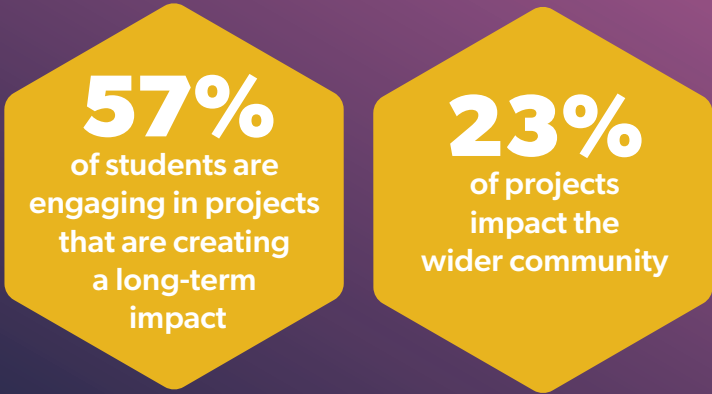
We hosted a Christmas dinner and visited the care home with a loan box of items from back in the day to create a fun day for the residents.

Newbridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland





# OUR IMPACT - ON COMMUNITIES

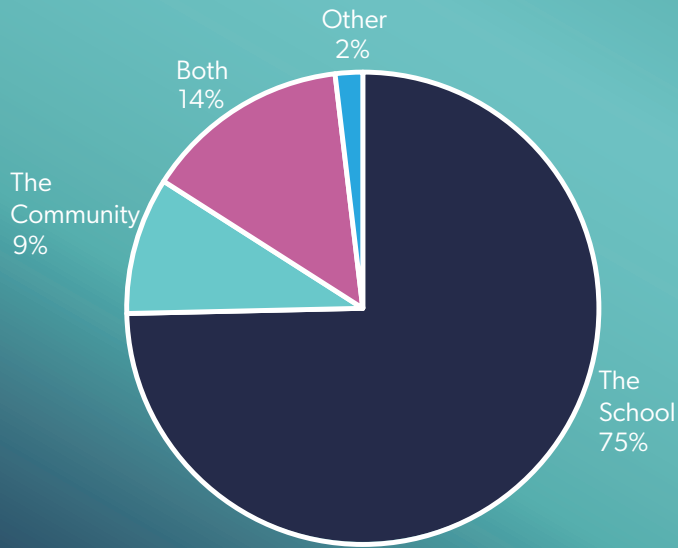


## The ripple effect:

On average, each pupil impacted



## Who was impacted by Student Projects



### Spreading the word about SistersIN

I ran an Instagram page alongside my friend, @Slemish.Sistersin, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DC9FdyUKtD2/> and it was eye opening, I loved it! I promoted projects and connected with my peers. We also organised our own charity coat collection supporting homeless teens and young people in Belfast.

Slemish College, Ballymena



### Caring for those who care – Young Carers’ Initiative

I set up a support group within the school for Young Carers to catch up on work, meet people in similar situations and relax.

Dominican College, Fortwilliam

### Bringing out the impact of Nature - The Mindfulness Garden

We restored the overgrown and messy area within the school. We built a team and organised Dig Days a weekly garden club. With ongoing help from the gardening team it will flourish into an area in which students and staff can enjoy when they need a quiet place to relax.

Laurenhill Community College, Lisburn



### Helping to save money & save the planet – Uniform Swap

I did a uniform swap where students in the school brought in a second hand uniform that they have grown out of and we resold it to other students for a significantly reduced price and donated the money to a clothing charity in my town.

Limavady Grammar School, Limavady

### Monthly Motivation

My Project involved supporting a group of year 9 girls who had been struggling with their work and motivation. Every other week we took them out of class for a period at the end of the day and help them create goals and be able to share with us what they where struggling the most with in school. We then helped them find ways to work around this and asked them to give weekly updates. Once they had overcome one goal we would make sure they had another set in place. For me it was about empowering the frame of mind to realise womens’ potential.

Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast



I learnt what it means to be a good leader and how that drastically affects the outcomes.

Pupil



# SOCIAL MEDIA & PRESS COVERAGE

## How we've created conversations

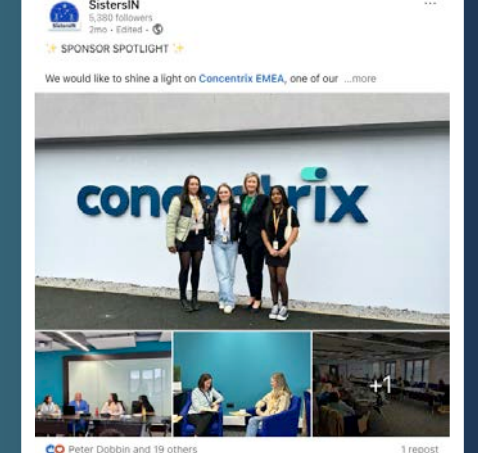
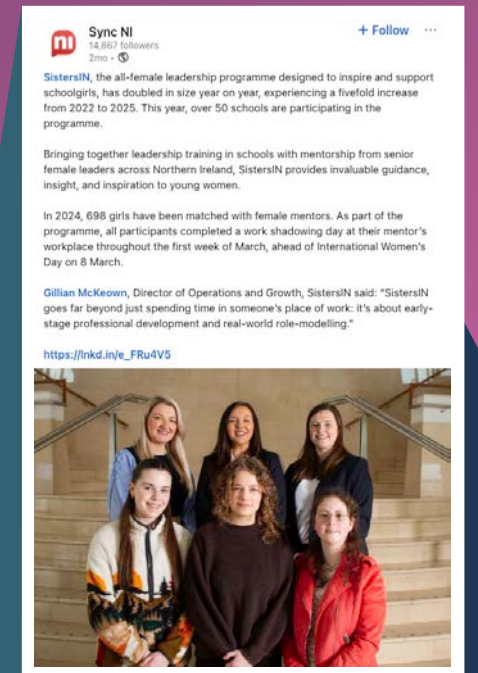
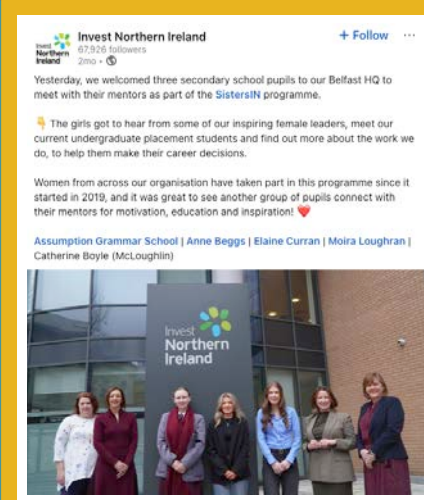
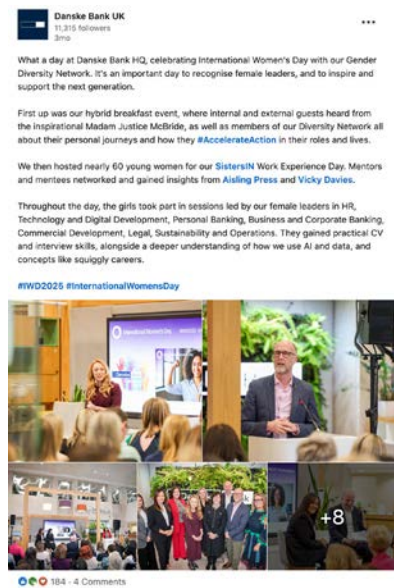
**5,351**  
FOLLOWERS

+41% increase on last year

**22,7477**  
IMPRESSIONS

**10,600**  
PAGE VIEWS

**3,760**  
UNIQUE VISITORS







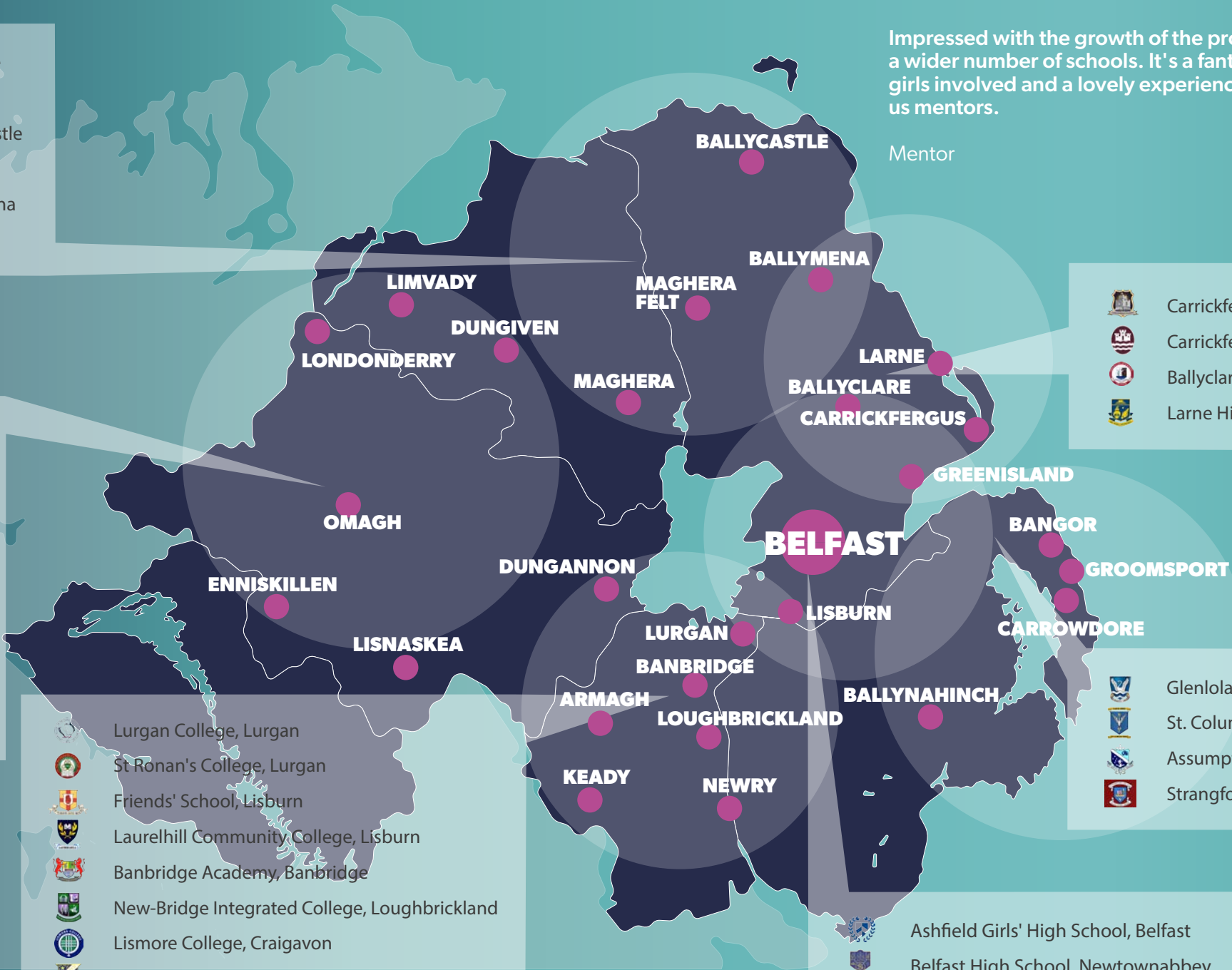
Impressed with the growth of the programme and inclusivity to a wider number of schools. It's a fantastic opportunity for all girls involved and a lovely experience to be if assistance for us mentors.

Mentor



The speed with which SistersIN has had the capacity to size up, to support so many young women through the Programme in such a short space of time.

Mentor



- Ballycastle High School, Ballycastle
- Ballymena Academy
- Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle
- Slemish College, Ballymena
- St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena
- St Patrick's College, Maghera

- Carrickfergus Academy, Carrickfergus
- Carrickfergus Grammar School, Carrickfergus
- Ballyclare High School, Ballyclare
- Larne High School, Larne

- Lumen Christi College, Derry
- Limavady Grammar School, Limavady
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh
- Mount Lourdes Grammar School
- Sperrin Integrated College, Londonderry
- St Cecilia's College, Londonderry
- St Patrick's College, Londonderry
- St Kevin's College, Enniskillen
- St Pius X College, Londonderry

- Lurgan College, Lurgan
- St Ronan's College, Lurgan
- Friends' School, Lisburn
- Laurelhill Community College, Lisburn
- Banbridge Academy, Banbridge
- New-Bridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland
- Lismore College, Craigavon
- Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry
- St Patrick's College, Dungannon
- St Patrick's High School, Keady

- Ashfield Girls' High School, Belfast
- Belfast High School, Newtownabbey
- Bloomfield Collegiate School, Belfast
- Dominican College, Fortwilliam
- Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast
- Lagan College, Belfast
- Hazelwood Integrated College, Newtownabbey
- Mercy College, Belfast
- Methodist College, Belfast
- St Dominic's High School, Belfast
- St Genevieve's High School, Belfast
- St Joseph's College, Belfast
- St. Louise's Comprehensive College, Belfast
- Strathearn School, Belfast
- Sullivan Upper School, Belfast
- Victoria College, Belfast

# 49 SCHOOLS FROM ACROSS NORTHERN IRELAND PARTICIPATED IN THE 2024/25 PROGRAMME

SistersIN aims to provide this programme to all schools in Northern Ireland who have female pupils that want to participate. Below are the schools participating in this year's cohort



# LOOKING AHEAD

Our SistersIN 2026 Vision

## What our Partners have to say:

At Baker McKenzie we have two objectives that really connect. One on gender diversity across our firm with a focus on ensuring a diverse pool of future talent and one is a local focus on social mobility. SistersIN combines the two and so it made sense for us to get involved and help broaden out the sense of possibility for girls.

Partner Lead

At Danske Bank, we're very focused on promoting leadership, supporting the next generation and empowering people to be brave, strong and try something new and that's what SistersIN is all about.

Partner

**Looking ahead to 2025/26, SistersIN is entering an exciting new phase. We are ready to transition from a start-up mindset to a model of sustainable growth.**

This means strengthening our foundations through long-term partnerships, expanding opportunities for our girls and mentors, and actively exploring ways to broaden access and impact. From potential accreditation routes to new resource offerings and programme enhancements, the possibilities are vast. We will also continue to evolve at governance level, welcoming new Board members who bring fresh insights and help us steward this next chapter with ambition and care.

## Our Priorities for 2025/26:

### Partnerships Manager

- Recruitment of two key roles to strengthen delivery:
  - Partnerships Manager
  - Programme Administration Coordinator

### Drive continuous improvement

- Appointment of new Board members to bring additional expertise, strategic insight, and governance support.

### Enable with technology

- Development of a library of resources for schools, mentors, and pupils to enhance programme support and consistency.
- Continued focus on enhanced training and support for mentors and schools.
- Implementation of PushFar mentoring platform to streamline mentor-pupil matching, communication, and tracking.

### Set the stage for growth

- Research and scope accreditation options to formalise and add value to participants' experiences.
- Research and scope how to widen access to the programme

## Call for action:

The Partnerships with businesses, government and third sector organisations are critical to our success and make it possible for us to deliver the impact potential of SistersIN.

We're always looking for organisations that share our vision and values and together make a real difference.

### There are two key ways to get involved:

- Volunteer as a Mentor and inspire the next generation
- Become a Partner and support us financially to help us scale and drive continuous improvement

### So, are you ready to join us?

To find out more about becoming a Partner, go to: [erourke@sisters-in.org](mailto:erourke@sisters-in.org)

For schools looking to join SistersIN in 2025/26, please contact: [hfitzsimmons@sisters-in.org](mailto:hfitzsimmons@sisters-in.org)



# THANKS TO PARTNERS AND MENTORS

**Collectively we can play a part in giving each girl the opportunity to shine to their fullest potential.**

If you are passionate about playing a part in positively impacting gender diversity in the world of work in Northern Ireland, please get in touch using the details below.

## Get in contact:

Website: [www.sisters-IN.org](http://www.sisters-IN.org)

Email: [info@sisters-IN.org](mailto:info@sisters-IN.org)

## Follow us on:

 the-sistersin-leadership-programme

The SistersIN Impact Report 2025 was developed by Emer Brady, Chispa Consulting & Christina Taylor, Learn to Grow

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A huge thanks goes out to all of our Partners who have supported us and of course the leaders who have played an active role as mentors.

We couldn't have done it without you.

## FOUNDING PARTNERS



## PLATINUM PARTNERS



## GOLD PARTNERS



## SILVER PARTNERS



## BRONZE PARTNERS



## COLLABORATION PARTNERS

