

## STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: ACCESS AGREEMENT

### Introduction

1. Stranmillis University College's mission is *to sustain a critical community of educational excellence in teaching and research in a shared learning environment where diversity is welcomed, in order to help meet the professional needs of society in Northern Ireland and beyond*. The College's Strategic Objectives for 2004-07 include a commitment 'to sustain and support students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds'. The University College, therefore, takes widening participation, increasing access, retention and the employability of students very seriously.
2. The core business of Stranmillis University College is the education of teachers but it has successfully diversified in recent years by offering two additional undergraduate degrees in the niche markets of Early Childhood Studies and Health and Leisure Studies. Its recruitment and admissions policy is de facto a widening participation agenda. Whilst there can be no increase in full-time student numbers at present, our commitment to attract a diverse mix of students has resulted in the recruitment of students from a range of educational backgrounds, including those with qualifications which are alternative to A-level and mature students. However, we are conscious that much work needs to be done in attracting more students from the lowest socio-economic groups (SEC5-7), students from low participation neighbourhoods, students from ethnic minority groupings and students with disabilities.
3. In addressing issues of widening participation two very important points must be borne in mind:
  - i. Unlike Queen's University and the University of Ulster which have been generously funded in recent years for specific interventions, there has been no government funding to support widening participation initiatives in the University Colleges. Additionally, government has automatically provided the universities with ongoing capital funding for disabled access works, whilst Stranmillis has to date, only received a one-off injection of capital for this purpose. We have just learned, however, that in planning its integrated regional strategy for widening participation, the Department for Employment and Learning has indicated that we will receive an allocation of funding in 2005/2006. This offer is as yet unquantified, but will include funding to support students in receipt of the Disabled Student Allowance.
  - ii. Secondly, the academic calibre of students entering Stranmillis, particularly for the BEd degree is amongst the highest in the United Kingdom, a situation caused to a great extent by market forces with approximately ten applicants for each available place. In the sense of producing a high-quality workforce this is to be welcomed. However, the very high entry standards can militate against some young people even considering teaching as a career, particularly those from under-represented groups. When this is coupled with potential fees of £3000 per annum, we must be even more careful that the possibility of entry to Stranmillis is not perceived by some to be completely beyond their reach.

These two factors would suggest that we have a considerable way to go in meeting the objectives set out by government. For this reason it is imperative that the University College invests some of the additional revenue from increased fees in building a robust infrastructure which will support a number of clearly identified projects and measures to attract, support and sustain students from the groups which are currently under-represented.

4. Having examined the existing literature on the factors which influence participation and success in HE across the student lifecycle it is clear that an holistic approach is required which will create challenges at institutional level and is a staff development issue as well as a student issue.

## **FEES**

5. Stranmillis University College intends to charge all full-time undergraduate students the maximum fee of £3,000 from September 2006, adjusted for inflation, the amount to be determined annually by Government.

## **ACTION PLAN**

6. Whilst the DEL guidance has not specified the proportion of additional income which should be spent on bursaries and outreach activities, the University College has used the yardstick of one-third and based its activities on this base. It can be seen from Table 4 that in the first year, 55% of the total additional income will be disbursed on the strategy and 27% of the total will be allocated to bursaries. The proportion will gradually reduce as the infrastructure is established. The following paragraphs set out to identify the specific measures which the University College will introduce over the next five years. They are divided into:

Bursaries and Other Financial Support for Students

Outreach and Interventions

Building capacity in the institutional infrastructure

The final section will provide a breakdown of widening access costs.

## **BURSARIES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

7. Stranmillis University College proposes to offer bursaries to students who receive a Higher Education Maintenance Grant through a scheme which will operate on an incremental scale. Students will be assessed on the basis of income as determined by their Education & Library Board and will receive a bursary according to the following banded scale using the amount of residual household income as the determining factor.

<b>Income Level</b>	<b>Bursary</b>
£17,500 or less	£1,000
£17,501 - £22,500	£500
Over £22,500	No bursary



8. The University College intends to develop detailed 'Financial Information Packs' for prospective students about the financial support they can expect to receive and the aggregate cost of their tuition if they are successful in gaining a place at the institution. We will provide illustrations of the total costs of studying over the duration of a course and include all other relevant information such as state support available and the overall cost of living. This information will be presented in a clearly written and illustrated manner. It will also be available on our website and will be updated annually. Presentations to schools and in particular the Outreach Schools (see below) will include sessions on financial information. Specifically, information packs will be adapted to meet the needs of each of the groups identified above and measures will be taken to ensure that these packs are disseminated effectively. For example in the case of students from Ethnic Minority Groupings, liaison will take place with the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities.

## **OUTREACH AND INTERVENTIONS**

### **Project 1 – Attracting more students from under-represented groups**

9. We are conscious that student decisions on access to HE may take place early in their schooling – research suggests that it is much earlier than hitherto expected and some work in schools suggests that it may take place as early as primary school. Thus we must develop a strategy to both go out into schools and bring schools into the University College. The key tasks outlined here will allow us to work on the aspirations of pupils in schools across NI. The focus will be on students from under-represented groups (mainly SEC5-7) and on schools from low participation neighbourhoods.
10. The project will target disadvantaged pupils from 4 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The schools will be those from which the College receives few or no applicants and from which very few students have been accepted in recent years. The schools will be amongst those which have previously been identified within the TSN initiative. The project will address the whole of the student life cycle from aspiration raising to the provision of additional support throughout their student experience right up to preparation for employment. Whilst retention rates at Stranmillis are very good, there will be a greater need in the future to identify students 'at risk' and to ensure that support is available when required.
11. Milestones and targets would be measured by an increase in applications from this under-represented group. Baseline data will be established for this group and will be reported back in the first year of monitoring. The target set is an increase of 10% in the number of applicants from this group within the first five years of the project.

## Project 2 – Males into Teaching: Role Modelling Scheme

12. There is a considerable body of research, including that of the NIHEC Expert Group Report (2004) which indicates that working class Protestant males have a lower entry rate to HE in Northern Ireland. There is a problem generally in attracting males to teaching, particularly primary teaching and this has been identified by our Board of Governors for several years, as an issue which must be addressed. For example in the last three years the number of male entrants to the BEd ranged between 16% and 18%, with a further breakdown showing that male entrants to the Primary BEd in that period have not exceeded 10%.
13. The processes in this project will be similar to those in Project 1, but in the light of the NIHEC Expert Group Report (2004) will be directed at raising aspirations of young Protestant working class males in relation to the BEd degree, particularly the Primary BEd. The focus of activity would be with 4 schools from which SUC receives few or no male applicants. The schools selected may or may not overlap with those involved in Project 1. The process would involve role modelling using existing male teachers and final year students in raising aspirations and providing experiences which will enable students from this group to identify teaching as a career.
14. Milestones and targets would be measured by an increase in applications from this under-represented group. The target set is an increase of 10% in the number of applicants from this group within the first five years of the project. (Baseline information is provided in Annex A)

### Activities and Milestones for Projects 1 and 2

Activity	Period	Milestones
<b>Phase 1- Aspiration Raising</b>		
Identification of schools/ Building SUC/school partnerships	2006/2007	8 schools identified
Manage and deliver HE awareness events to pupils and parents	2006 onwards	Attendance at events (30 per event)
Provide classes on study skills and key skills	2006 onwards	Measurements of improvement in study/key skills
Provide activities which will raise self confidence and self esteem	2006 onwards	Activities identified and attendance measured
Prepare SUC information packs for parents and pupils (including funding info.)	2006 onwards	Specially developed info packs
Web-Site reviewed, content management system, compliant with disability legislation	2006 onwards	Content management system, DDA compliant
Marketing strategies developed to include project aims	2006 onwards	Strategies in place

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
<b>Phase 2 Pre-entry/Admissions</b>		
Arrange special Open Days and taster experiences	2007 onwards	Attendance at events (100 per event)
Provide Summer School (Residential)	August 2007 and each following August	40 students
Set admissions targets for each project	2007	Senior Management in consultation with DE
<b>For Project 2:</b> Visits to Primary Schools/working as classroom assistant/shadowing male teachers	2007 onwards	16 students
<b>Phase 3 – First semester experience</b>		
Review induction programme	2008	Revised programme in place
Introduce 'buddy system' for new Students, as an extension of the College's existing mentoring scheme	2008	Scheme in place
Ensure that Student Services support and advice is maximised through chaplains, nurse, careers and student support service and is fully articulated and easily available	2008 onwards	Increased activity in each of these services
Free Halls of Residence places or assistance with living costs for students admitted from Project 1 and 2 Groupings	2008 onwards	Free places taken up/living cost assistance provided
Enhance study skills support programme throughout the year for all students who have identified needs.	2008	Study Skills programme in place
Develop Personal Development Plans Introduced	2008 onwards	Full use being made of PDPs

Table 1

## Moving Through the Course

15. The University College Learning and Teaching Strategy places the learner at the centre of the process and takes account of the discipline mix of the institution and the employment needs of learners. Programmes will be monitored carefully through our Quality Assurance procedures and detailed use made of the outcomes of programme reviews. The activities listed below are in addition to the existing provision.

Activity	Period	Milestones
Staff development training in Widening Access	2007 onwards	Training needs identified: number of staff attending (target 75%)
Funding and Debt Management Seminars	2008 onwards	Number of students attending seminars (100 each seminar)
Offer buddying and Early Warning Systems for identifying students at risk	2008 onwards	Systems in place
Widening Access Advisory Group set up to develop strategies and work with WA Co-ordinator	2006 onwards	Group established
Careers Workshops	2008	Students attendance (target all leavers)
Extension of Professional Careers Provision to include BEd students	2006	Number of BEd students supported in seeking employment
Embedding Widening Access activities in academic planning process. Review strategies for: Learning and Teaching Admissions Staff Development Human Resources Information Management	2007 onwards	All strategies reflecting WA Agenda, where they do not already do so

Table 2

## Increasing Levels of Participation across the University College

16. The University College intends to monitor and make progress on its HESA Performance Indicators as follows:

	2002/03	Benchmark	2003/04	Benchmark	Target for 2006 to 2011
<b>% of students from NS-SEC 4-7</b>	40.1	33.8	31.2	34.7	Work to achieve an average of 38% (to be reviewed when 2004/05 HESA data is available)
<b>% of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods</b>	7.7	16.1	14.0	16.3	Work to meet and sustain average of 16.5%

Table 3

The NIHEC Expert Group Report (2004) highlighted the fact that within Northern Ireland, NS-SEC Groups 5-7 are significantly underrepresented. Baseline data for Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions as provided by DEL shows that in the period 2002/03-2004/05 the average percentage of accepted applicants in NS-SEC Groups 5-7 was 25.1%. Stranmillis will set as a target, an increase of 10% on the 25.1% baseline within the period 2006-2011. We shall also seek to increase by 10% over a 5 year period, the number of students with a disability (currently 4%) and to enhance recruitment from ethnic minority groups (currently 0.2%).

## Building Capacity in the Infrastructure

17. The University College welcomes the opportunity to dedicate some funding to Widening Participation initiatives and has identified the following essential requirements if the projects are to succeed. A full-time Widening Access Co-ordinator will be appointed on an academic scale. This person will be supported by a Student Support Officer. Both appointments will require dedicated administrative support with office, telephone and computer space. This administrative support officer will also assist with the implementation of the bursary scheme. A building on the campus, will be refurbished to provide a Student Support Centre. This will be an independent, welcoming, easily accessible place for students who require support.

Activity	Period	Milestones
Appointment of Widening Access co-ordinator,	2006	Post in place
Appointment of Student Support Officer,	2006	Post in place
Administrative Officer, with dedicated office space, computer, telephone, etc.	2006	Post in place
Extension of Careers Provision to include BEd students	2006	Post extended

Table 4

## Widening Access Costs

	<b>Widening Access Costs</b>	£ 2006-07	£ 2007-08	£ 2008-09	£ 2009-10	£ 2010-11
<b>A</b>	<b>Additional Income</b>	489,500	989,820	1,515,780	1,933,330	1,992,970
B	Bursaries (Minimum) %	132,000 27	272,000 27.5	420,000 27.7	577,000 29.8	595,000 29.8
C	Staff Appointments	92,000	90,000	93,000	95,000	97,000
D	Setting up of Student Support Centre	30,000				
E	Projects, including additional on-course activities	15,000	75,000	82,000	85,000	87,000
F	Halls of Residence Places/Living Costs Support	7,000	14,500	22,000	30,000	31,500
<b>B..F</b>	<b>Total Expenditure (TE)</b>	276,000	451,500	617,000	787,000	810,500
	<b>TE as a Proportion of additional fees</b>	56%	46%	41%	41%	41%

Table 5

### 18. Monitoring

The Widening Access Co-ordinator will report to the Widening Access Advisory Group at regular intervals on progress. The reporting lines will be through the Learning and Teaching Committee to the Strategic Planning Committee and Board of Governors. An annual review of milestones and targets will take place.

**Males into Teaching**

PRIMARY/SECONDARY

Year	Male Applicants	Male Intakes	Total Intake (Primary)	Total Intake (Secondary)	Male Intake as a Percentage of Total Primary Intake
<b>2000</b>	225	29 (Pr) 14 (Sec)	151	35	19%
<b>2001</b>	189	25 (Pr) 12 (Sec)	168	40	15%
<b>2002</b>	202	15 (Pr) 14 (Sec)	153	44	10%
<b>2003</b>	227 (Pr) 59 (Sec)	26 (Pr) 19 (Sec)	156	41	17%
<b>2004</b>	214 (Pr) 83 (Sec)	15 (Pr) 17 (Sec)	155	49	10%