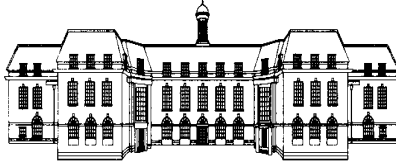


SEPTEMBER 2006



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

A College of The Queen's University of Belfast

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

Mr Steve Costello

PRINCIPAL

Professor Richard McMinn

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2006-2009

INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan sets out the aim and goals of Stranmillis University College for the period 2006-09 and replaces an earlier Plan, published in the autumn of 2005, which covered the period 2005-08. Now that the University College has been legally incorporated (October 2005) following approval of an Order-in-Council, it has been possible to update our strategic objectives for the next three years. The planning period, to an extent, is aligned with the planning cycle of the University College's principal sponsoring Department – Employment and Learning (DEL), which itself has published a Strategic Plan for 2004-07. The Stranmillis Strategic Plan will of course be rolled forward. The effect of incorporation has been to establish Stranmillis as a corporate entity, with a reconstituted Governing Body shouldering the additional responsibilities which this development has created. Incorporation has conferred additional autonomy and responsibility on the College and its Governors. It also brings Stranmillis into line with the other higher education institutions (HEIs) in Northern Ireland. The new Governing Body has approved this Strategic Plan, as the University College moves forward under incorporation. As in the past, our annual Business Plans will continue to identify the shorter-term objectives and targets which we wish to achieve in pursuit of the strategic goals described in this document, which will themselves be updated on an annual rolling basis. Risk management considerations will be built into both this Strategic Plan and into the annual Business Plans, along with some appropriate metrics in the case of the latter.

OUR BUSINESS

The University College's main areas of activity are:

- the initial undergraduate and post-graduate education of teachers for nursery, primary and special schools in all sectors through BEd and PGCE programmes;
- the initial undergraduate education of teachers for certain subject areas in post-primary schools and colleges in all sectors through a BEd programme;
- the professional development of serving teachers from all types of schools and of other education professionals (through a Masters-level programme in Education and through a Master of Teaching (M.Teach) programme);
- the vocational undergraduate and postgraduate education of professionals to work across the whole spectrum of the Early Years sector through BA (Early Childhood Studies) and MA (Early Childhood Studies) programmes;

- the vocational undergraduate education of professionals in the spheres of health promotion, fitness and leisure, health and safety through a BSc (Health and Leisure Studies) programme;
- the training of PSNI community police officers through a Certificate course to work effectively in schools;
- joint supervision with colleagues at QUB of a number of post-graduate research students;
- the operation of a conference centre on both a residential and a non-residential basis.

The possibility of becoming involved with one or more Foundation Degrees, for example in the field of Early Years, in partnership with relevant employers and the FE sector, is currently being explored.

The College's teaching programmes are underpinned by a major commitment to research and to international outreach through staff and student mobility (both inward and outward). Stranmillis is currently hosting a number of externally funded research projects along with a major curriculum development initiative funded by the Ulster-Scots Agency. As an academically integrated College of Queen's University Belfast, our teaching provision leads to QUB degrees and other awards and is governed by the academic policies and requirements of the University. Stranmillis retains full autonomy however in relation to funding and staff employment. The most recent national benchmarking exercise involving the University College (the QAA Subject Review of Education in 2001) placed it within the top five-per-cent of Schools of Education nationally and amongst the top two local providers of Education programmes. This review included the BA (Early Childhood Studies) in its coverage. More recently other performance indicators such as those published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), as a result of the National Student Survey outcomes, have been extremely positive. Stranmillis has the lowest student drop-out rate of any NI HEI and the highest graduate employment rate.

OUR ORGANISATION

The University College is governed on behalf of DEL by a Governing Body, appointed by the Department, utilising the procedures for public appointments prescribed by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (NI). As previously indicated, legislation was passed in 2005 to incorporate the College from 1st October 2005, with a new Instrument and Articles of Government coming into force. A new Financial Memorandum will be implemented shortly. A revised committee structure

for the Governing Body will be established, to reflect its reduced membership.

The development and oversight of policy is the responsibility of the Management Board which is chaired by the Principal and consists of four Vice Principals with specific functional responsibilities. The Principal is the Accounting Officer and Chief Executive of the College and is accountable to the Permanent Secretary at DEL for its management. Teaching and technical staff are grouped into four Departments for management purposes – Early Childhood Education, Health and Leisure Education, Teacher Education (Primary) and Teacher Education (Post-primary). Each has a Head of Department, who along with the Head of School Partnerships and the heads of support teams, form a middle management tier. Other support staff are grouped into a number of units in addition to the above, such as Corporate Services, Academic Registry, Education Services, Library and Information Services, IT Services, Estates, Domestic Services and Portering Services.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF OTHERS

The University College has a key role to play in meeting the educational goals, as set out in their Strategic Plans, of the two Departments – DEL and DE, with which it works most closely. The University College also contributes to the work of other educational partners with which it collaborates – QUB, the Education and Library Boards, the General Teaching Council, the Regional Training Unit (RTU), the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS), the PSNI, Belfast Healthy Cities, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The establishment of the new Education and Schools Authority (ESA) in 2008 will provide a further opportunity for partnership development. We will also meet the obligations and commitments given in our Equality Scheme and in relation to health and safety, data protection, publication of information, anti-discrimination, equality and human rights legislation. We will, therefore, play our part in promoting a fully inclusive and equal society. We will also actively promote the development of co-operation between our institution and those in the rest of Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe, the United States of America and South Africa. Additional partnerships in Uganda, Zambia and China have recently been established.

THE WAY WE WORK

We share our sponsoring Department's aim to achieve the highest public sector standards, particularly in relation to accountability and value-for-money, in every aspect of our activities and continuously strive to improve our performance. A range of policies has been put in place to reinforce internal controls and to consolidate standards of service, within a framework of risk management and equality screening.

PEOPLE STRATEGY

In delivering our Strategic Goals, the contribution of staff is clearly one of the most crucial factors in ensuring success. The University College is therefore putting in place a new Human Resources Strategy for the period 2006-08, which will be rolled forward subsequently. It will shortly complete its implementation of the National Framework Agreement (NFA), covering the salary terms for the employment of all staff.

CONTEXT

The three-year planning period from 2006 to 2009 will be a crucial one for the University College, as it continues to consolidate its position within the higher education sector as a multi-professional University College of The Queen's University of Belfast, whilst retaining its reputation as a centre of excellence for teacher education and is operating as an incorporated institution, with a reconstituted Governing Body. The work of Stranmillis during the planning period will be very much influenced by the context in which it operates. A number of significant external developments can be anticipated which will impact upon the University College:

- the ongoing review of the provision of teacher education in Northern Ireland and the associated developments such as the demographic downturn and the Review of Public Administration (RPA);
- the outcomes of the Review of Post-primary Education, following the report of the Costello Committee and the revision of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) from 2007-08 onwards;
- the globalisation of learning through new technologies and the reflection of this through the implementation of the Northern Ireland **emPowering Schools Strategy** and the establishment of the Northern Ireland 'Learning NI', virtual learning environment (vle);
- the implications of incorporation, particularly for the College's estate;
- Government initiatives, for example to widen access to higher education and to promote healthier living and lifelong learning;

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- the introduction of variable, deferred fees from 2006-07, the associated implementation of the College's Access Agreement and the additional income stream which will flow from this;
- the College's possible entry to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE);
- the implementation of the 'Vision for Queen's University', developed by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Gregson;
- the implementation, backdated to August 2006, of the National Framework Agreement on staff salaries and the related process of role analysis through the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) scheme.

During the planning period, a revised internal academic management structure, following a review in 2005-06, will be put in place, alongside a revised academic committee structure. Planning for the successful implementation of incorporated status will be a major priority and may result in further changes to University College structures and operational arrangements. A major estates capital project, funded by DEL, the construction of the new Orchard Building, is due for completion by autumn 2007.

THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S VISION, MISSION STATEMENT AND GENERAL AIMS

The University College's vision is to be a centre of excellence in educational, professional and vocational development.

The 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 University College's associated general aims are:

- (i) to offer its students high quality education, to equip them with intellectual, scientific, technical and professional skills and to provide the facilities which will enable this to be achieved;
- (ii) to value staff and students and ensure their welfare and well-being;
- (iii) to sustain its historic role as a centre of excellence for the education of teachers and to develop further its more recent role of meeting the needs of a number of other professions;
- (iv) to be a major centre of knowledge, learning, innovation and scholarship for those disciplines in which it specialises;

- (v) to pursue selectively research of national and international standard and to develop new and existing areas as appropriate;
- (vi) to maintain and to develop further a research base which will facilitate applied research and knowledge transfer to satisfy the needs of appropriate professions, Government and the community;
- (vii) to maintain and extend the diversity of backgrounds, cultures and nationalities from which its staff and students are drawn;
- (viii) to enrich the quality of life in the Northern Ireland community;
- (ix) to continue to consolidate the University College's position within the university sector, serving identified niche markets of a professional nature;
- (x) to enhance and develop further partnerships with business and other organisations/institutions, both nationally and internationally.

CORE VALUES

We share our sponsoring Department's core values which will underpin our work as they do the work of DEL. The DEL core values are reproduced below:

Public service ethos:	the Department exists to serve the community, respecting human rights and diversity and affording equality of opportunity.
Accountability:	we are accountable for all our actions, including the efficient and effective use of resources.
Openness and transparency:	we act in a spirit of open government and freedom of information.
Co-operation:	we endeavour to work with our stakeholders in a spirit of constructive partnership.
Excellence:	we seek continually to improve the ways we do business.
Respect:	we work together on the basis of mutual respect.
Pride:	we can make a real, positive difference to individuals' lives and to the quality of life in Northern Ireland and we take pride in our efforts to do this.
Integrity:	our actions will be consistent with our words.
Impartiality:	we will deliver all our services and act impartially at all times.

The College hopes to develop a new set of values in 2006-07 through a process of internal debate and consultation.

THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In pursuing its vision, core values, mission and general aims, the University College will, over the period of this plan, address a number of key strategic objectives.

These are:

- To consider critically the future positioning of the University College, especially in the context of both incorporation and the teacher education reform process initiated by DEL/DE.
- To develop further and enhance partnerships for all degree pathways with external institutions, organisations and professional groups.
- To develop further and enhance the University College's community-based links and activities.
- To develop further and enhance the research profile of the University College.
- To continue to provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities on all degree pathways, including student placements and international outreach activities.
- To recruit, sustain and support students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds.
- To develop further the University College's estate and technological infrastructure.
- To develop and reward all categories of University College staff.
- To promote growth in relation to the University College's various activities in the context of incorporation and particularly to explore the expansion of part-time and international student numbers and of conference business.
- To provide leadership and support in developing e-learning capability.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE –
THE FUTURE POSITIONING OF THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

Objective

To consider critically the future positioning of the University College, especially in the context of both incorporation and the teacher education reform process initiated by DEL/DE.

Commentary

A number of factors will be interacting together during the planning period which will both enable and require the University College to undertake a critical analysis of its medium and long-term future. These are:

- incorporation, which gives the College and its reconstituted Governing Body greater autonomy from DEL in determining future developments;
- the teacher education reform process, which is due to generate a set of proposals for debate from DEL and DE in 2006-07. The proposals will be set against the ongoing demographic downturn and the related debate about the future arrangements for Continuing Professional Development (CPD for teachers) initiated by the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and the CPD proposals emanating from the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI);
- the implications for the University College of Vice-Chancellor Gregson's 'Vision' for QUB, with its emphasis on internationalisation and world-class interdisciplinary research and teaching;
- the very significant financial demands being made by QUB in return for the continuation of the current academic integration/ validation arrangements;
- the requirement to re-negotiate the 2002 Agreement with QUB, as a consequence of the major restructuring exercise within the University;
- significant changes within the Senior Management Group due to impending retirements.

The key issues are how best to maximise the advantages of incorporation, whether any significant rationalisation of teacher education at either the initial and/or the later phases is likely to be pushed through by DEL/DE and whether the present academic relationship with QUB can be sustained, without at least some modification. These issues will require significant discussion on the part of the College in the coming months. Full debates at various levels –Governing Body, Management Board, College Academic Departments, College Council – will therefore have to take place.

Key Performance Targets

- To achieve the identification of the future roles of Stranmillis in the context outlined above, for example in relation to continuing professional development for teachers;
- to determine the applicability of the Vice-Chancellor's 'Vision' for QUB to Stranmillis;
- to review and revise the 2002 Agreement with QUB;
- to achieve a resolution of the QUB validation fee issue;
- to engage in some further restructuring of senior management, allied to succession planning.

Key Risks

- DEL/DE proposes a major re-alignment of pre and in-service teacher education in Northern Ireland which reduces the College's role to the extent that its future viability is in doubt;
- Incorporation has a negative rather than a positive impact on the College's financial position.
- The Vice-Chancellor's 'Vision' proves to be too demanding for Stranmillis, as a small, specialist institution.
- The University refuses to make any further financial concessions re validation and attempts to identify alternatives prove to be a dead-end.
- It proves impossible to fill new senior management posts, either by trawl or public advertisement.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO –
ENHANCEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS**

Objective

To develop further and enhance partnerships for all degree pathways with external institutions, organisations and professional groups.

Commentary

The development and enhancement of partnerships remains a key priority for the University College. In relation to teacher education, the reform process referred to above will have significant implications, particularly the proposals from the GTC (NI) for a revised set of teacher education competences and the reorganisation of CPD, which would result in an even more significant role for GTC (NI) itself. The ongoing Review of Public Administration (RPA) is also likely to produce significant changes in relation to curriculum and professional development and will alter the landscape, as far as partners and potential partners are concerned, both in the context of teacher education and also of health and social services. DE has also

recently reviewed Early Years education, a process which has produced some significant changes.

Key Performance Targets

- To strengthen existing relationships with the GTC NI);
- to enhance relationships with bodies such as Education and Library Boards, Health Trusts, the Regional Training Unit (RTU), Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association (NIPPA) and, in due course, with any successor bodies;
- to continue to make effective use of dedicated DE funding to engage in partnership work with schools, for example through annual partnership events;
- to review and, where necessary, to extend the roles and remits of existing pathway partnership consultative committees.

Key Risks

- The reform processes in relation to teacher education and to public administration generally create new tensions which make partnership development even more difficult.
- In particular, the danger that the proposed single body for curriculum support and staff development attempts to monopolise CPD activity for teachers, building on existing or projected expansion in this area by the RTU and CCEA.
- NIPPA continues to expand its activities in relation to Early Years training and this process is reinforced by further expansion of distance-learning opportunities by University College Worcester and by enhanced Early Years activity in the School of Education at QUB.
- The development of a part-time Foundation Degree in Exercise Science/ Leisure Studies by BIFHE and St Mary's University College reduces placement opportunities for BSc students and introduces an element of competition into the area of partnership development.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE –
ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED LINKS AND ACTIVITIES**

Objective

To develop further and enhance the University College's community-based links and activities.

Commentary

The University College has always had a significant role in the local community, above and beyond the provision of well-qualified professionals for occupational areas such as teaching, working with pre-school children and working in settings which promote health and fitness. It provides conference and recently refurbished theatre facilities for external clients, it works closely with the Open University in relation to the provision of a NI Study Centre, it has a unique relationship with its local primary school (Stranmillis Primary School), it has previously offered a community-based, part-time MA programme for those interested in the development of arts in the community (currently the subject of a major review), it has in recent years been developing a creative arts profile in partnership with the Arts Council (NI) and the Golden Thread Gallery and it has been hosting major curriculum development projects on behalf of the Ulster-Scots Agency (aimed both at school pupils and at adults interested in developing a linguistic proficiency in Ulster-Scots). These are all areas which the College would wish to sustain and develop further, provided there is a complementarity with the core business of Stranmillis in relation to learning and teaching and provided adequate funding is available to support such ventures. The widening access agenda will require the development of enhanced community-based links with bodies such as the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), the Chinese Welfare Association, Disability Action etc.

Key Performance Targets

- To encourage and enhance use of the College Theatre by external groups, for example amateur theatre groups, given the demise of the Group Theatre and by the Lyric Theatre during its re-building programme;
- to explore alternative uses for the Henry Garrett site and to develop options for consideration by the Governing Body – for example, the possible relocation to the site of Stranmillis Primary School;
- to explore future developments with regard to academic programmes in the areas of Health and Leisure Studies and of community arts, either independently or in partnership with QUB and to consolidate existing Creative Arts residency projects with the now confirmed part-funding from the Arts Council;
- to complete successfully for publication, possibly through the **Learning NI** electronic portal, the remaining curriculum materials under development for the Ulster-Scots Agency and also, through appropriate journals, the associated educational research studies. There is also the possibility of some extension to the language aspects of this work.

Key Risks

- Increased business for the refurbished College Theatre will fail to materialise, particularly since the College will wish to generate some income from lettings. A similar risk applies to the possible period of temporary use by the Lyric Theatre, especially because of perceived limitations re public access, limited facilities for public use of the theatre itself (e.g. access to toilets and bar facilities) and the Lyric Theatre management's wish to rotate productions around various venues.
- Because of possible site access and traffic issues, the Stranmillis Primary School option does not progress beyond the feasibility or economic appraisal stages – the project would require the de-listing and demolition of the existing Henry Garrett building, which will be fully vacated in the summer of 2007, once the new Orchard Building is complete.
- It proves impossible, given the constraint on staffing resources, and given potential competition in the area from QUB, to push forward a new academic initiative in the area of community arts.
- Funding and/ or other difficulties (e.g. withdrawal of limited Arts Council support or need for budget cuts) result in the closure of the Creative Arts residency project.
- Funding and staffing difficulties prevent or seriously delay the publication by the Ulster-Scots Agency of the remaining Ulster-Scots materials, as originally envisaged.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR –
ENHANCEMENT OF RESEARCH PROFILE**

Objective

To develop further and enhance the research profile of the University College.

Commentary

In recent years the University College has been progressively developing its research profile, with a possible view to entering the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008 in the area of Education. A significant investment from the funding associated with the Rewarding and Developing Staff (RDS) initiative has been made to improve the research infrastructure-provision of sabbatical leave, support for attendance at national and international conferences (especially for those presenting papers), support for those staff undertaking higher degrees, employment of additional research-active staff. All staff have been encouraged to bid for research grants, present progress reports as papers at regular lunchtime seminars and become involved in the joint supervision of post-graduate research students

with QUB colleagues. An interactive dialogue with the now defunct University Central Research Committee was helpful in identifying strategic research aims and in benchmarking progress. The College's HR Strategy and its Discretionary Payment and Promotion schemes have placed considerable emphasis on the achievement of published research outcomes. In consequence, a number of staff have potential RAE entries in terms of published outputs and for the first time in its history, the University College is significantly involved in supervising research students. It is, however, the case that some research-active staff have been, or will be, lost through resignation or retirement and some of the new appointees to replace them are currently more research-active than others.

No final strategic decision has yet been taken as to whether to proceed with an RAE entry. However, it is clear that there is scope for a further expansion of research activity, taking into account the emerging practical details of how the 2008 mechanisms in relation to Education will actually operate in relation to the three areas of measuring output, the assessment of the institutional research environment and the identification of measures of esteem. Such a further expansion will depend crucially on motivating staff to redouble their efforts and on providing the necessary support structures to assist with this. Consideration will also need to be given to the implications of the possible introduction by Government of a metrics-based approach to measuring the quality of research output post-2008.

Key Performance Targets

- To continue to build a supportive research infrastructure through instruments such as sabbatical leave and support for conference attendance;
- to revise and update associated policy documentation;
- to achieve a minimum RAE entry group of 10-15 staff, each with four strong publications.

Key Risks

- Loss of key staff through retirement or resignation.
- Insufficient staff respond to the challenge by the census deadline in 2007 in terms of output, either for morale and workload reasons or because of publication queues for significant journals.
- Insufficient funding available to sustain the research infrastructure.
- Standards set by Education sub-panel are too demanding, for example in relation to research infrastructure or measures of esteem.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FIVE –
PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES**

Objective

To continue to provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities on all degree pathways, including student placements and international outreach activities.

Commentary

The University College has taken pride over its long history in the quality of its teaching and learning, for which it has always enjoyed a high reputation. In recent years diversification away from the traditional core business of teacher education into areas such as Early Childhood Studies, Health and Leisure Studies and Arts in the Community has increased the challenges and the demands on staff, but these have been successfully met. The award by the QAA in 2001 of the maximum score of 24 points in the Specialist Subject Review of Education, the positive outcomes of two major ETI surveys of aspects of teacher education provision, the large number of staff achieving registered practitioner status with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the designation by DEL of a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the College, the positive outcomes for the College of the National Student Survey in 2005 and 2006 and the encouraging performance indicators for the College generated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in relation to student drop-out rates, and graduate employment, all provide benchmarked evidence of this. The College has also significantly expanded its placement opportunities in schools to cope with an increased number of initial teacher education (ITE) students (although these will in future decline in number) and developed new placement opportunities in pre-school settings, health promotion settings and the fitness and leisure industry for its non-ITE students. A vibrant international outreach strategy has also been pursued for all undergraduate pathways, resulting in placement opportunities under both the ERASMUS scheme and other local institutional initiatives in most EU countries, as well as the USA (school-based work placements and one-year Business Education Initiative (BEI) opportunities), South Africa, Zambia, Uganda and China. Reciprocal student exchange arrangements are of course in place, including the recently developed Irish American Scholars programme.

However, as in other areas of College activity, things do not stand still, particularly with regard to the amended ERASMUS scheme and further work will be required to consolidate existing outreach and placement arrangements, for example in the case of South China Normal University. Funding will also be available to support a new cross-border student

exchange project in 2006-07. In addition, it will be necessary to modify existing quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) arrangements to take account of the implications of the restructuring of the College's academic management structures and committee systems. A major review of the College's Library, Learning Support Services and IT Services was initiated in 2004-05. Work will continue on the implementation of the outcomes of this review in 2006-07. Guidance is awaited from QUB with regard to any replacement for the University Subject Review process.

Key Performance Targets

- To consolidate student outreach and placement opportunities, notably those in China in 2006-07 and to implement the new North-South exchange programme for which funding has been secured;
- to explore possible new provision in Health and Leisure Studies and community arts in 2006-07;
- to amend existing QA and QE arrangements in the light of College restructuring;
- to continue to implement the outcomes of the recent major review of the College's Library and Information Services.

Key Risks

- Reduction of student interest in international exchange opportunities, possibly linked to international terrorism or to specific incidents involving individual students or to a flu epidemic.
- Increasing difficulty in securing school and early years placements for students, because of legal and other liabilities for schools.
- University College staff find it difficult to accept the greater responsibilities in the areas of QA and QE, either because of lack of confidence or an insufficiently systematic approach.
- Implementation of the review of Library and Information Services proves to be problematic.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE SIX –
WIDENING ACCESS**

Objective

To recruit, sustain and support students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds.

Commentary

For some years now, the University College has been attempting, with some success, to recruit and support students from non-traditional backgrounds,

as far as higher education is concerned. Considerable progress has been made in relation to the recruitment of mature students through access routes and with the recruitment of students with a range of disabilities. However, a number of challenges remain. Recruitment of male students on to teacher education programmes remains somewhat disappointing, despite some affirmative action measures having been taken and the annual Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures indicate that the College is below its benchmark in relation to recruitment from social classes V to VII. Young Protestant males from these social classes in general appear to be less interested in higher education opportunities than should be the case. The number of students from local ethnic minority backgrounds at the College remains low, again a situation which is replicated at other NI institutions.

The College has, as required by Government policy, developed an Access Agreement (approved by DEL) which will take effect from 2006-07, alongside the introduction of the new, variable, deferred fees regime. Significant amounts of the additional income deriving from the maximum fee of £3000 p.a. which the University College has decided to charge for its full-time undergraduate and PGCE programmes will be devoted to bursaries, outreach initiatives and improvements to student support arrangements, including the establishment of a 'one-stop shop' Student Support Centre in what was formerly the College Health Centre. These are all intended to cushion any negative impact of the new fee arrangements on widening access and to target specific groups currently under-represented within the College's student body, as described above.

Hopefully, the Access Agreement will provide the framework to enable the College to take the widening access agenda forward during the planning period.

Key Performance Targets

- To open the new Student Support Centre, utilising dedicated DEL funding;
- to implement the College's Access Agreement in 2006-07 and in particular, the proposed bursary scheme and outreach initiatives, in consultation with appropriate community representatives;
- to introduce a new student support and widening access infrastructure, with dedicated staffing, led by a full-time Student Support Officer, supported by a Widening Access Promoter;
- to extend careers guidance arrangements to all undergraduate students (including teacher education students).

Key Risks

- The identified targets/ milestones in the Access Agreement will not be achieved (although the College will not be penalised for this, provided proposed initiatives have actually been undertaken) and certain groups will remain under-represented in what is a relatively small student body.
- Recruitment, particularly from under-represented groups, will be adversely affected by the new fees regime.
- The enhanced support mechanisms will prove inadequate in terms of preventing significant drop-out of students from under-represented groups.
- Certain students may experience a ‘chill factor’ in terms of their interaction with fellow students or even some staff members, although the issue is being addressed through staff development programmes.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE SEVEN –
INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Objective

To develop further the University College’s estate and technological infrastructure.

Commentary

Incorporation has transferred ownership from 1 October 2005 of the College’s estate from Government to its Governing Body. It has been widely recognised that for a significant period of time there has been an investment deficit as far as the College’s buildings are concerned. This has been compounded by the age of these buildings. However, in the last few years significant action has been taken to address the problems, insofar as capital project funding from DEL permitted. There has been considerable investment in the College’s IT systems and hardware provision, individual areas, such as the Library, IT Open Access Centres, the College Theatre and some teaching accommodation have been upgraded, major improvements have been made to the Refectory facilities and to the Halls of Residence and important fire safety and disabled access work has been undertaken in some, but not all, buildings. However, in the same period, part of one building (Henry Garrett Building) had to be permanently closed for health and safety reasons and emergency repairs undertaken to extend the life of the rest of it. Disability access work is outstanding in relation to the Central Building, and there is a need to replace the central heating system in the Halls of Residence. The project management capacity of the Estates Department has had to be enlarged to cope with the backlog of work.

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However, a number of positive developments are in the pipeline which will hopefully assist with these issues, for example, the opening of the new Student Support Centre in September 2006, the erection of a new building (funded by DEL) on the Orchard site to house Physical Education, Health and Leisure Studies, Art and Design and Technology and Design (to be completed by September 2007)). An upgrade of conference facilities in the Halls of Residence complex has been completed and disability access and fire safety work in the Central Building will be undertaken in 2006-07. A phased approach to the installation of decentralised gas heating systems in the Halls of Residence is being funded by DEL. Crucially, the new Financial Memorandum will result in an annual capital funding stream to support the implementation of a long-term maintenance plan. Updating of IT facilities is ongoing.

Key Performance Targets

- To progress the new Orchard Building for completion in 2007;
- to complete fire and safety and disability access works in the Central Building in 2006-07;
- to continue to upgrade Halls of Residence student accommodation, including the phased replacement of the heating by a decentralised gas system by autumn 2007;
- to undertake planned maintenance work in Main Building;
- to resolve the issue of the long-term future of the Henry Garrett Building (see Strategic Objective 3 above);
- to continue to upgrade teaching accommodation, particularly in relation to the use of new technology;
- to provide appropriate, redecorated accommodation to give physical shape to the new academic departmental structures.

Key Risks

- Completion of new Orchard Building is delayed because of construction problems.
- Project management problems, given the small size of the organisation.
- Unanticipated problems with existing buildings develop.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EIGHT – DEVELOPING AND REWARDING STAFF

Objective

To develop and reward all categories of University College staff.

Commentary

All HEIs throughout the UK have been working on the implementation by August 2006, or as soon as possible thereafter, at institutional level of the far-reaching National Framework Agreement on reward structures and harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment for all categories of staff. Significant investment in staff development, related to the College's strategic objectives, such as research, has been funded in recent years from both rounds of the DEL Rewarding and Developing Staff (RDS) initiative. Funding has also been put into new academic promotions and discretionary payment schemes for teaching staff and rewarding outstanding teaching performance, as well as the implementation of a job evaluation scheme for support staff and the employment of additional staff.

These activities will be taken forward throughout the planning period, in partnership with the recognised trade unions (for example through the College Forum for the Framework Agreement). A revised HR Strategy will be introduced for the period 2006-08, all staff will be subject to role analysis utilising the HERA Scheme, new salary structures will be agreed and introduced, appraisal will be extended to support staff and a comprehensive programme of staff development, partly linked to appraisal, will be delivered. Some additional funding will become available through the new fees regime from 2006-07.

Key Performance Targets

- To develop and implement a new HR Strategy for 2006-08;
- to complete the implementation of the National Framework Agreement and to agree and introduce in 2006-07 a revised set of salary structures for all staff, in parallel with the application of role analysis to all staff;
- to extend appraisal to all staff;
- to provide appropriate programmes of staff development to cater for both individual and institutional needs, for example in relation to e-learning and disability issues and revised policies on dignity at work, absence management and performance management;
- to continue to provide research support, for example for presentation of conference papers and through sabbatical leave, and to reward outstanding teaching through an awards scheme;
- to take account of the findings from the recently conducted Organisational Effectiveness Survey and the Good Relations Audit.

Key Risks

- Insufficient funding is available for this area of activity, particularly because of other demands on the increased income from student fees and given the cost of agreed national salary increases.
- Agreement with recognised trade unions on new salary structures is delayed or not achieved.
- The implementation of the various work streams associated with the National Framework Agreement proves very demanding for a small organisation and further delays inevitably result.
- The roll-out of extended appraisal proves problematic.
- The roll-out of other HR initiatives is hampered by the sheer volume of routine HR work.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE NINE –
BUSINESS GROWTH**

Objective

To provide growth in relation to the University College's various activities in the context of incorporation and particularly to explore the expansion of part-time and international student numbers and of conference business.

Commentary

As previously noted, the College became an incorporated higher education institution on 1 October 2005. This provides an additional incentive to develop and expand income generating activity of various kinds, given the financial responsibility which now devolves to the Governing Body. In particular, given the cap imposed by Government on full-time, domestic student numbers, consideration needs to be given as to how part-time numbers might be expanded and as to whether there is scope for recruitment of fee-paying, overseas students, despite the localised nature of some of the College's programmes, e.g. aspects of undergraduate teacher education. However, the difficulties relating to the highly competitive international market, especially for small institutions with no track record in this area, should not be minimised.

The conference business area is a very promising one, especially given the upgrade of Nendrum Hall to create 40 en-suite bedrooms and the related refurbishment of a dedicated conference centre, adjacent to all necessary facilities. It should be possible to promote this integrated package effectively.

Key Performance Targets

- To explore new initiatives to recruit additional, domestic, part-time students, for example through the MA (Early Childhood Studies) and the M.Teach and through enhanced involvement in CPD work and to recruit full-time international students;
- to expand residential conference activity by twenty-per-cent over the planning period in the contest of a new marketing strategy.

Key Risks

- Recruitment of additional domestic, part-time students fails to materialise.
- Government fails to progress new CPD arrangements for teachers or fails to give HEIs an expanded role.
- International student recruitment generates additional marketing costs with very little result, because of competition from other larger institutions and/ or the specialised nature of what the College has to offer and/or the lack of an international student infrastructure in the College.
- Because of competition from other providers, e.g. the increasing number of hotels and PFI operators in schools and FE institutions, the conference business does not expand beyond its current level or even declines somewhat.
- Student occupancy of Halls continues to decline because of the increased costs of higher education study and changes to the structure of the College's academic year.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TEN –
E-LEARNING**

Objective

To provide leadership and support in developing e-learning capability.

Commentary

E-learning will assume even greater importance than currently in the planning period, as the use of wireless technology and electronic whiteboards increases, and as the use of learning portals in both higher education (e.g. Queen's On-line to which College staff have access) and in schools (Learning NI) increases. The University College cannot afford to be left behind, as it seeks to sustain its traditional reputation for high-quality learning and teaching, as it expands its M.Teach programme which is partly delivered through electronic means, and as it develops its Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (funded by DEL), which is

focused on the use of virtual classrooms and virtual learning objects in the context of preparing teachers and Early Years practitioners. This is an innovative but highly experimental initiative. Full access by teacher education students to the C2K primary and post-primary networks and to the Learning NI portal is in place. A phased programme of upgrading electronic teaching facilities, e.g. through the introduction of whiteboards, is ongoing.

Key Performance Targets

- To implement the College's E-learning and IT Strategies for the planning period;
- to extend the use of Queen's On-Line as a teaching and learning medium;
- to consolidate the part-time M.Teach pathway, which is partly delivered electronically;
- to achieve the milestones of the CETL over the five-year DEL funding period;
- to extend access to the College's IT network through the use of wireless technology, for example in relation to the Halls of Residence;
- to complete the phased programme of upgrading electronic teaching facilities.

Key Risks

- Systems failures due to viruses etc.
- Funding shortfall with regard to upgrading facilities.
- CETL's work runs into difficulties because of technical problems, methodological problems or reluctance of schools and/ or pupils to participate. It is also heavily dependent on the efforts of two key individuals, plus their line manager and could therefore be vulnerable to illness, resignation etc, which at the very least could cause delays in achieving milestones.