



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

bulletin

staff

Issue 5, June 2021



Achieving in a year of
challenges
Investing for the Future

Community Engagement
Planning for 2021
Health and Wellbeing

Best small Students' Union
University of Year nomination
1st for student satisfaction

A Year Like No Other

As we come to the end of a very challenging year, I would like to thank and congratulate you all on what we have achieved.

Throughout, and despite, the many restrictions and difficulties the pandemic has thrown at us, we have continued to invest in our people and in our campus, and

we have continued to innovate and deliver. Our student retention and success rates remain high and are a reflection of the dedicated efforts of our staff, who continue to deliver high quality, scholarship-led teaching and outstanding student support. Coming 1st in Northern Ireland and

6th in the UK in the recent National Student Survey and making it into the final four nominations for the Edufuturist University of the Year Award are public endorsements of the College's pursuit of excellence.

In 2020-21, we were forced to rely heavily on digital technology to ensure business continuity. We are grateful to the enormous efforts of our Digital and IT Services and Marketing teams who ensured the College continued to communicate effectively with our internal and external stakeholders and maintain a vibrant profile as we tried to navigate the Covid-19 world.

The end of this academic year marks the completion of our 2018-21 Corporate Plan and we can look back on the successful delivery of the key objectives as outlined in



Investing in our People

The wellbeing of our staff and students lies at the heart of our mission. Over the past year, one of our strategic priorities has been to maintain the highest quality of teaching experience and student support. Being student focused - nurturing, developing and maximising the potential of every student - is one of our guiding values. During a time of challenge and uncertainty, that priority and core value has ensured that our students succeeded, felt valued and have been supported at all times.

The latest National Student Survey, carried out during the pandemic, ranks the College 1st in Northern Ireland and 6th in the UK for student satisfaction. We have also maintained our outstanding levels of

student retention (97%) and student success (97%). These achievements have only been possible as a result of your hard work, professionalism and unfailing commitment to our students. With restrictions on f2f interviews, over 1100 virtual interviews were conducted to ensure that a new cohort of students will walk through the College gates in September. I applaud all those involved in the process, with a special mention to the Registry team.

Our Halls of Residence were severely disrupted by the lockdowns. Despite this our Halls team has done an outstanding job looking after those students who remained on campus. The fact that our Halls are already full for the next year is testament to how well students felt cared for and safe while living on campus.

this Bulletin. These are impressive achievements the College can be proud of. Staff and students have felt the loss of community and face-to-face contact this year. We all look forward to meeting up in the near future for a coffee and chat. Hopefully, the 2021-22 year will bring us back to a 'near normal' experience of College life.

At the end of July, I will have completed 14 years as Principal. It has

been a great honour to serve and lead the College. Like all journeys, there have been some challenges but my abiding memory will be one of joy and gratitude. Thank you for all your support and encouragement over the years. It was a great journey shared with great people! I wish you all a restful summer and every success for the new academic year.

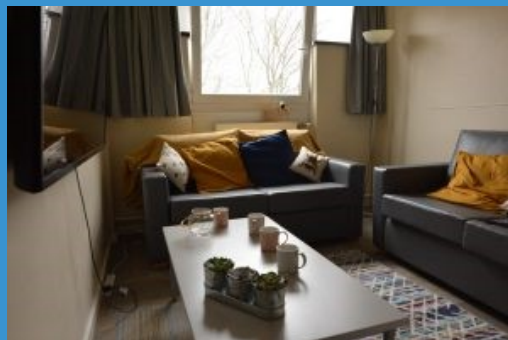
Professor Anne Heaslett
Principal

Investing in Campus Infrastructure

One positive outcome of the pandemic has been the College's ability to attract Covid-19 Contingency Funding, which has allowed us to invest over £500,000 in upgrading Halls, enabling us to create new social spaces in every flat, upgrade kitchen facilities and refurbish Nendrum Hall.

We have also invested £1.5m on other campus projects such as the demolition of College Hall, Health and Safety Improvement Works and a robust IT and Digital Services provision, which has been critical to our success during lockdown. £643k was invested

to progress the University College's IT and Digital Services strategy including improved campus Wi-Fi, a new Learning Management System and Teaching and Learning equipment for staff and students. This has brought immense benefits, with easier and more immediate access for staff and students.



Investing in Innovation and Development

Covid-19 did not prevent us from making significant progress in developing and expanding our portfolio of blended learning modules and courses. As a result, new Masters' enrolments increased by 60% and income from our Professional Development programme increased hugely. This excellent performance reflects the demand for innovative online programmes and provides a significant opportunity for future growth in this vital area. Our students also contributed to innovative curriculum development by producing online teaching resources for use in schools and at home.

The College has also strengthened its research profile, with, during the last planning cycle, over 200 research and scholarship outputs across a range of key areas, including the Report of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement, chaired by Dr Noel Purdy. The work of our Centre for Research into Educational Underachievement has accelerated and is now making a major impact in this critical area.

Investing in the Future

As a result of careful management and our Finance Team securing significant Covid-19 grants, despite the significant financial challenges, we will achieve a positive bottom line. This is to be celebrated and means that as we emerge from the global pandemic, we will be able to continue to invest in the College's

future as outlined in the Corporate Plan for the Transition Year 2021-22. Another cause for celebration is the College receiving Planning Approval to proceed with the refurbishment of the College's All-Weather Pitches. Our consultants, McAdam Design, are now working on the final design.

Widening Participation and Social Responsibility

Supporting Access to HE, and having a strong programme of WP events, is a vital element of our Community Engagement strategy. From coding workshops for children to health and wellbeing events, supporting families



and communities in disadvantaged areas to forging partnerships with Fostering Network, Volunteer Now and the FE Colleges, the College is committed to making a difference and building better futures for all. During the pandemic, the creation of online teaching and learning resources by our Student WP Ambassadors and the delivery, free of charge, of online and blended learning professional development courses to over 1,000 teachers and education professionals further demonstrates our commitment to supporting the whole of the sector.

Planning for Academic Year 2021-22 and the Opening Up of Our Campus

The planning for 2021-22 continues on the assumption that there will be a return to near normal conditions from the start of the new academic year. The focus for the 2021-22 year must be on re-engagement with staff and students in order to reconnect with the vibrant campus community we have all missed so much.

The principles guiding our planning, taking all current and future government guidelines into account, will continue to be the:

- health, welfare and safety of our College community
- continued provision of a high-quality learning and teaching



experience for all students, and the maintenance of quality standards

- continued provision of a high-quality, broad all-round educational experience for all students
- us working in collaboration with other Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to present a bid to government for a financial package to fund a robust Student Re-engagement Strategy to support students.

Health and Wellbeing

Feeling Good App

The Feeling Good App, which is free to access for staff and students, is an award winning app providing access to a range of content which teaches you how to calm the mind and develop a positive mindset, enabling greater emotional resilience to deal more effectively with challenges of life. Over 100 staff and students have already downloaded the app and we have received very positive feedback on it. One user noted 'I have found it very difficult to find

an app to help me self manage my emotions and moods as this year has been financially tough. I am so grateful you have made this available."



Mental Health First Aid

We are currently running Mental Health First Aid Training for 15 staff from across the College with a view to having a network of trained volunteers who can support colleagues and students and sign post them to appropriate professional support. Feedback from participants to date has been very encouraging. Further details of volunteers and the programme will be made available once training has been completed.

Flu Vaccine

This year we offered a flu vaccine free of charge to all members of staff, with 62 availing of the opportunity to have the vaccine. We were lucky to have placed an early order for the flu vaccine which was in short supply!

Back Health

As many of us have not been working at our normal workstations, it is more important than ever that we take care of our back health. We appointed a

physiotherapist to provide staff with a further opportunity to attend an online Back Health Awareness session.

Inspire Support Hub

All staff now have access to a range of free online resources via the Inspire Support Hub. The Hub comprises various resources, including self-help programmes and digital intervention tools, digital counselling tools and a wellbeing information library.



If you need further information on any of our health and wellbeing services, please get in contact with our Human Resources team at hr@stran.ac.uk.

News in Brief

Research in Hyperdrive

Over the past few months, our Research Office has been going all guns blazing. As well as successfully submitting our submission for REF2021, the team has published a number of important and high profile research reports including the report of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement (A Fair Start), School-based Support for Syrian Refugee Pupils in Northern Ireland, Homeschooling during the Covid-19 Crisis, Safer Borrowing (an Evaluation of the Impact of Financial Literacy in Schools) and Play in Practice and during the Pandemic.

Congratulations to Dr Noel Purdy, Dr John McMullen, Celia O'Hagan, Dr Glenda Walsh, and all those involved in the REF submission, for continuing to deliver on our commitment to shaping education and changing lives.



Congratulations to Jonny

Jonathan Reid, our outgoing Student President, and his Student Executive, did an exceptional job supporting students and helping to maintain a sense of college community under the most trying of circumstances. We wish in-coming President, Meabh Magee, and her Executive every success for 2021-22.



Dissertation Survivors!

Well done Class of 2021. The Library team offers their congratulations to the 2021 **#dissertationsurvivors!** "You've worked hard, adapted to so much (including using the library remotely) and now it's time to celebrate! **#loveyourlibrary**

College History: QUB Archaeological Excavation Project

The College is working with QUB Department of Archaeology and Palaeoecology this summer to facilitate undergraduate training with excavation work on the campus. The campus has many areas of archaeological interest. The excavations, supervised by Dr Colm Donnelly and field archaeologists (Ruairi O Baoill, Brian Sloan and Ruth Logue) from the Centre for Community Archaeology (CCA) will focus on: the "farmyard", which may be a "lost" early 17th century fortified house and defended farmstead; the lawn outside Stran House which records suggest was an Early Medieval ringfort; and a rather curious linear building to the western boundary of the estate shown on a map from the 1830s. We will keep you posted on their findings.

Halls are Full!

At this time of year we would normally have around 50 bookings for our Halls for next year, with the vast majority of bookings coming in once A-level results are out and students start looking for accommodation. For next year our Halls are already oversubscribed - a big shout-out for Halls!

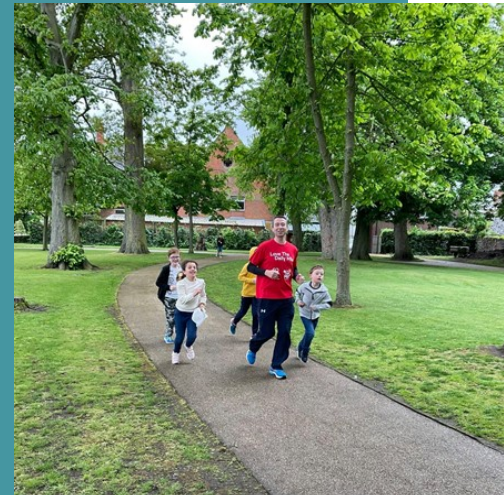
#Why We Care!

The College was delighted to be able to support the recent #WhyWeCare Foster Care Fortnight campaign. Ensuring that every care experienced young person has the same opportunities to access Higher Education as their peers is one of the pillars of our Widening Access and Participation strategy.



NI Does Daily Mile

On Friday 28th May, 392 schools took part in NI Does the Daily Mile, with primary and nursery schools across Northern Ireland running their Daily Mile together (virtually) to raise awareness of children's mental health and wellbeing. Congratulations to Brenda McKay-Redmond and the team behind the Daily Mile.



EduFuturists

The College is delighted to have been shortlisted as one of the four finalists for the Edufuturists University of the Year Awards. The College was nominated by Seaview Primary School Principal, Mrs Latham. *"I nominated the excellent work of the university research and the amazing digital support that was provided during lockdown. Honestly you have all been amazing throughout lockdown and during the pandemic times and I just wanted to highlight the wonderful work you are all doing. So tell your friends and get voting!!! Let's shine a spotlight on positive Covid-19 moments."*



Working Together, Achieving Together

As we come to the end of the 2018-21 Corporate Plan, it is with great pride that we can look back and reflect on some of the many achievements we have made collectively as a team over the past 3 years - staff, students, management and board all working with a clear focus to meet and exceed challenging targets, even with a global pandemic thrown in to the mix!

KEY OUTCOMES 2018-2021

UCAS
335 AVERAGE
ENTRY TARIFF
(2018 - 325 AVERAGE)



Successful QAA
Assessments
and
Established
Provider status



NO. 1

for Student Satisfaction
in Northern Ireland
and 6th in UK



ECO CAMPUS
STATUS
AWARDED

97%
STUDENT
RETENTION RATE

97%
STUDENT
SUCCESS RATE

£3.7M

CAMPUS INVESTMENT

£413K

2018
£288K

Postgraduate &
Professional
Development
fees

208
RESEARCH
OUTPUTS



Centre for
Research in
Educational
Underachievement

Established in 2018

71%

ACADEMIC STAFF
WITH DOCTORATES
(2018 - 63%)

Stran SU Takes Top Spot



For Students' Union President, Jonny Reid, and his Student Executive, this year has certainly been a year like no other - a year of constant challenges when, probably more than ever, creativity, innovative thinking and sheer hard work were needed to ensure that the Stran community stayed together and supported each other.

Their success was recognised by the Union of Students in Ireland and NUS when the team won Small SU team of the year in the [#SAAI21](#) awards for the second year in a row.

