

S T RA N M I L L I S U N I V E R S I T Y C O L L E G E A College of Queen's University Belfast

CORPORATE PLAN FOR THE TRANSITION YEAR 2021-22



Approved By the Governing Body 22 June 2021

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Foreword

In October 2022, Stranmillis University College will be approaching a significant milestone its centenary. At the end of the College's 2018-21 planning cycle, it finds itself emerging from a major global pandemic that has disrupted life globally. During the latter, it would appear that the disruption faced by the College during the 2nd World War, arguably pales into insignificance. However, despite the COVID-19 challenges encountered, the College has continued to deliver for students.

It has not only continued to meet the needs of undergraduate students but the wider groups of educational professionals by providing professional development courses to support those working under particularly challenging circumstances. At the end of the 2018-21 planning cycle, and despite COVID-19, the College can record a number 1 position in Northern Ireland for student satisfaction and an increase in its CPD and Master's enrolments. An excellent REF submission has been completed and the work of the Centre for Research into Educational Underachievement is expanding.

This Corporate Plan, which has been developed in consultation with our staff, approved by the Governing Body, begins with a 'Transitional Year. The 2021-22 academic year will see the appointment of a new Principal at Stranmillis University College as it hopefully emerges into the post-pandemic world. The 'Transition Plan' will continue to focus on key priorities such as the expansion of part-time postgraduate enrolments and developing a robust Reengagement Strategy for students as they return to campus teaching, as well as taking account of the strategic framework set out in the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document published in January 2021 and key policy documents such as the 'Learning Leaders – A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning'.

Stranmillis remains steadfast in its commitment to nurturing a student-centred learning environment. Students from all backgrounds and faiths are encouraged to engage in critical enquiry and academic challenge. This is achieved through the provision of teaching which is informed by scholarship and research, as in the words of our motto:

Docendo Discimus: 'Through teaching we learn'

The College will focus on implementing a comprehensive Student Re-engagement strategy as we anticipate the return to on campus learning in September 2021. It will continue to build on the best practice experience of using a blended learning approach particularly in relation to postgraduate programmes. The College's community and international engagement strategies will continue to be developed and expanded in order to enrich the Stranmillis learning community and widen the horizons of staff and students.

As a Non-Departmental Public Body and a University College of Queen's University (QUB), the College continues to aspire to a positive relationship with all its stakeholders, including amongst others, the Department for the Economy (DfE) as its Sponsor Department, the Department of Education (DE), schools and international partners, all of which are critical in supporting the College to achieve its strategic objectives.

The College, like all other higher education institutions, faces a number of challenges in an environment where there is a great deal of uncertainty around the continuing management of the pandemic and the unprecedented downward pressure on budgets. It is committed to working collaboratively with the higher education and further education sectors to provide a

vibrant integrated learning environment for students and to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

Notwithstanding these challenges of the post-pandemic world, we seek to pursue a vision which aims to have a positive impact on the local community and beyond through shared learning and resources. We believe that education can have a transformative power in the lives of individuals and communities, helping to shape people's lives and their future prosperity.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea Chair of the Governing Body Professor Anne Heaslett Principal

1. Introduction

The College completes the planning cycle for 2018-2021 in unprecedented circumstances, shaped by a global pandemic; something that was never envisaged when the 2018-2021 Corporate Plan was put in place. The College used the Business Continuity Planning strategy to address the many challenges presented as a direct result of the pandemic. This enabled the College to focus on its core mission and to continue to progress the strategic objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2018-2021. The success in delivering on those objectives can be clearly seen in the Key Performance Outcomes highlighted below.

Student Focus

Over the past 18 months, the College's key focus has been the wellbeing of students and staff. In the Corporate Plan, one of the strategic priorities was to "deliver high quality teaching and learning" - providing our students with the best teaching experience and the appropriate student support to enable them to successfully progress in their course. One of our driving College values is to be student focussed - nurturing, developing and maximising the potential of every student. During an unprecedented time of challenge and uncertainty, that strategic priority and core value, together with a vigilance in monitoring and responding to student support and teaching and learning issues has ensured that our students succeed, feel valued and are supported at all times. In the last National Student Survey, carried out during the pandemic, Stranmillis University College was ranked the 1st in Northern Ireland and 6th in the whole of the UK for student satisfaction and, throughout the pandemic, the College has maintained its outstanding levels of student retention (98%) and student success (95%).

A number of other strategic priorities were progressed during the 2018-21 planning cycle were critical in ensuring that the College had the capacity and resources to remain focused on its core mission while responding to the restrictions associated with the pandemic. These included:

Established Provider Status

The College started the 2018-21 planning outcome by celebrating the achievement of Established Provider Status as a result of the **Quality Review Visit (QRV)** conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency from 20 to 22 February 2018. The final report was published in August 2018 and indicated that the College had achieved the highest level of outcome, namely:

There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.

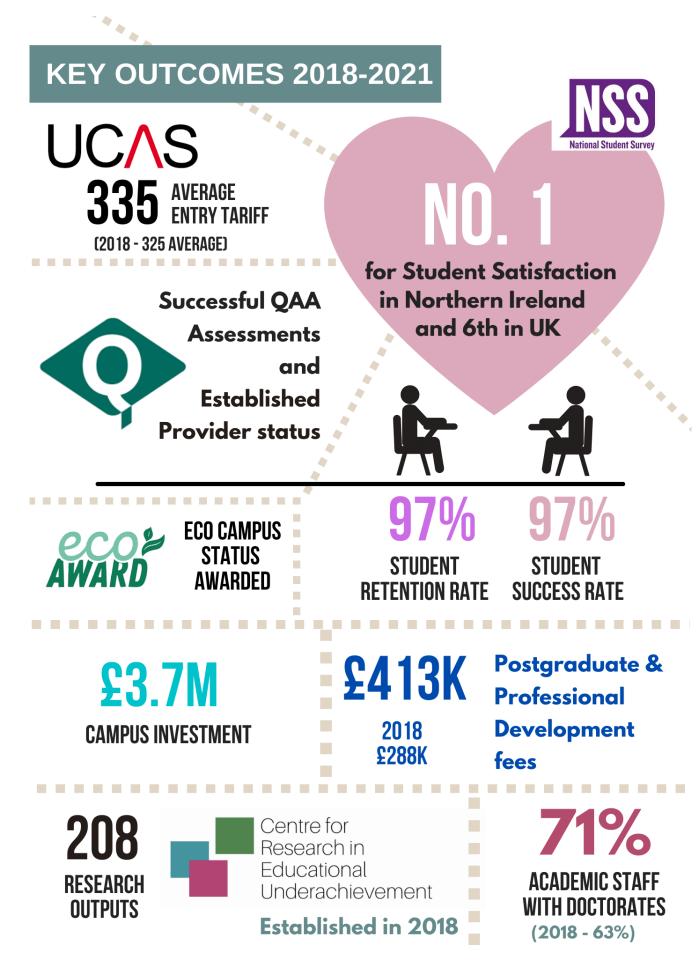
Investment in the Technological Infrastructure

A crucial part of the College's response to the pandemic was the effective use of new technologies to deliver high quality teaching and learning, be able to conduct online interviews for student recruitment and deliver a range of virtual events, such as International

Days and Open Days. Although international student and staff mobility was negatively impacted because of Covid-19 international travel restrictions, the College offered modules through remote learning to international students and maintained contact with our international partners. Successful virtual international events were hosted for staff in November 2020 and students in March 2021.

During the planning cycle, there was an investment of £643k to progress the University College's IT and Digital Services strategy. Equipment purchases included an IT Infrastructure Upgrade Project to improve campus Wi-Fi and enhancements to IT Security, a new Learning Management System and Teaching and Learning equipment for staff and students. The new Virtual Learning Environment (Canvas), which was made operational in 2019, has brought immense benefits to the teaching and learning in College, with easier and more immediate access for staff and students and much more flexibility with regards to creating and setting access for students undertaking professional development and postgraduate programmes, programmes that over the past 18 months could not have been maintained without the new VLE being in place. This investment has ensured that the College has access to the tools required for the development and delivery of high-quality blended and online learning opportunities.

The University College continues to invest in the development and implementation of a bespoke Placement Management system. When this is fully operational, it will enable the College to develop a more innovative Student Placement Strategy which supports the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning. The investment in a new Timetabling system has also improved communication and the sharing of information with students and staff.



Innovative Curriculum Development

The College has made significant progress in developing and expanding its portfolio of blended learning modules and courses. This is reflected in the 60% increase in new Masters' enrolments and the substantial increase in income earned from our Professional Development programme. This excellent performance reflects the demand for online professional development and Masters and provides a significant opportunity for the College to continue to grow this vital area through the development of a broader professional development portfolio, especially courses that can support pull through to Masters through Recognition of Prior Learning. The procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning is an important strategic development.

Research & Scholarship

Despite the current restrictions, the College has made a successful REF 2021 submission. The College has also strengthened its research profile and during this planning cycle has delivered over 200 research and scholarship outputs across a range of key areas of educational practice. In particular, the work of the Centre for Research into Educational Underachievement has accelerated and is now making a major impact in this critical area.

Widening Participation/Social Responsibility

Supporting access to higher education and delivering a strong portfolio of widening participation events, activities and programmes is a vital pillar of the College's Community Engagement strategy. From coding workshops for children to health and wellbeing events, support for families and communities in disadvantaged areas to partnerships with the likes of 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 and delivery of innovative online teaching and learning resources by our team of Student WP Ambassadors and the delivery, free of charge, of online and blended learning professional development courses to over 1,000 teachers and education further reflects that wider commitment to supporting the whole of the sector.

Investment in the Campus Infrastructure

During the pandemic lockdown, the College has continued to proactively take forward its Estates Strategy. During lockdown there has been in the region of £1.5m investment on campus. This included the Demolition of College Hall and over £500k of Campus Health and Safety Improvement Works. The pandemic also provided the College with the opportunity to bid for Covid-19 additional funding. As a result, over £500k of refurbishment work has been carried out on our Halls of Residence.

The Hospitality, Accommodation & Conferencing Services (HACS) Department has been adversely impacted, with Halls occupancy disrupted by the frequent rent pauses offered to students to support student health and wellbeing and conferencing activity decimated by the pandemic. However, a positive outcome of the pandemic has been the College's ability to attract Covid-19 Contingency Funding, which has enabled the College to upgrade Halls to ensure they are fit for purpose in an era of social distancing. This has resulted in the

refurbishment of Nendrum Hall, upgrades and new equipment to kitchens and the creation of new social spaces in every flat. These improvements are also an important response to issues raised in recent student surveys and are clearly going to enhance the student experience on campus.

Conclusion

The pandemic has both challenged and transformed how we do things. The move to a blended learning approach has been remarkable. Academic and professional support staff are to be commended for their exceptional professionalism in responding to the challenges of providing high quality teaching and learning and student support during these unprecedented times. Under the stressful conditions associated with lockdown, staff demonstrated not only their continued commitment to the College and its students but also to innovative professional practice which has been acknowledged by independent third parties such as External Examiners and University Co-ordinators. To maintain and deliver high quality learning under such circumstances is a great accolade to the College's dedication to the delivery of its Mission. It is a reminder of the steadfast professional pathway it has carved out over the past 100 years.

Planning Context

2.1 A Challenging Environment

As outlined in the Foreword, the Corporate Plan Transition Year 2021-2022 has been prepared for a single year to take account of the emergence from a global pandemic and the appointment of a new Principal.

Notwithstanding these challenges, and as the College has demonstrated throughout the

pandemic, Stranmillis remains committed to being a teaching-led, scholarship-based and research active institution. Through teaching and scholarship, the College seeks to pursue a vision which aims to have a positive impact on the local community and beyond through shared learning and resources. The College's teaching and learning expertise, which is built on and informs scholarship and research, is demonstrated by academic leadership (internally and externally) and is enhanced and strengthened by community engagement.



2.2 Small, Specialist Higher Education Institutions

Small Specialist Institutions have been recognised for the valuable role they play and, as documented in the **QAA Report (2013)**, their focus is on practical professional skills alongside academic practice.

The vocational nature of their programmes mean that such institutions tend to have strong engagement with the professions they represent and are equipped to deliver excellent teaching, encouraging student engagement and producing high employability rates.

Scholarship and research are also important features, and strong links with the educational community help to ensure that scholarship and research have a clear impact on professional practice.

Evidence points to the positive and transformational impact specialist institutions have on local development, with a greater level of engagement with communities and experience of shaping inter-departmental policy.

Stranmillis shares the characteristics of best practice described in the QAA report, and the College's Mission. Vision and Values align with how a smaller, specialised institution should be positioning itself.

2.3 A Joined-up Approach

Despite the uncertainties that exists at present, there are a number of major strategic developments that have impacted on the College and helped shape the **Corporate Plan for Transition Year 2021-22** including: 'Learning Leaders - A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning'; Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document published in January 2021; and the seven strategic objectives set out by the Department for the Economy, which are outlined below.

Department's Strategic Objectives

- 1. Accelerate innovation and research
- 2. Enhance education, skills and employability
- 3. Drive inclusive, sustainable growth
- 4. Succeed in global markets
- 5. Build the best economic infrastructure
- 6. Deliver a regulatory environment that optimizes economic opportunities for business and commerce, while also protecting consumers and workers
- 7. Ensure the Department has effective governance and manages its resources, both financial and staff

In line with our vision for 'Leading innovative professional practice', the College provides an infrastructure to build capacity in the area of project implementation, undergraduate and postgraduate work, professional development and research within the field of educational disadvantage and underachievement. Research in critical areas of education such as educational disadvantage and underachievement, cyberbullying, playful learning, early childhood, outdoor learning, special educational needs are essential if we are to lead innovative professional practice. The College's 2021 REF submission demonstrates its expertise in these important areas.

The College launched a Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement on 6th June 2018. The Centre is engaging in a focused portfolio of innovative interdisciplinary research and scholarly initiatives focusing on educational underachievement in Northern Ireland and beyond, working to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature of educational underachievement and providing an evidence-base to inform future policy and practice. The Centre is closely aligned to the College's WP strategy.

The College's core mission is closely aligned with the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document published in January 2021. It is particularly well placed to make a significant contribution to ensuring that we achieve the following outcomes:

- Our children and young people have the best start in life.
- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.
- Everyone can reach their potential.
- Everyone feels safe we all respect the law and each other.
- We live and work sustainably protecting the environment.
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives.

Strategic Objectives

The College's planning and resource allocation during the period of this Transition Corporate Plan will be shaped by the following strategic objectives.

Key Stranmillis University College Strategic Objectives

- 1. Recruit and retain the right calibre of students who are committed to a professional career in an education related field, with a focused approach on promoting widening access, including those currently underrepresented in Higher Education.
- 2. Deliver a transformational learning experience which enhances education, skills and employability.
- 3. Create a vibrant scholarship and research culture.
- 4. Deliver an international strategy which reflects the global perspective and enriches the student and staff experience.
- 5. Create a high quality teaching and learning environment which embraces the principles of sustainability, including the non-built environment.
- 6. Optimises the opportunities for developing income generation strategies, while also protecting consumers and workers.

1. The College's Mission

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." (Nelson Mandela)

Education can have a transformative power in the lives of children, young people and communities, helping to shape lives, maximise potential and build future prosperity. Since it was established as a non-denominational College for both men and women in 1922, the College's compelling Mission has been:

"Transforming the lives of children, young people and communities, through excellence in teaching, scholarship and research."

This Mission can only be realised through a shared vision and a strong collaborative and partnership approach by all those involved in delivering the highest quality education system - public, private and voluntary sectors as well as government itself. It is only through this collective effort that, society can begin to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation. Community engagement and building collaborative partnerships lie at the heart of the College's forward planning and are critical to its success.

2. The College's Vision and Values

In line with the Draft Programme for Government, and to realise its Mission, the College recognises that all stakeholders need to work in partnership to:

- Improve the quality of education;
- Improve educational outcomes; and
- Reduce educational inequality.

The College's Vision is to be the **best specialist higher education institution in the field** of teacher education and related professions; driving and leading innovative professional practice that will:

- Shape education
- Unlock potential
- Build better futures for all
- Connect globally

The College's Core Values provide the foundation for the successful achievement of our Mission, Vision and the Strategic Objectives and provide consistency and a strong sense of common purpose.

The College:

- * is student-focused: nurturing, developing and maximising the potential of every student.
- pursues excellence: demonstrating leadership in teaching, scholarship, research and professional practice.
- champions collaboration: creating effective partnerships locally, nationally and internationally.
- promotes social responsibility and respect: listening to and working with colleagues and the wider College community.
- promotes entrepreneurship: delivering innovative programmes and projects, growing income generation and promoting good governance.

3. Strategic Aims

The College's focus in the 2021-2022 transition year must be on the full continuum of teacher education and related professional fields, including the professional support services which underpin this work. The College's aim will be to:

- deliver high-quality teaching and learning that is informed by scholarship and research, promotes critical enquiry and is recognised at regional, national and international level;
- attract and retain the students who are best suited to the undergraduate programmes and the needs of the sector as a whole, and improve accessibility, particularly for those currently under-represented in Higher Education;
- enable all learners, from entry to employment, to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate and timely support services;
- focus scholarship and research to help inform teaching, shape policy, change practice and inform debate;

- develop and sustain collaborative partnerships, locally, nationally and internationally which promote the concept of learning communities and sharing resources;
- embed the concept of lifelong learning through the promotion of professional development at all levels;
- attract, retain and develop high calibre staff;
- create a safe and attractive working environment to support the College community;
- maximise income generation to ensure financial sustainability;
- improve communication to demonstrate impact to both internal and external stakeholders.

4. Summary of Strategic Priorities 2021-2022

During the 2021-2022 transition year, the focus will be on the following key strategic priorities.

Deliver high-quality teaching and learning

- Improve the alignment of our Teaching & Learning and Research & Scholarship strategies to achieve greater synergy and innovative learning opportunities
- Successful completion of the validation of a part-time Doctorate in Professional Practice
- Expand the portfolio of blended learning programmes and opportunities
- Facilitate progression, including the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), from Professional Development short courses to Masters to Doctorate level work
- Promote the Intergenerational Learning Strategy

Attract and retain students

- Recruit and retain the right calibre of students, in line with the MASN quota, who are committed to a professional career in an education related field
- Deliver the approved Student Re-engagement strategy to enable students to achieve their full potential

Enable all learners to achieve their full potential

- Use the PeopleHawk pilot study as a catalyst for further enhancing Careers Education
- Implement the approved Widening Participation Plan to widen access to higher education
- > Develop a Mental Health Charter

 Focus scholarship and research to inform teaching, shape policy, change practice and inform debate

- Develop a rich, vibrant and supportive research and scholarship infrastructure characterised by the highest standards of ethics and integrity
- Increase the quantity and quality of research outputs, focusing on originality, significance and rigour
- Increase research income across the College and especially for CREU through the development of more high-quality medium and large funding applications
- > Build stronger national and international collaborative research partnerships

Develop collaborative partnerships and share resources

- Build new and strengthen existing collaborative partnerships within the schools and Further Education sector
- > Organise a Stranmillis Summer School in collaboration with key partners
- Develop an Outdoor Learning strategy in collaboration with key partners in order to achieve 'Green Flag' status

Promote professional development and lifelong learning

Develop a microsite as the first step in establishing an Early Childhood Studies (ECS) Professional Institute/Association

Attract, retain and develop high calibre staff

- > Agree and implement an agreed Academic Promotion Policy
- > Invest in the development of staff mentoring and coaching culture

Maintain and enhance a safe and attractive working campus

- Maintain a Covid-compliant environment
- Progress the priorities as set out in the Estates Strategy
- Continue to develop the technological infrastructure to provide a comprehensive range of Digital Services with robust cyber security measures in place
- Use a whole College community approach to promote the Health & Wellbeing Strategy

Maximise income generation to secure financial sustainability

Increase the number of international fee-paying students and related income targets as soon as international travel restrictions are lifted

- Expand our portfolio of available online professional development and postgraduate courses and modules and increase part-time enrolments and related income targets
- > Implement the Marketing Strategy for Hospitality, Accommodation & Conferencing
- Maximise the income generation potential of Hospitality, Accommodation & Conferencing

Improve communication both internally and externally

- Enhance and develop our public awareness and visibility, and stakeholder engagement, through effective media relations, social media and digital/online communications and the delivery of ongoing public affairs and community engagement
- Develop and implement an internal communications strategy, and use relevant communications platforms to enhance staff and student communication, ensure two-way communication/feedback and monitor satisfaction levels
- Develop and implement a plan to celebrate and use the College's centenary to raise visibility of the importance and impact of the College.

Internet and Other Access to our Plans

A copy of this Plan is available on the Internet at www.stran.ac.uk.

Copies can also be obtained by writing to: Stranmillis University College Marketing and Communications 2nd Floor, Stranmillis House Belfast BT9 5DY

Or: by e-mailing marketing@stran.ac.uk Or: phoning 028 9038 4352

Copies in alternative formats or languages will be considered in light of demand.

Appendix A

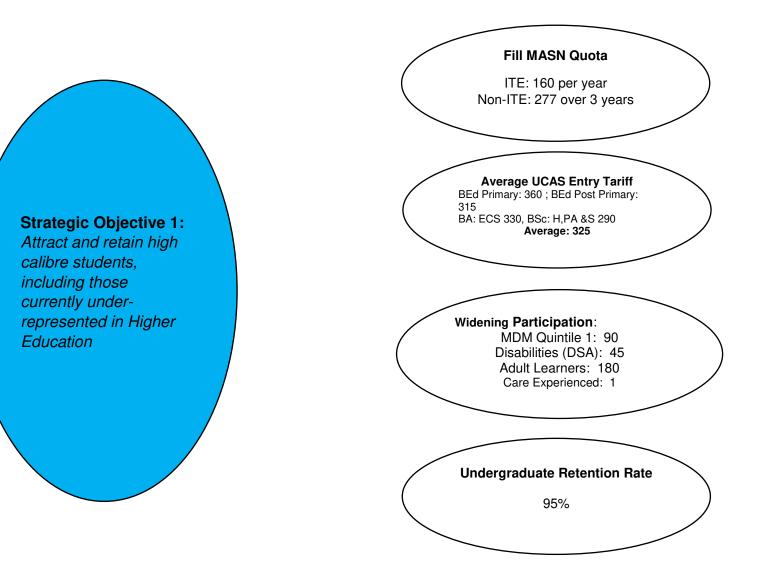


STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE A College of Queen's University Belfast

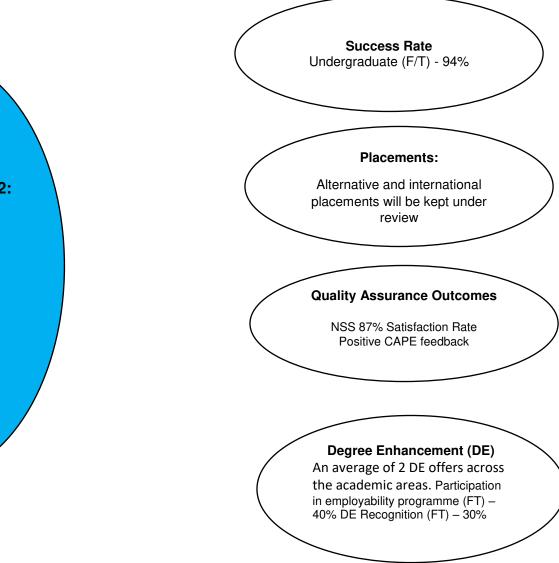
College Business Plan 2021-22

Glossary

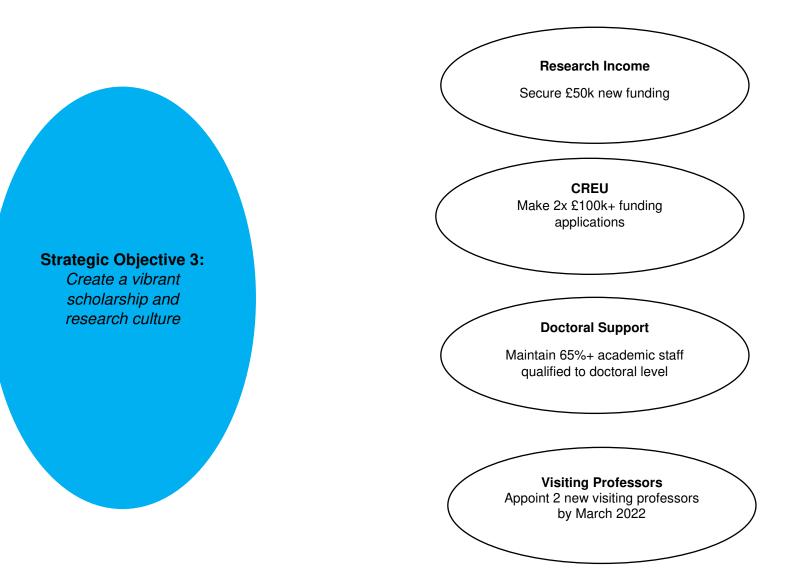
MaSN: Maximum Student Numbers UCAS: University & Colleges Admissions Service MDM Quintile: Multiple Deprivation Measure CAPE: Continuous Action for Programme Enhancement GTCNI: General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland ETI: Education & Training Inspectorate REF: Research Excellence Framework

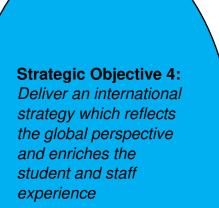


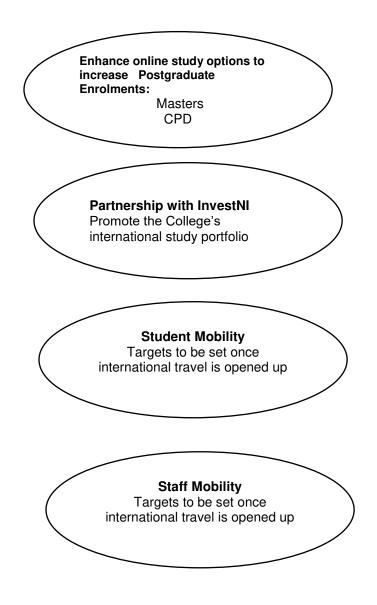
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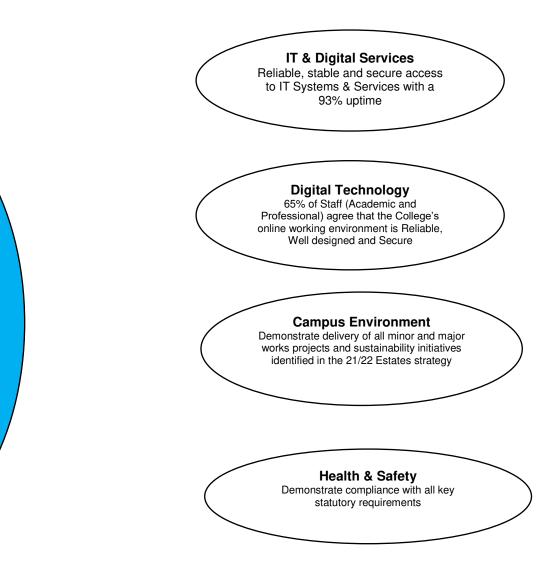


Strategic Objective 2: Deliver a transformational learning experience which enhances education, skills and employability





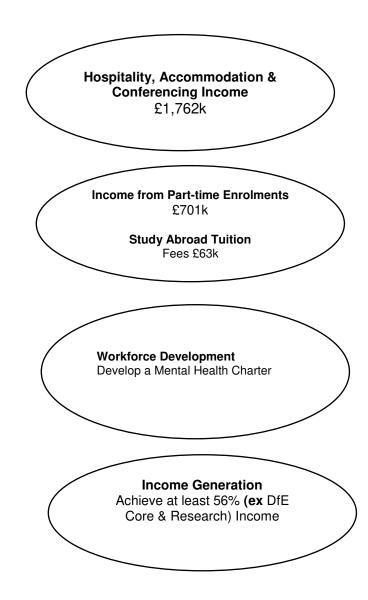




Strategic Objective 5: Create a high quality teaching & learning environment, including the non-built environment, which embraces the principles of sustainability

Strategic Objective 6:

Deliver a regulatory environment that optimises the opportunities for developing income generation strategies, while also protecting consumers and workers



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Financial Viability Demonstrate all efforts are being made to secure long-term viability through Annual Accounts

Audit

Achieve overall Satisfactory Assurance for 2021-22 from Internal Audit Reviews

Annual Assurance

Demonstrate Regulatory & Statutory Compliance through Annual Assurance Statements

Good Governance Demonstrate compliance with the HE Code of Governance through Annual Governance Statement

Strategic Objective 7: *Ensure the College has effective governance and manages its resources, both financial and staff*