

**WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2021/22 – 2023/24**

**Institutions are required to submit information under each of the headings below. Please see the guidance notes for help in completing this return.**

**1.1** Please provide a high level outline of your institution's Widening Participation policy in Higher Education and how this fits in with the institution's strategic direction.

The Mission of Stranmillis University College is:

*'To transform the lives of children and young people through excellence in teaching, scholarship and research.'*

The Mission can only be realised by improving educational outcomes and reducing educational inequality, hence our focus is on four key themes:

- Unlocking Potential
- Shaping Education
- Building Futures
- Connecting Globally

Given the mission and focus articulated above, the University College agrees:

'that any qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to higher education, irrespective of their personal or social background. (Access to Success, 2012, p. 5).

'... [With] a future vision ... in which the people who are *MOST ABLE but LEAST LIKELY* to participate are given every encouragement and support to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to, and to benefit from, the higher education that is right for them' (Access to Success, Foreword, 2012).

Aligned to DfE guidance (March 2020), Stranmillis will continue to use a percentage of the additional financial resource available for Access and Widening Participation (WP) resourcing to seek to build a diverse student body with support provided for aspirational individuals and communities. The College recognises that, as an institution, we are relatively small and do not have the capacity to offer the variety of activities that larger HE institutions can provide. We also recognise that many of our specialised professional degree programmes will only appeal to prospective students wishing to enter careers aligned with teacher education and related professions. Through this focus on education we continue to foster good and growing relations with learners in schools, the Regional Colleges and local communities aligned with WP KPIs.

While we are aware that our outreach with local communities will not necessarily produce significant outcomes in recruitment to the College, we do continue to invest in these areas and sectors to promote a love of learning and aspiration. We have confidence that this will influence participants to aspire to Higher Education in Northern Ireland and overseas. With our partnerships in the wider community, student modules/placements and our research and scholarship activity, we believe that, as an institution, we have made impact on the local community in relation to educational aspiration and success. In recent years, formal and strategic intervention, policy and provision have resulted in WP not simply being seen as a form of outreach, but as an integral and necessary thread within our core business, as documented in our Academic and Corporate Plans and Strategy.

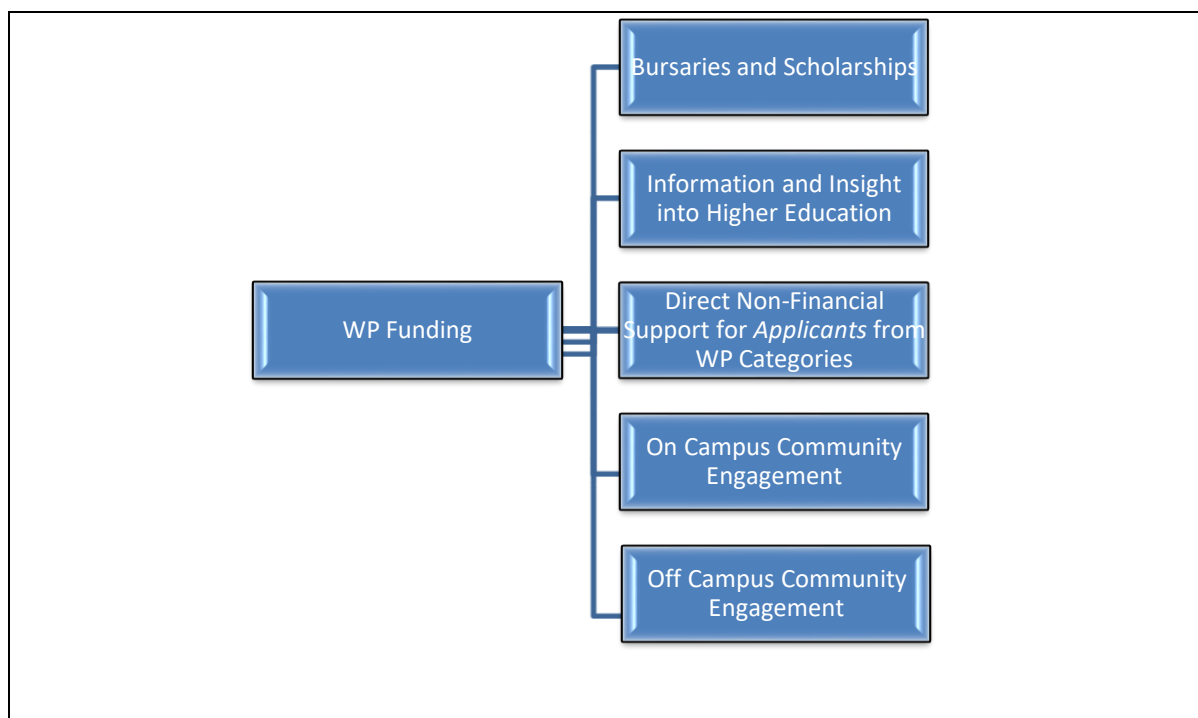
The development and implementation of this strategy is undertaken by the Widening Participation Coordinator, supported by an administrator, and monitored by the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs, the Academic Planning team, Senior Management and the Board of Governors. WP is now centralised with the alignment of academic duties to allow for strategic perspective across the College and reports at Director level at all central institutional committees within the University College. This ensures that the strategy is communicated clearly and integrated into all aspects of College life. The College system of 'Staff Student Consultative Committees' ensures that the views of students are represented in strategic decisions relating to WP.

Vocational qualifications, FE Access courses and foundation degrees are welcomed within the University College and attributed the same validity as more traditional courses. We view vocational qualifications as helpful in empowering students to obtain the high entrance tariffs required for the various pathways at Stranmillis. The College continues to explore further access opportunities in support of widening participation. This is in keeping with research in the area of 'access to teaching' and aligned to the College's targets for both males in the profession and adult entrants to HE, both of which are currently underrepresented in Northern Ireland.

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. The College launched a Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018. The Centre aims to engage in a focused portfolio of innovative interdisciplinary research and scholarly initiatives focusing on educational underachievement in Northern Ireland, 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 and will inform evaluation and research procedures in the future.

Following a presentation to the NI Assembly Education Committee, the Centre Director, Dr Noel Purdy, has been appointed Independent Chair of Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement, appointed by Minister of Education, Peter Weir MLA, September 2020 – May 2021

As can be seen below, WP funding continues to be routed into various streams to undertake core WP activity.



**1.2** What is your view of the success record of your institution in relation to recruitment, retention and progression for Widening Participation students?

As stated by the Department of Economy, 'there is considerable evidence that the earlier that a child is introduced to the concept of higher education the more likely they are to consider participation as a real possibility for themselves' (Access to Success 4.6.5). Stranmillis University College continues to focus on building up the infrastructure for WP provision and exploring the potential that exists through community engagement ('community' includes locality, family and schools).

Taking into consideration the above statement from 'Access to Success' (2012), the College has made significant effort to build up partnerships with local schools and communities in order to target younger learners through our WP programme. Through the WP programme we continue to invest time and energy towards building positive attitudes to education in the early years of schooling for children and parents and creating support throughout the school journey; it is arguably too late in upper secondary level for many individuals to foster these positive attitudes. Programme evaluations of interventions from younger learners do demonstrate these positive attitudes, however one of the pitfalls of this approach is that it can have a limited short-term impact on our own recruitment. While a primary school pupil may enjoy the programme at Stranmillis, and it may inspire them to work towards Higher Education, it may not translate into a place at the College. However, through this we feel as an institution that we are contributing to the collective regional approach to raising aspiration of the 'Most able - least likely'. The College is fully aware that the introduction of WP funding should not be used to simply fund institutional recruitment but rather to build upon community engagement. In keeping with the official recommendation inherent in the statement that, 'At a more general level, some activities have been criticised as being too focused on recruitment to specific institutions rather than promoting access to HE more widely' (Access to Success 4.6.10), the College vision for WP has both developed with an aspirational objective and an access agreement in the College to allow for multiple qualification routes and pathways to HE awards.

Notwithstanding, we continue to believe in the value of producing programmes that target younger learners, as we see on a regular basis how this ongoing input raises their aspirations for the future. Ultimately the successful delivery of the WP strategy requires this type of long-term investment. Nonetheless, we do realise that this investment has a minimal impact in supporting the achievement of recruitment KPIs for our target groups. This is to be expected with the ages and stages of pupils that we work with.

We have continued to implement measures relating directly to recruitment targets such as careers events/talks/campus visits, but the central focus has continued to be on community outreach. New staff are now in place to support our plans for Access and WP to be more closely aligned and we aim in the next cycle to commence progressing the planned realignment of our recruitment and selection processes, or to offer new and additional forms of support for potential applicants who represent our WP target cohort. This is a priority for the next three years.

As a College, we are currently in the process of agreeing revisions to our recruitment/selection process for undergraduate degree programmes in order to enable prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds to have enhanced support during the application process. 'Contextual data can be used as part of a holistic decision-making process when considering applications to HE from an increasingly diverse application pool' (Access to Success 4.5.17).

During 2017-18, we progressed the model adopted for Care Experienced applicants in 2016, and have begun to make better use of our application data to focus on 'individual applicants' (Access to Success 4.5.16). We have started the process of building the following procedures:

- Identify and note all WP applicants from their UCAS Application.
- Offer and provide 'effective presentations' workshops and interview techniques as preparation for the Stranmillis BEd and BA interview.
- Provide a pre-entry Campus Visit and familiarisation tour to meet key people within the College.
- Provide academic support to WP applicants within their current area of study e.g. post-16 'revision technique' workshops, support with Adult Access course elements.

While some delays were incurred as part of the UCAS system, there is progress emerging in support of new analytics for applications in the future. Our registry department is working very closely with UCAS upgrades to support this plan. This has slowed progress for us at the College.

With the working infrastructure plan in place for WP, we are now in a much better position to consolidate our core WP activity in relation to recruitment, retention and progression for WP students. In pursuing a community approach in outreach, we do see the danger in not meeting targets for some WP groups. We hope that the process above will empower every WP applicant with the confidence and knowledge to secure a place on one of our courses. This process is the preferred option for the College to meet the needs of and provide the most support to WP applicants. At this point we have no plans to engage in Extended Outreach i.e., 'schemes which explicitly link their programmes to clear access routes for disadvantaged students'. For example, on successful completion of a programme, a student may be guaranteed to have their application considered or be offered an interview or, in some cases, be guaranteed the offer of a place at the institution' (Access to Success 4.7.3). While this may work in a large institution, Stranmillis is arguably too small to guarantee access through a bespoke programme and would likely create a sense of disappointment and disincentive to those who were not selected.

### Entry Tariffs

In Access for Success (2.28) the Department predicted 'a rise in the A Level grades and qualifications needed to secure a place at a Northern Ireland HE institution [and that] young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to attain lower grades in their A Levels than their more advantaged peers with similar underlying ability'. The Department also stated that, 'Even with high aspirations, the single most important factor in determining the probability that a person will progress into HE is the strength of the student's qualifications gained in second-level education' (Access to Success 4.6.14). This is an ongoing challenge for Stranmillis which, due to the volume of applications, requires very high entry tariffs for the BEd degree programmes, with the AAB entry or equivalent requirement for BEd primary. There has also been a considerable increased interest in our BA Early Childhood Studies degree which has also created a rise in entry tariffs. This does create difficulty in recruiting students who have faced some form of disadvantage as part of a target. As suggested in paragraph 2.28 of Access to Success, 'young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who do progress beyond GCSE are, unfortunately, also likely to attain lower grades in their A Levels than their more advantaged peers with similar underlying ability. More advantaged students account for a disproportionately high percentage of the top grades at A Level' (4.6.17). It is for this reason that we plan to offer GCSE and post-16 study support to our WP applicants who have received offers.

Through our own outreach activity at careers events, the residual negative and unsubstantiated publicity around recruitment in the teaching profession, in particular, the difficulty in securing a full time teaching position in NI, continues to have a great impact on students from a socially disadvantaged background who have a greater reluctance to take this risk. This viewpoint has been highlighted on several occasions to us through our conversations with Careers Guidance staff. Anecdotal evidence gained at FE careers events continues to highlight that, '[some] talented people from disadvantaged groups [are] making entirely rational decisions to follow a different path in an apprenticeship or other form of training' (Access for Success, 4.6 .2). For prospective students to the College, a career within Education or the Early Years sector may prove attractive, but it cannot compare with cost free options such as Social Work and Nursing. Negative perceptions of the teaching profession have also impacted the recruitment of more males into College for teacher education, particularly those from lower MDM quintiles.

### Student Profile Intelligence

When UCAS applications arrive in College we have made progress seeking to, 'more clearly identify, at individual level, the most disadvantaged students/groups ... to increase understanding of the patterns of application and acceptance, and to direct and focus institutional efforts to support wider participation' (Access to Success, 4.5.10). The staffing issues articulated previously have significantly impacted our plans to gather better internal intelligence in relation to our student intake and how we might best meet increasing recruitment targets based on evidence from a rigorous evaluation of our student intake pattern. This is now in hand under the leadership of the WP coordinator and the Registry Office Manager.

In line with the Department's guidance in Access to Success (4.5.11), we will begin to audit and report, 'a wider range of information on applications as well as admissions', including:

- the number of applications to different courses;
- the offers made to applicants, including subjects and grades required; and
- the number and profile (i.e. WP status) of applicants admitted to each course (Access to Success 4.5.11).

Within this audit, we will increase our intelligence gathering to find more appropriate ways to increase our targets for all, but especially students from the lowest MDM quintile communities. In the 18/19 WAPP cycle the above processes will directly support applicants from a WP background to increase their selection chances. This will help to increase our, 'understanding of the patterns of application and acceptance, and to direct and focus institutional efforts to support wider participation' (Access to Success 4.5 .1 2).

#### Target Groups

We continue to progress in our 'Care Leavers' target group and our policy in practice in this area is leading to growing disclosures. We have seen much greater interest and evidence of engagement during the past academic year and are hopeful that our outreach work in this area and the support measures in place should result in more 'Care Leavers' enrolled within the University College. Regarding the recruitment of mature students, targeted interventions prior to 2013 led to a rise in entrants, however, since then we have not engaged in the previous level of pre-entry support for mature students and numbers have not risen any further. This is something that is now being addressed through more direct targeting as in pre-2013. We remain committed to raising awareness to all members of the disabled community. We are progressing work in this area both in terms of our website for communication support and the dissemination of our approach to mentoring and supporting learners who come to Stranmillis. There is no evidence that disability hinders applications and we continue committed to consulting the relevant sector to widening opportunities yet further in the future.

#### Males into Higher Education

We initially offered scholarships for males (2015) and have now progressed to a more cohesive approach to support male transition where it is appropriate to do so. It is worth noting in 2018/19, 215 males made up 30% of our population of under 25 learners. In addition, we aim to further target male entrants through the advancement of FE college engagement and the opening up of access course pathways across the College's course profile. This outreach effort includes project work to target underachievement for younger entrants and to address level 3 deficit qualifications for mature learners through access courses and/or other qualification routes being further opened up. Contact was made with the DfE to support this. There is a feeling that for WP needs, an access provision may make outreach and HE targets for level 3 more viable particular for under-represented groups.

#### Retention

The College remains in the top ten UK institutions for retention rates. Student attendance is recorded and tracked in support of attainment and also continues to be closely monitored during professional placements that are at the core of our degree programmes. Undergraduate retention is supported by active monitoring and follow up by Advisers of Studies, Personal Tutors and programme teams. In a small institution such as Stranmillis University College it is difficult for a student to simply 'slip through the net' unnoticed. The Student Support and Wellbeing Strategy is linked to student retention within the College. In order to ensure that learners are not unnecessarily penalised academically due to disadvantage factors, our protocols clearly stipulate that Advisers of Studies are provided with information in relation to WP students. This ensures that advice given and measures put in place take account of the specific needs of the student. The University College also has a long-established Students' Union which provides additional support for the student body.

Cause for concern in patterns of attendance, where they arise, are highlighted during Subject Board meetings. Students who are classified as WP are listed on a 'Programme' spread sheet for

each year group. This is checked against attendance at the end of each module and shared with the Programme Chair and Adviser of Studies. The aim is to determine if the factor of disadvantage has had any impact on attendance and how this relates to support and sanctions. The information is then collated to illustrate trends and patterns and assist with the development and enhancement of support measures.

#### Gap Analysis

Current WP activity has highlighted success and areas for improvement. To enhance our provision in relation to recruitment, retention and progression of Stranmillis WP students we plan to:

- Establish clearer metrics of our current student profile.
- Identify the geographical areas in which our WP applicants live.
- Track WP student entry into employment and use the alumni information for WP publicity.
- Offer WP students the opportunity to become registered WP Ambassadors and offer attractive 'Degree Enhancement' opportunities for such activities.
- Offer more robust evaluation of our recruitment and retention measures for WP students and provide such students with an opportunity to formally feedback the student experience and voice.
- Contribute to targeted recruitment involving WP Student Ambassadors.
- Further engage existing and alternative qualifying organisations including non-selective schools and colleges of FE to understand WP opportunities for all students at level 3.

### **1.3 Please outline the Widening Participation aims, objectives and targets for the next 3 years for your institution.**

*You will need to provide details on key target groups within Access to Success, anticipated expenditure and the measures of success – your response should include a description of your approach to targeting, as well as the areas targeted for improvement over the next 3 years. You may wish to add to the projection tables below to report on your own institution's specified target groups if not already included in Access to Success.*

Stranmillis WP aims are:

- To recruit, sustain and support students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds. (This requires setting Widening Participation strategic goals in line with the Department for Employment & Learning Access to Success document, 2012).
- 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.

Stranmillis University College has two strategic WP Objectives to implement that underpin its framework:

Strategic Objective 1: Aspiration and Access - all forms of Widening Participation activity provided up to the point of student application for Stranmillis. It involves:

- The raising of educational aspirations amongst underrepresented groups through experiences of higher education and future career/educational options.
- Direct support for underrepresented groups through 'on campus' master classes or 'in community' student mentoring/coaching in relation to the current curriculum participants are engaged in.
- The development of admissions procedures to encourage WP.
- The further development of pre-entry support for targeted students e.g. ITE/ECS interview guidance and pre-application practical experience.

Strategic Objective 2: Entry, Retention and Employability - support at the point of student application to Stranmillis through to graduation and beyond:

- The delivery of co-ordinated processes to ensure a successful induction into higher education.
- A positive and effective induction to the University College and the course of study including ready access to sources of academic, pastoral and financial support.
- The monitoring of student progress and maintenance of a supportive personal and academic environment.
- A structured pathway to employment, including opportunities for careers guidance additional role modelling and volunteering.

We will work in partnership with corporate and academic teams, partner schools/key stakeholders to plan and design, organise, host/implement and evaluate outcomes for the agreed series of interventions required to achieve the targets for:

Target 1- Attracting students from under-represented groups, in particular:

Students representative of lower MDM Quintiles (1&2),  
Disabled Learners  
Care experienced young people.

Target 2 - Mature Learners

This is mainly part time intakes at SUC. Currently the BA part time and the PGCE are the only programmes with a part-time matriculation.

Target 3 - Males into HE and the Profession

### 1.3 (a) TARGETS

You will note that the tables numbered (i) to (vi) below have been pre populated with your institution's average enrolment for the last 3 years. You are now required to insert numerical targets for each of the groups identified across the **3 years 2021/22 – 2023/24**. These groups are regarded as being underrepresented in Access to Success.



- (i) Group: **MDM Quintile 1**  
 Outcome: **To increase participation of those from NI MDM Q1**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 3 years 2016-2019)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>			
<b>3 Year Average</b>		<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>89</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	89	90	91

- (ii) Group: **Students with a Disability**  
 Outcome: **To increase the number of students who declare a disability**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 3 years 2016-2019)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>			
<b>3 Year Average</b>		<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>82</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	82	83	84

- (iii) Group: **Students with a Disability**  
 Outcome: **To increase the number of students in receipt of DSA**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 3 years 2016-2019)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>
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3 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>46</b>		46	47	48

(iv) Group: **Young Males from Quintile 1**Outcome: **To increase participation of young males from NI MDM Quintile 1**

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2016-2019)	Targets/Outcome			
3 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>10</b>	11	12	13	

(v) Group: **Adult Learners**Outcome: **To increase the number of adult learners participating in HE**

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2016-2019)	Targets/Outcome			
3 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>134</b>	134	134	134	

As HESA data is largely incomplete for the following area, the figure that you provided in a previous WAPP for 2016/17 has been inserted as a base line.

(vi) Group: **Number of Care Experienced enrolments**Outcome: **To increase the number of enrolments for those from a care background**

BASE YEAR 2016-2017	Targets/Outcome			
Number	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	
3	3	3	3	

**1.3(b)** The following tables have been provided for you to now insert any other ‘specific’ institutional targets. These may be different to those groups identified in 1.3(a) or may relate to targets other than enrolments. In all cases you will need to identify the group and highlight what the target outcome will be e.g. outreach, retention etc.

(i)

Group:
Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	Number			
	Percentage			

(ii)

Group:
Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	Number			

	<b>Percentage</b>			

(iii)

Group:
Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	Number			
	Percentage			

Please now outline the estimated 'direct' expenditure required to meet the identified objectives in the table below. You may wish to refer to Part 2 of the guidance notes in "How to Complete your Widening Access and Participation Plan" for a definition of direct spend. Whilst we appreciate that figures for later years are only indicative we do require estimations inserted in each of the categories.

Activity	Estimated Spend 2021/22 (£)	Estimated Spend 2022/23 (£)	Estimated Spend 2023/24 (£)
Bursaries	98400	98800	98800
Scholarships	0	0	0
Other financial Support	23463	23463	23463
Outreach, Access, MiHE	123811.33	123811.33	123811.33
Retention	24829.60	24829.60	24829.60
Research Activity	43249.25	43249.25	43249.25
Staffing/ Administration	1530	1560.60	1591.81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>315283.18</b>	<b>315,713.78</b>	<b>315,744.99</b>

**1.4** List below the key programmes/projects financed from additional student fees that will contribute towards your institution's performance.

(Please refer to the appropriate section of the guidance notes before completing.)

The University College will work in partnership with a variety of corporate and academic teams, partners in schools and key stakeholders to organise, host and evaluate outcomes for the agreed events required to achieve the WAPP targets for:

**Target 1** - Attracting students from under-represented groups, in particular:

Students representative of lower MDM Quintiles (1&2),  
 Disabled learners,  
 Care experienced young people.

**Target 2** – Mature Learners

Meeting the wider needs of adult returners is a priority target for the College, aligned the 'Access to Success 4.6.3' strategy and governments goals to address the deficit in level 3 and 4 and above qualification routes in NI.

**Target 3** - Males into HE

We fully agree that, 'The key to generating more qualified applicants for HE, from the widest possible range of social and educational backgrounds, is to raise awareness of the potential for higher education to improve one's career prospects, earnings potential and quality of life 'Access to Success 4.6.3). We will therefore work with a number of partners and stakeholders to achieve the objectives below:

**WP Strategic Objective 1:** Aspiration and Access – all forms of Widening Participation activity provided up to the point of student application for Stranmillis through:

- Raising educational aspirations amongst under-represented groups through exposure into higher education and future career/educational options.
- Direct support for underrepresented groups through 'on campus' master classes or 'in community' student mentoring/coaching in relation to the current curriculum participants are engaged in.
- Further development of pre-entry support for targeted students e.g. ITE interview guidance and pre-application work-based/classroom experience.

**WP Strategic Objective 2:** Entry, Retention and Employability – support at the point of student application to Stranmillis through to graduation by:

- Delivering co-ordinated and planned processes to ensure a successful induction into higher education.

- Creating a welcoming and effective induction to the University College and the course of study including ready access to sources of academic, pastoral and financial support.
- Monitoring student progress and maintenance of a supportive personal and academic environment.
- Structuring a distinct pathway to employment, including opportunities for careers guidance additional role modelling and volunteering.

For 2023-24 Stranmillis University College will offer 5 Key Programmes:

- Access@Stran
- Males@Stran
- Outreach@Stran
- Retention and Induction
- Research into Underachievement and Support Needs

### **Access@Stran**

This is a priority project to develop a targeted entry route for those from harder to reach areas in our community in NI, focusing on Foundation Degree and Access Courses.

Work will involve:

1. Roadshows across FE Colleges in NI – targeted to key areas of subject or WP KPI related needs
2. Support workshops for both role modelling and mentorship in support of HE study for those targeted within the Stranmillis Access Agreement or linked to WP KPIs
3. Support schools at Stranmillis to address needs and/or underachievement goals.

### **Males@ Stran**

#### **MiHE Males into Higher Education**

Promotion and development of the MiHE including Teaching as a Career and Higher Education for personal development more generally.

Dedicated briefing seminars, including Open Day Presentation.

### **Outreach@Stran**

#### **i. 'Look @ Stran'**

- Promotions/Info material.
- Dedicated WP Target 1&2 Information Sources.
- Campus visits for our WP Target to find out more about Stranmillis e.g. Foundation Degree Students.

This project will also include dedicated information events for potential Mature Student applicants. These will take the form of 'Open Evenings' on campus and 'Working Lunches' within FE Colleges.

**ii. 'Stran Local – in Your Community'**

This project covers activities in which Stranmillis students work with groups in the community. Typically this involves providing student volunteer support for one to one interactions with underachieving children or whole class activities designed to boost confidence and a love for learning. In this project Stranmillis does not organize the activity, just the student participation and award of Degree Enhancement.

**iii. 'Support Your BEd Application'**

Direct support for WP applicants to the BEd degree in Stranmillis

Identify and note all WP BEd applicants from their UCAS Application. Estimated approximately 150 applicants.

For WP applicants invited to interview offer and provide training sessions on confidence building, delivering a good presentation and interview techniques. 3 Half Day sessions with approximately 20 potential students in attendance.

Provide a pre-entry Campus Visit and familiarisation tour for applicants who receive offers to meet key people within the College, to be hosted in June 2021 (Covid dependent). Twilight sessions involving key staff from BEd degree programmes and students.

The College will continue to network with key stakeholders across Care, Disability and adult providers such as Fostering NI and regional Colleges to offer support and guidance for pre-entry applications. This is currently managed by the registry and advice and guidance support team at the College. WP will also be involved where there is a mentoring need for any applicant.

**iv. 'UpGrade U'**

This will be our main campus based activity. 'UpGrade U', selected schools will participate in regular 'on campus' activity. Each school will attend at 4-6 full day events during each Key (12 days for Primary and 3 for Post-Primary) days will be spread over the 3 years of each Stage and will normally consist of 12 per academic year.

**WP Ambassadors and Alumni**

As part of University College Degree Enhancement Policy, the University College will begin to recruit 20 voluntary WP Ambassadors whose role will involve:

- Hosting School and FE visits to the University College Campus, particularly targeting Access courses and Males into HE.
- Assisting in the management of 'On Campus @Stran' community engagement events
- Participating in internal and external careers events and delivering careers progression talks in schools/FE
- Assisting with Careers Guidance interviews for WP applicants undertaking any of our degree programmes. It is planned that this may include in the future the College alumni utilising intergenerational learning opportunities across the College family.



- Supporting one 'Stran Local-In Your Community' initiative. Any community group that participates in our outreach programmes will be categorised as representing a Low MDM and Low Participation neighbourhood.
- The Ambassadors will undertake this role in a voluntary capacity but will receive training and branded clothing.

#### A more focused approach to Outreach Projects

In the past WAPP cycles, post event evaluations have highlighted that participants (children and their parents/carers) benefit considerably from our on-campus activity. These projects provide University insights and also incorporate activity to upskill and build positive mind-sets. Essentially on-campus activity has aimed to support schools in raising pupil and parent aspirations, allowing them to begin to appreciate that university is a future option for them. In making decisions about 2023/24 outreach projects we would like to consolidate and better focus activity as it was evident that:

**Subjects on Offer** - The outreach projects that are most popular with schools focus on Literacy and 'STEAM' subjects. Also popular are brain-based and positive mind-set workshops.

**Contact Time** - More frequent and sustained 'on-campus' time for participants is desirable - not just a series of 'one-offs'. In this way we can be more influential on participants and can engage in more detailed project evaluations.

**Transition Support** - Stakeholders have highlighted the particular value of supporting learners and their families around 'Key Transitions' e.g. Early Years/Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 and then to Key Stage 3.

**Key Stage 4 and Post-16** - Outreach for Key Stage 4 and Post-16 are now part of 'Support U@Stran' – 'Pre-Entry' and 'Stran Local - In Your Community'. Other larger HEI's target this age range and have the capacity to offer a wider range of excellent programmes; the Stranmillis campus has developed resourcing which focuses on the younger learner.

With the above in mind, we will continue to enhance our outreach project 'Up Grade U' which will feature what we feel have been the most appropriate 'on-campus' outreach activities. While there is some benefit in one-off outreach activities, for the purposes of evaluation and in particular for the Kirkpatrick Model (see 1.8) it is evident that we need to offer a longer contact period for participants to allow them to build up their confidence, for us to be able to track progress through a longer period, and to link with schools to obtain performance data related to the pupil's social background.

In each Key Stage of school, the pupils attending UpGrade U will undertake classes and workshops in the curriculum areas of Upgrade U listed below. These will be held in the College facilities including outdoor classrooms. Pupils will also have opportunities to visit various College areas and will graduate at the end of the Key Stage.

#### Selection of Schools

In moving forward with Up Grade U in 2023/24 we will develop links with schools in the targeted area of under-representation building on the work of previous years. To advance this effort, a significant focus will be placed both on 'understanding' underachievement and working with our Up Grade U programme to evaluate impact.

All Up Grade U campus activities will meet with the following criteria:

- Activities meet with 'Access to Success' targets with the central emphasis on participants from low MDM and Participation groupings largely with an emphasis on the younger learner (Under 14). There is a likelihood that the wider group might include other target groups such as, Care Leavers. However other focused projects will specifically target narrower WP groups such as Care Leavers.
- All campus based activities provide participants with an insight into and feel of what it is like to spend time on a university campus and they will be given promotional information about higher education during their time on campus. Participants will engage in fun yet challenging activities directly related to their current educational needs. The aim is not simply to inspire but also raise attainment.
- The range of activities are 'Curriculum Centred' and will aim to replicate both a Higher Education curriculum, from STEM subjects to the Arts, while also remaining relevant to the curriculum being studied by pupils in school. This will ensure that students can relate to the content whilst also developing their knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their current educational stage.

#### **Retention and Induction: Support U at Stran - Entry, Retention and Employability**

In relation to Strategic Objective 2 - Entry, Retention and Employability we will include the following elements.

For 2023/24 2023-24 Stranmillis University College will offer 2 Programmes for Entry and Retention:

1. 'WP info @Stran'
2. BSc Induction

#### WP info @ Stran

This project is an information source for all forms of support for Stranmillis WP Students including additional bursaries. The 'Communication Skills Centre', under the direction of Student and Learning Services, will continue to support students with their academic writing. This is a one-to-one study skills support programme throughout the year for all WP students who have identified writing support needs.

The College will progress the appropriate provision/infrastructure for Care Leaver Support, the existing 'Stranmillis Cares about U' initiative will become part of our wider information support for WP students.

The College research group and 'Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement Advisory Group' will continue to inform a clearer and more robust strategy for research and evaluation within the area of underachievement at the College.

#### BSc Induction

'MiMS- Max-i-Mizing Success' - HPAS Induction Course - Early induction to the context of higher education for year one students from a WP category on the BSc HPAS.

**1.5** Please provide a short summary of how your activities link to the key actions within Access to Success.

Stranmillis University College welcomes 'Access to Success' as the foundation policy for our strategic direction. All of our strategic documentation and presentations begin with reference to Access to Success as this highlights clearly that developments within Stranmillis are not simply institutional requirements but regional. We agree that those who are 'MOST ABLE but LEAST LIKELY' to participate are given every encouragement and support to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to, and to benefit from, the higher education ...' (2.31). We appreciate that today's unrepresented minority may be tomorrow's mainstream (4.5.19) and the professionals Stranmillis produces must engage effectively with this group.

In section 4.8.14 of Access to Success it is emphasised that, 'Strong senior management commitment to widening participation can drive institutions to improve the quality of the student experience and improve retention and progression rates. Activities to recruit and retain students, particularly from non-traditional backgrounds, are integral to these institutions rather than seen as an add-on to core activities'. Stranmillis senior management fully support WP and appreciate the links between it and core student issues such as retention. This is in line with the Department of the Economy's findings that, 'over the last ten years institutions have embedded widening participation activities much more strongly within their overall strategy planning and implementation' (2.14).

We welcome the Department's commitment to, 'expand the range of aspiration and attainment raising programmes at school, college, community and the workplace' (4.6.23). Stranmillis has invested in community outreach that, 'incorporate[s] attainment raising elements and should not be just awareness -raising / marketing' (4.6.23) The University College has always had this goal in its WP outreach and is well placed to lead such activity further.

**1.6** How do you plan to communicate information on the availability of financial and other assistance to students?

In addition to the WAPP as a source of information, Stranmillis has established a central hub containing WP information produced by the new Research Centre for Educational Underachievement in Stranmillis. The projects for WP will include a web-based presence and regular social media and newsletter dissemination, PDF and hard copy leaflets, branded under Stranmillis in support of the activities of the College, including and branded in conjunction with the Department for the Economy Corporate branding.

These sources illustrate the support available to students studying over the duration of a course and include all relevant information other than course content. This information is presented in a clearly written, widely available electronically and updated annually.

The College website development remains under progress as part of a whole College web rebuild - it is important that WP information sources are not separate from other web information.

At outreach events, all relevant stakeholders are provided with copies of the information leaflets and can obtain more. In respect of community engagement, presentations to schools (Year 12 and above) and FE will also include relevant financial information and any bursaries/scholarships that are available. Specifically, information leaflets are adapted to meet the needs of each of the target groups identified and measures will be taken to ensure that these are disseminated effectively. Incoming Year 1 students will receive a briefing presentation during Induction week and can also obtain support and advice throughout the year from College staff.

### 1.7 How do you plan to monitor progress against the targets and the achievement of outcomes?

SUC monitor the WAPP in line with the College's governance, senior management and leadership committee structure. The WAPP is managed by a senior officer of the College. Various sub-committees feed into the decisions about the WAPP return including the Colleges Student recruitment and marketing committee and Student Learning Services. The structure includes governance, the senior leadership team, academic learning committee, student recruitment and marketing and student learning services committees. The WP task group will feed in to all levels.

We have put in place an infrastructure to more comprehensively monitor WP student progress and evaluate outreach projects, through a pre and post methodology piloted over the last number of years. We agree that evaluations must look beyond satisfaction indicators to more robustly establish changes in attitude and aspiration. Impact will be developed where it is possible to effect contexts for more sustainable WP outcomes.

All of our on-campus outreach activities include a participant feedback sheet and these tend to reflect the observed response of participants; overwhelmingly positive following the experience. Suggestions for improvement tend to be functional, while the opportunity to engage in activity on campus does result in a more positive attitude to university and education in general. Feedback from adults who accompany participants is also good and we regularly receive feedback that a certain child had become much more responsive to educational support in the weeks following the campus activity. The Up Grade U project with its focus on more frequent and regular contact with Stranmillis will allow us to do much more than obtain completed feedback forms. Up Grade U will enable opportunities for impact using a robust action research approach for evaluation.

In relation to retention, support for students with a Disability within Stranmillis University College is carefully monitored. However, entrants from lower socio-economic groups, under-achieving communities, mature, care leavers and male students are not formally and directly monitored beyond the systems that are in place for all students. In Stranmillis University College it is difficult for a student to simply 'slip through the net' unnoticed. While there are mass lectures, the majority of classes are sufficiently small; it is therefore possible for academic and support staff, and indeed other students, to keep a formative check on progress.

Stranmillis University College also has a long established Students' Union which provides additional support for the student body. The issue of formally monitoring students who enter under the Access Agreement, in addition to the mechanisms that exist for the whole student body is unnecessary. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a larger percentage of mature entrants graduate with a higher degree classification.

**1.8** Please provide an additional evaluation on how you think your institution is performing or provide us with relevant documents in line with section 1.8 of the guidance document.

*(Full details on how to complete this section are in the guidance notes)*

In order to ensure consistency across institutions we would ask that you use the Kirkpatrick Model for this exercise. The concept is that individual institutions will learn from this self-evaluation and obtain evidence to influence future widening participation activity and plans. You may evaluate the institution's widening participation activity as a whole, or evaluate individual projects.

The following sub headings should help focus your response. The Department expects that most institutions will be able to evaluate widening participation activity to at least Level 3 (as below).

### **Level 1 Evaluation – Reactions**

*what they thought and felt about the programme*

All of our programmes to date have included feedback through questionnaire, oral response and in some cases evaluation report. From this it has been evident that campus activity has had a positive impact on:

- Pupil participants
- Teachers
- Parents
- Community Leaders
- Educational support Organisations/Charities
- Stranmillis Students
- Stranmillis Staff

So far all of our outreach activity has included a Level 1 evaluation and will continue to do so. It will certainly be important to record if participants enjoyed the experience as if not, learning is unlikely to have been developed. This is undertaken with a short post evaluation questionnaire for each new contact session on campus. The questionnaire is tailored to the age and ability of the pupils and we have developed visual questionnaires for our pre-school and foundation stage learners who cannot read.

Post session evaluations will require participants to comment on the value of the event to their wants and needs, both physical/domestic and in relation to the demands of the activity. They will be asked for highlights and suggestions for improvement, e.g. did they feel sufficiently involved.

In Up Grade U we will be much more thorough and rigorous in our evaluations. An electronic as well as paper questionnaire will be developed by investigating the use of an accompanying website that will inform participants and their parents etc. of the scheme. In the future, we also intend to provide much more informative and rigorous reports to Academic Leadership to gather useful feedback for future projections and planning.

During the course of each on Campus event the Stranmillis WP Ambassadors will gather visual and verbal evidence of the success of the event; this will complement the formal participant evaluations

As noted previously in the past WAPP cycles Post event evaluations have highlighted that participants (children and their parents) benefit considerably from our on campus activity. These projects provide university insight and also incorporate activity to up-skill and build positive mind-sets. Essentially on campus activity has aimed to support schools in raising pupil and parent aspirations and for them to begin to appreciate that university is a future option for them. In making decisions about 2023/24 outreach projects our evaluations have indicated that we should consider:

- Subjects on Offer-The outreach projects that are most popular with schools focus on Literacy and 'STEAM ' subjects. Also popular are brain-based and positive mind-set workshops. These should be the future focus
- Contact Time - More frequent and sustained 'on campus' time for participants is desirable - not just a series of one-offs. In this way we can be more influential on participants and can engage in more detailed project evaluations. Longer contact time projects are necessary to gather more evidence and begin to make a greater impact on Level 3 below.
- Transition Support - Stakeholders have highlighted the particular value of supporting learners and their families around 'Key Transitions' e.g. Early Years/Key Stage1 to Key Stage 2 and then to Key Stage 3. Outreach Projects must reflect the demands of transition stages.
- Key Stage 4 and Post-16 - Outreach for Key Stage 4 and Post-16 should become part of 'Support U @ Stran' - Pre-Entry and 'Stran Local-In Your Community'. Other larger HEIs target this age range and have the capacity to offer excellent programmes; we are arguably better resourced to focus on the younger learner.

## **Level 2 Evaluation - Learning**

*the resulting increase in knowledge or capability*

Moving to the Up Grade U model with increased contact with participants will make it easier to measure an increase in knowledge or capability after the learning experience. The aim will be to obtain firm evidence of a positive change in attitude to education and in this case the follow up questionnaire/evaluations will not be so concerned with practical satisfaction indicators, but rather knowledge and understanding of the content of the on campus sessions. The evaluative tools will focus on what the participant knows, or can do, that is better than before. This can be initially assessed as a group at the end of the session through feedback and presentation; while individual growth in understanding and capability will be determined through an online questionnaire. To minimise inconsistency all forms of evaluative tools must be common to all participants, they must be tested for validity and reliability, clear scoring and measurements need to be established.

The design of these tools must be closely related to the aims of the learning will be undertaken and piloted in 2023/24 in preparation for the introduction of Up Grade U. These tools will be closely aligned to research and evaluation carried out by the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement.

A more robust research model is under investigation during this period at the College linked to understanding underachievement and interventions for trial using educational research methodologies. This will align and advance the work of the Kirkpatrick model of the past.

### **Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer**

*behaviour - extent of behaviour and capability improvement and implementation/application*

The advantage of Up Grade U with regular and sustained contact with the University College is that we can begin to identify changes in behaviour in relation to how the experience has a positive impact on mind-set that is seen back in school. While past evidence has suggested that some participants have a more positive attitude to school and education after a campus visit, a one-off event offers little scope for clarification.

In this form of evaluation, we will largely depend on feedback from teachers, or significant others such as parents and community leaders who can verify the extent to which participants applied the new learning and attitude to other situations, i.e. attitudes in school or at home. This feedback can be based on their observations or on additional evidence such as more regular school attendance or higher test scores.

Transfer of knowledge may be seen in a follow up in a certain subject area, or may be a wider cross-curricular improvement in engagement and outcome.

U Grade U with its building of strong, regular and sustained links with schools etc. will enable the University College to be able to build good working relationships with key people such as the participant's teacher. Obtaining evidence of transfer is only possible in longer duration projects such as Up Grade U.

### **Level 4 Evaluation- Results**

*Results- the effects resulting from performance*

Level 4 is a longer term objective as one would not expect to see changes in mind-set, and performance after a one-off event. It is also recognised that this is the ultimate goal of WP to raise aspirations and attainment to such a degree that the individual has a realistic opportunity to apply for an HE course.

Measures used here would be evidence of improvements at key 'Transitions' e.g. the post-primary transfer test.

Evidence would also need to be provided by participants and observers that the campus activities undertaken within Up Grade U have directly contributed to improvements e.g. did the participant acknowledge that Up Grade U has helped them to reach their current position.