



STRANMILLIS | 100  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
*Shaping education since 1922*



Department for the  
**Economy**  
[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

# Widening Access and Participation Plan 2023/23-2025/26

**WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2023/24 – 2025/26**

**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.

Stranmillis University College's Widening Participation policy is designed to support the engagement of students from underrepresented groups in higher education. We are committed to seeing the '*most able but less likely*' being given encouragement and support to achieve the necessary qualifications to apply to, and to benefit from, Higher Education. In this context the University College aims to:

- Raise aspirations by increasing access to Higher Education
- Enhance entry, secure retention, and promote employability.

This aligns with our strategic direction in a number of ways. The mission of Stranmillis University College is "*to transform the lives of children and young people through excellence in teaching, scholarship and research*" and we therefore agree "*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, p5). As an institution we are committed to a policy that promotes opportunity, choice and excellence in Higher Education.

We recognise that Widening Participation is not just a matter of fairness, it is an economic imperative which is critically important to the economic survival and future prosperity of Northern Ireland, particularly in a climate of unprecedented economic challenges.

The University College endeavours to build a diverse student body and is cognisant of the fact that we are a small specialist institution offering professional degree programmes which are primarily attractive to those wishing to follow careers that are closely aligned to teacher education and education-related professions. We are committed to working with a range of relevant partners including, but not limited to, pupils in schools, learners in the regional colleges, community organisations, colleagues in other HEIs and interested parties in the community.

As an institution we recognise that many young people and adults have the potential to enter higher education but do not currently apply to Stranmillis University College (or Higher Education more widely) for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to:

- Lack of aspiration/support;
- Challenging personal circumstances;
- Insufficient family income;
- Limited information about the application and selection process;
- Being from a family with little or no experience of higher education; and
- A lack of awareness of the ultimately benefits of engagement in higher education study and the resulting qualifications.

The University College has an agreed Widening Participation Strategy which has been approved through internal processes. We welcome applications from students with a breadth of qualifications and backgrounds including those with traditional qualifications, vocational qualifications, FE Access courses and foundation degrees.

Recognising the importance of research and scholarship and the value of research-informed teaching, the University College has established a Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU). Since its inception the CREU has produced and published extensively, locally, nationally, and globally in the area of underachievement. The aim of the Centre to gain a clear understanding of the reasons underlying underachievement and to devise strategies and influence policy decisions in this very important area. This aligns with our Widening Participation Policy in addressing underachievement and ensuring all reach their full potential.

The prevalence of Covid throughout the 2020-21 academic year was a factor that had a significant impact upon society in general and upon the delivery of the College's planned Widening Participation activities. During that time period schools were closed for considerable blocks of time and teaching and learning in schools moved to remote delivery. When schools were open access to them was significantly restricted with only essential requirements to be present being permitted entry. At the same time traditional on-campus outreach activity was also not permitted as pupils were unable to travel or congregate in groups (schools were operating class bubbles as a way of reducing the spread of the virus). As a result, by way of mitigation, the College took the strategic decision to provide Widening Participation activities in a remote format, this fulfilled our commitment to uphold the aims of Widening Participation and to recognise the significant importance of this key area to both the College and those potential learners from a Widening Participation background. The College's alternative provision for Widening Participation, with an indication of the resulting impact, is reflected in the table presented below.

Project	Rationale	Impact		
<p><b>Virtual Lessons</b></p> <p>KS1 with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spelling</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Money</li> </ul> <p>KS2 with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spelling</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Money</li> </ul>	<p>Targeted parents and pupils for re-engagement purposes with charities and communities in need, Key stages 1 and 2.</p> <p>See <a href="https://www.stran.ac.uk/restart-and-recovery/">https://www.stran.ac.uk/restart-and-recovery/</a></p> <p>Over 100 schools were targeted.</p> <p>Three families took part in East Side Partnership.</p> <p>Parentkind NI sent the resource to all schools and parents in the wider NI community.</p> <p>The resource was later shared by NI Teachers Collaborate for all primary schools in NI. Over 15000 members.</p>	<p>Aspiration raising – bringing SUC lessons to the community in support of family learning.</p>	<p>Stran in the community.</p>	<p>Promoting education (literacy and numeracy – time, money and spelling) from research with East Side and Parentkind NI.</p>
<p><b>Co Spaces – Coding Lessons for Schools</b></p> <p>KS2 and KS3</p>	<p>STEM to promote engagement in males in particular. Mindcrafting with some coding tools for maths and technology.</p> <p>See <a href="https://www.stran.ac.uk/restart-and-recovery/coding/">https://www.stran.ac.uk/restart-and-recovery/coding/</a></p>	<p>STEM aspirations.</p>	<p>Stran in the community.</p>	<p>Promoting Education for all.</p>

	30 Schools targeted with high FSM.			
<b>Literacy Hubs</b> KS1	FSM high schools x 3 targeted. Re-engage post-Covid.  Student teachers developed live links with school bubbles across three different schools to engage learners in activities and books coming alive. Packs and resources were made available and student teachers had a live stream into the school environment in support of lessons.	Support for learning literacy/books coming alive.	Stran in the community.	Outreach and aspiration raising.
<b>Mathematics Magicians</b> KS2	Number in words and video with seasonal learning. Student teachers engage learners in maths concepts using imagery and live lesson streams. Packs and resources were shared with schools and pupils engaged in three different schools.  60 pupils x 3 schools.  Schools in hard-to-reach areas with high FSM.	Raising aspirations for maths and education.	Unlocking potential in maths and supporting role models through Stran in the community.	Raising confidence to raise aspirations.
<b>U Compute @ Coding</b>  A programme to support the use of capability building through coding. 100 schools targeted from high FSM areas across NI. 33 schools took part in the developing of coding culture and confidence for school wide outreach.	33 Schools engaged in 'coding' workshops to develop a coding culture at School. Resources and materials were expertly shared by the coding team and staff at Stranmillis.	Improved coding awareness as both curricular and extra-curricular approaches to pupil confidence building and STEM particularly for inter-gender and cross-subject work.	School upskilling in support of pupil aspiration and confidence building through STEM.	Stranmillis in the community in support of the wider school network. Staff was encouraged to build homework clubs and coding schools with parental and pupil engagement. Resources, ebooks, and apps were shared to encourage implementation for schools.
<b>Theatre in Education –</b> Wellbeing, and Health focused post-Covid	<a href="https://www.stran.ac.uk/zoomanji/">https://www.stran.ac.uk/zoomanji/</a>  The student project was developed as part of theatre studies with a focus on Stranmillis in the Community. Wellbeing and health were at the core of the messages.  This reached all c2k schools in NI and was targeted at all high FSM partner schools at the College. This is over 1000 schools.	Support wellbeing and raise awareness of the importance of education.	Developing resources for communities and gaining enhanced access to HE.	Outreach and access to higher education through online tools.

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

### **Recruitment**

As an institution we continually review our recruitment/selection processes for our undergraduate degree programmes to support prospective students from all backgrounds including those from underrepresented backgrounds by providing them with appropriate help during the application process.

#### Entry Tariffs

Stranmillis B.Ed. degree programmes are in high demand and carry entry tariffs that reflect the academic rigor of the subject and programme. There has also been a considerable increased interest in our B.A. Early Childhood Studies degree which has also mandated a rise in entry tariffs. Given that demand cannot be accommodated by increasing places (due to a fixed MASN), increased competition naturally results in higher entry tariffs. This does create some additional challenges in recruiting a larger number of students who have faced some form of disadvantage but it is one that we seek to address by working alongside the young people involved to support them with their applications.

Through our own outreach activity at careers events and working in partnership with schools, we seek to engage and encourage those least likely to engage with higher education, in particular males in general and also males from lower MDM quintiles.

#### Student Profile Intelligence

When UCAS applications arrive in College we seek to identify the most disadvantaged students/groups in order to better understand patterns of application and acceptance. Such information provides us with a better understanding of our student intake pattern:

- The profile of those making application;
- The offers made to applicants, including subjects and grades required; and
- The number and profile (i.e. Widening Participation status) of applicants admitted to each course.

#### Target Groups

At Stranmillis University College we have identified several key target groups/areas including: 'Care Leavers'; Mature Students; Disabled Students; Males into Higher Education'; and Retention. It is important to state that the targeting of many of these specific groups was additionally impacted by the Covid pandemic lockdowns. We continue to progress work in this area through our website to communicate opportunities and support as well as the support that is offered to learners at Stranmillis. We continue to be committed to consulting with the relevant sectors to ensure that appropriate widening opportunities are presented in the future. One element of this is our work with all six regional colleges in the provision of at least one of our Foundation Degree programmes which articulate onto our Level 6 top up programmes.

We encourage and support applications from those with a Care Experienced background by:

- Identifying Widening Participation applicants from their UCAS Application.
- Offering 'effective presentations' workshops and interview techniques as preparation for the Stranmillis B.Ed. and B.A. interview.

- Offering pre-entry Campus Visit and familiarisation tours to meet key people within the College.
- Providing academic support to Widening Participation applicants within their current area of study e.g., post-16 'revision technique' workshops, support with Adult Access course elements.

We continue to promote Higher Education to 'Care Leavers' and we would be hopeful that further work in this area will increase engagement from this target group.

Regarding the recruitment of mature students, this is a specific group that we continue to target and we remain committed to the recruitment of mature students.

We continue to raise awareness of disability and the opportunities that exist for those who have a disability or multiple disabilities.

We continue to target male entrants to careers in education, education-related, and early years' education through engagement with the regional colleges and by making provision for articulation to our level 6 courses. Encouraging male entrants into education is of particular importance given current underrepresentation in many areas of education and we continue to discuss with both DE, DfE and others how the entirety of the education sector needs to collaborate to move this situation forward more rapidly.

### **Retention**

The College continues to secure very high retention and success rates and we have processes in place which enable student engagement to be monitored and for those who may be inclined to disengage to be followed-up by Student Support, Advisers of Studies, Personal Tutors and programme teams. In a small institution such as Stranmillis 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.

The University College also has a long-established and very active Students' Union which provides additional support for the student body within the College Community. It is worth noting that our students can also avail of support and activities offered by QUB.

The 2020-21 academic year was a challenging time for everyone due to the global pandemic. Pupils and students completed their second level education in most cases remotely because schools were not open and teaching was being delivered electronically. Scheduled examinations often did not take place and they were replaced by teacher assessed grades. The same students then entered higher education with teacher predicted grades, and again there were spells of lockdown and remote teaching. Consequently the students did not have the opportunity to experience 'normal' university life nor the normal transition from secondary education. The University College has again become the number one HEI in NI for overall student satisfaction in the latest NSS.

**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 University College Widening Participation 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 the Economy Targets).
- To further develop and enhance partnerships for all degree pathways with external institutions, organisations and professional groups.
- To develop further and enhance the University College's community-based links and activities.

To enhance our provision in relation to recruitment, retention and progression of Stranmillis Widening Participation students we will seek to:

- Establish clearer metrics of our current student profile.
- Identify the geographical areas in which our Widening Participation applicants live.
- Track Widening Participation student entry into employment and use the alumni information for Widening Participation publicity.
- Encourage Widening Participation students to become engaged in the wider elements of College life.
- Offer more robust evaluation of our recruitment and retention measures for Widening Participation students and provide such students with an opportunity to formally feedback the student experience and voice.

Stranmillis University College has two strategic Widening Participation Strategic Objectives to implement that underpin its framework:

**Strategic Objective 1** (Pre-entry): 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** (Post-entry): 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.
- The provision of a pre-term on-campus residential with the expressed aim of enhancing student engagement, and the promotion of student retention.
- The provision of a comprehensive suite of support activities.
- The provision of a range of targeted financial support packages to enable the engagement of those potentially less likely to have the financial capability to enable them to fully engage.

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

**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 Stranmillis University College. Currently the BA is the only programme with a part-time matriculation.

**Target 3** - Males into HE and the Education Profession

Over the years' considerable work has been done to support and encourage the engagement of male students into education programmes and onto the Early Childhood Studies programme.



Despite the fact that places on the various degree programmes at Stranmillis University College are quite limited due to external caps on places (DE also place caps on Initial Teacher Education places), measures of success will be to increase the number of students in each of the listed Target categories (Target 1, 2 & 3).

### 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 2023/24 – 2025/26**. These groups are regarded as being under represented in Access to Success.

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018-2021)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>85</b>		86	87	88

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018-2021)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>105</b>		106	107	108

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)	Targets/Outcome			
	4 Year Average	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>30</b>	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	32	34	36

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)	Targets/Outcome			
	4 Year Average	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>10</b>	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	11	12	13

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)	Targets/Outcome			
	4 Year Average	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<b>135</b>	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	135	135	135

As HESA data is largely incomplete for the following area, the figure that you provided in a previous WAPP for 2019/20 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	Targets/Outcome			
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
2	<b>Number</b>	2	2	2

**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)

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	<b>Number</b>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

(ii)

Group:
Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Number			
	Percentage			

(iii)

Group:
Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Number			
	Percentage			

**1.3(c)** 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.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Estimated Spend 2023/24 (£)</b>	<b>Estimated Spend 2024/25 (£)</b>	<b>Estimated Spend 2025/26 (£)</b>
Bursaries	96,800.00	99,704.00	102,695.12
Scholarships	0	0	0
Other financial Support	32,946.00	33,934.38	34,952.41
Outreach	103,000.00	106,090.00	109,272.70
Retention	15,000.00	15,450.00	15,913.50
Research Activity	25,000.00	25,750.00	26,522.50
Staffing/ Administration	2,862.00	2,947.86	3,036.30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>275,608.00</b>	<b>283,876.24</b>	<b>292,392.53</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.)

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

1. Access@Stran
2. Males@Stran
3. Outreach@Stran
4. Retention and Induction
5. Research into Underachievement and Support Needs

1. 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:

- Roadshows across the Regional Colleges in NI – targeted to key areas of subject or Widening Participation KPI related needs

- Support workshops for both role modelling and mentorship in support of HE study for those targeted within the Stranmillis Access Agreement or linked to Widening Participation KPIs
- Support schools at Stranmillis to address needs and/or underachievement goals.

## 2. Males@ Stran

Promotion and development of Males@Stran including Teaching as a Career and working as an Early Years Professional and Higher Education for personal development more generally through dedicated briefing seminars, including Open Day Presentation.

## 3. Outreach@Stran

### i. 'Look @ Stran'

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

This project will also include dedicated information events for potential Mature Student applicants through activities such as on-campus 'Open Evenings'.

### 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 itself but facilitates student participation.

### iii. 'Support Your B.Ed. Application'

Direct support for Widening Participation applicants to the B.Ed. degree in Stranmillis

Identify and note all Widening Participation B.Ed. applicants from their UCAS Application.

For Widening Participation applicants invited to interview, offer and provide training sessions on confidence building, delivering a good presentation and interview techniques.

Provide a pre-entry Campus Visit and familiarisation tour for applicants who receive offers to meet key people within the College. Twilight sessions involving key staff from B.Ed. 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. Widening Participation will also be involved where there is a mentoring need for any applicant.

#### iv. 'UpGrade U'

This will be our main campus-based activity. Through 'UpGrade U', selected schools will participate in regular 'on campus' activity. Each school will attend a number of full day events over the course of the academic year.

#### 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. 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.

### 4. Retention and Induction

#### i. Support U at Stran - Entry, Retention and Employability

A key element of this project is to provide relevant information about the various forms of support available at Stranmillis for Widening Participation Students including the provision of appropriate financial support. The 'Communication Skills Centre', under the direction of Student and Learning Services, will continue to provide support for students with their academic writing. This is a one-to-one study skills support programme throughout the year for all Widening Participation students who have identified writing support needs.

The College will continue to make appropriate provision for Care Leavers in the following manner:

Verified Care Experienced students are eligible for:

- A free Halls of Residence place for the duration of their course (no means testing applies to this priority group i.e. they do not also need to be entitled to a Stranmillis University College Bursary). Students must apply each year for a free Halls of Residence place via the Care Leaver Co-ordinator at Stranmillis University College.
- A Study Support Bursary at the following rates:
  - £600 in first year
  - £800 in second year
  - £1,000 in third year
  - £1,000 in final year for those enrolled on a four year degree
- A Graduation Bursary of £500 to assist with transition into employment or post-graduate study

#### ii. Bursaries

A College bursary of £500 is made available to higher education students from lower socioeconomic groupings. The Bursary is offered to all students with a family

household income of less than £19,237, and who taken the full financial package that is available from Student Finance NI (tuition and maintenance loan), and consented to share their information with a third party have applied

iii. Inclusive Learning / Disability Support

Educational Psychology assessments and needs assessments are carried out for those disclose a disability, learning difficulty and/or a long-term medical condition(s), but who do not receive Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding. Appropriate support recommendations are implemented and reviewed throughout the year.

iv. Single point of contact

The College has a single point of contact for Student Support provision, through the College's Student Support Centre, irrespective of the reasons for the required support be that care leaver, care experienced, as well as those with other conditions. Support needs are made known on a 'need to know basis' with the expressed permission of the student concerned.

5. Research into Underachievement

The College's Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU) was launched in 2018 with the core aim of engaging in a focused portfolio of innovative interdisciplinary research into educational underachievement in Northern Ireland. The Centre seeks to build on many years of innovative teaching and learning, robust research and scholarship, and effective community partnerships by cohering our efforts to address one of the most significant and complex societal challenges facing Northern Ireland

Adopting rigorous research methods, the Centre draws together the College's existing strengths in a range of methodological approaches, including community- and school-based qualitative approaches, surveys, large-scale data-set analysis, and randomised control trials. In each case the most appropriate methodological approach will be chosen to address the particular focus of the research.

Ensuring impact by linking evidence with policy, through the connections within the College and with policymakers locally, nationally and internationally. Where relevant, children, families, teachers, educational leaders, teacher educators and other stakeholders, are encouraged to participate in the research process in ways that ultimately improve educational outcomes for children.

**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. Appropriate reference to Access to Success will highlight clearly that developments within Stranmillis are not simply institutional requirements but regional. We agree that it is important to encourage and support the learners from the



various underrepresented groups to have the opportunity to benefit from higher education.

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 Widening Participation 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 Widening Participation outreach and is well placed to lead such activity further.

Stranmillis University College's Widening Participation strategy is closely aligned to the Department for the Economy's Access to Success.

In pursuant of our commitment to Widening Participation Stranmillis University College will:

- Seek to proactively support those from key Widening Participation groups;
- Seek to widen recruitment by further engaging those from a Widening Participation background.

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

The communication of projects for Widening Participation will be conducted using the following means:

- A web-based presence
- Student Bulletins
- Social media postings
- Partnership engagement with the Students' Union
- Email communication
- Promotion through the Student Support Centre and Student Support Centre staff
- University College prospectus
- Student Voice Committees
- Student Engagement Committee
- Poster around campus
- On-campus notice boards

- Student Induction/Welcome & Orientation Programme
- On-campus electronic screens

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

Stranmillis University College monitor the WAPP in line with the College's governance, senior management and leadership committee structure. The WAPP is managed by a dedicated member of staff and overseen by a Director of the College. The structure includes governance, the Executive Leadership Team, Academic Learning Committee, Student Recruitment and Marketing and Learning and Student Services Committees. Widening Participation progress is monitored by:

- Conducting surveys with target groups and adjusting programmes based on feedback
- Regularly reviewing targets in specific areas and adapting promotion, marketing or support where it is required.
- Monitoring retention rates of Widening Participation groups
- The Executive Leadership Team will review Widening Participation engagement and progress against targets on an annual basis
- Periodic reports on Widening Participation activity will be presented to the Education Committee of the College's Governing Body.

**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 participants thought and felt about the programme*

All of our programmes to date have included feedback, orally and in some cases through an evaluation report and 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

Outreach activities will include an evaluation to determine the inherent value in providing the various Widening Participation activities. Such 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.

Previously evaluations have highlighted that participants have gained much from on campus activity. Such activities provide a useful insight into university life and attempt to build positive mind-sets. Essentially on campus activity has aimed to support schools in raising pupil awareness of and aspirations to third level study.

## **Level 2 Evaluation - Learning**

### *The resulting increase in knowledge or capability*

Students who engage with the relevant support services tend to think differently about their courses, their studies, and indeed will have higher expectations and stronger aspirations. For school-aged pupils on-campus engagement provides them with invaluable opportunities to gain a taster of university life and to potentially progress to higher-level study. Students who commence a course at Stranmillis University College and who are from a Widening Participation background are helped and supported by College staff to engage with their degree studies.

## **Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer**

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

Feedback from students on each of the degree programmes is taken at the different Student Voice Committee which normally meets three times per academic year. These meetings are co-chaired by staff and students. In addition, the Students' Union Executive meet with members of the College Senior Management Team on twice per semester basis. In addition, there is student representation on a wide range of University College Committee including, but not limited to, Learning and Teaching, Student Support and Engagement, and the College's Governing Board. Student views are clearly heard and appropriately responded to, the student voice is critically important to ensuring that capability improvement is identified and implemented.

**Level 4 Evaluation- Results***Results- the effects resulting from performance*

Through our Widening Participation and Community Engagement strategies, Stranmillis University College is committed to encouraging, motivating and supporting young people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and other under-represented groups, to apply for and gain a place at university. The College offers a range of student bursaries and scholarships to support our widening participation programme. In addition to working closely with schools, community engagement programme directly targets influencers, families, community groups and careers professionals.

The College has established a Student Support Centre and has a detailed Student Wellbeing Strategy in place to ensure the proactive delivery of student support to all students, including those from a Widening Participation background. The Student Support Centre is strategically located in the centre of the College campus, and this is indicative of the fact that the student is at the centre of all that we do in the College. The key aims of the Student Support Centre are to strengthen retention, promote engagement, and secure success.



STRANMILLIS | 100  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
*Shaping education since 1922*