

SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

WIDENING ACCESS AND

PARTICIPATION PLAN 2023/24 – 2025/26

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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.

Lifelong learning and addressing social inclusion by providing progression for the whole community is central to the vision of government policy in the Further Education Means Success strategy, Higher Education Graduation to Success and the widening participation in higher education strategy Access to Success. It is also central to the Northern Ireland Programme for Government with population outcomes aspiring to a more equal society and giving our children and young people the best start in life.

Engagement over the past two years has been severely impacted by the pandemic. Despite this the SERC team has been proactive, attending multiple virtual events with statutory, voluntary and community sector partners. This has led to some new partnerships being developed.

The College's extensive student support activities will continue to be developed and enhanced to enable individuals to return to education, build resilience while studying with us and progress to meaningful careers.

SERC's commitment to addressing these strategies and widening access and participation is embedded within the College Development Plan (CDP) 2022/23 with a detailed analysis of the needs of our community and reflects a revised approach to widening access introduced in 2017/18. This current College Development Plan has been progressed against a backdrop of a non-functioning Northern Ireland Executive, absence of longer-term budgets, a world-wide recession, a cost-of-living crisis and continued uncertainty on the world stage emanating from the Ukrainian crisis and rising energy costs. This creates uncertainty in NI generally, significant financial pressures for government, businesses and citizens and impacts on the services required from the FE sector.

The CDP identifies 7 strategic priorities for the College. One of these key priorities is to:

“Address social inclusion, through community engagement and support, providing opportunities for the economically inactive to

*obtain a professional qualification and obtain employment” (SERC,
CDP 2022-23)*

See Evidence folder 1A- College Development Plan 22-23

The College’s engagement and social inclusion activities support SERC’s strategic priorities and College Development Plan aspirations, primarily to support business productivity and address skills gaps by providing a skilled workforce.

The College strives to do this by:

- enabling young people to make informed choices
- providing a professional, relevant curriculum alongside innovative learning and teaching approaches
- providing a supportive learning environment
- providing second chances for those who wish to reskill and upskill
- providing and encouraging the economically inactive into education and onwards towards meaningful employment
- contributing to a range of strategic partnerships to leverage further support

This more structured approach to engaging with economically inactive individuals and community engagement generally, in line with the College’s commitments under Widening Participation, has been developed and embedded since 2017/18 which has been well supported by the Governing Body. It is acknowledged engagement processes are labour intensive and it takes time to grow the numbers of those re-entering education but the potential short and long-term impact on individuals can be significant and life-altering, however this has also been compounded by the pandemic.

Greater coordination between internal student engagement, teaching teams and external community engagement has been achieved and continues to positively impact achievement.

The success of this approach has been acknowledged by the receipt of the AoC Beacon Award for Widening Participation in June 2022.

It is also acknowledged that barriers to individuals entering education could not be overcome by SERC alone and that flexibility in delivery was of essence if any initiative were to succeed.

Strategic approach to Community Planning

SERC's commitment to widening access and participation is embedded within SERC's 2030 Strategy and the annual College Development Plan with detailed analysis of the needs of our community and reflects our approach to widening access.

SERC continues to be an active partner across Community Planning Partnerships and their subgroups. This has facilitated work with our partners on a wider statutory, economic and community basis to address barriers and to enhance understanding of further education and our social inclusion agenda. These strategic partnerships provide opportunities to address access to Higher Education by tackling digital poverty, social exclusion, and marginalisation. We are engaged in the Labour Market Partnerships across Ards and North Down, Lisburn and Castlereagh, and Newry Mourne and Down districts. These partnerships provide opportunities to provide new and alternative educational experiences by providing networks and funding opportunities to support those economically inactive to return to education, widen their horizons and explore options for higher education. We also continue to develop partnerships in deprived communities through Interagency fora and community events to further promote the offering available for individuals and increase awareness of educational opportunity.

Community Engagement

SERC has undertaken a programme of community engagement and is taking deliberative steps to embed a partnership approach through targeted community engagement initiatives. This programme has included attendance at community events, community-based volunteering, social impact programmes, and developing relationships with key community stakeholders and primary schools to address social inclusion. The impact of the pandemic and current cost of living crisis has hit our most deprived communities the hardest, further emphasising the need to work with these groups at their point of need. We aim to further develop partnerships to support individuals to realise their full potential through access to education and by obtaining a professional qualification and sustainable career pathway.

Most of SERC's work in widening access is through opening routes towards HE or L3 FE Courses. These routes start at Level 2 with Restart and Restart Plus leading

to L3 or Access to HE. In addition to the Access programme qualification students have the opportunity to achieve GCSE Maths and English which is essential to removing barriers towards employment and progression. This provides a measured and managed individual development route for those of whom the majority have no qualification.

Engagement with Primary Schools

SERC has developed networks across primary schools in the three council areas of Lisburn and Castlereagh, Newry Mourne and Down, and Ards and North Down. Working in partnership with the school principals and staff, SERC aims to develop opportunities and pathways for parents to access or re-enter education. We held a series of 10 coffee mornings across targeted schools with high free school meal allocation. This provided an opportunity for parents in our most deprived communities to learn about our 'Restart Education' course and College support services resulting in 20 expressions of interest in the 'Restart Education' course.

The principals from local primary schools in Downpatrick and Newcastle areas attended a breakfast event at our Downpatrick Campus to discuss the 'Restart Education' model and how we can develop and strengthen partnerships to support and upskill parents. These links have led to events supporting STEM learning with parents and children in the primary schools, delivered by students and staff which will promote the benefits of returning to learning in these areas.

This collaboration has resulted in the SERC Restart Team being present at Open Evenings and PTA events promoting returning to education. Interest from parents concerning returning to education has led to the course being offered a room within primary schools to run the course.

It is planned that these engagements will be rolled out across all council areas.

Restart: Health and Wellbeing model

Our ongoing outreach has resulted in new relationships with 4 organisations, St Mary's PS Killyleagh, St Colman's PS, Drumaness GAC and St Mary's PS Portaferry. There is potential to deliver an updated model of the Restart course with a focus on health and wellbeing with a view to participants progressing to a full Restart programme with SERC and Access to HE.

Engineering Activity

SERC has implemented extensive work to engage with women and girls around engineering, implement initiatives to promote engineering to women and girls, and implement Industry 4.0 manufacturing courses for people already working in the industry. This engagement work resulted in SERC securing the following funding opportunities:

Funding for women in engineering leadership and mentoring course: This course creates strong female role models in the industry and provides them with the skills to be able to manage any work situation that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Family engineering workshops for girls aged 4 to 12: The workshops promote engineering to young girls and give parents the knowledge to encourage their daughters to consider engineering as a career option.

Both initiatives allowed people from outside the College to experience SERC as a potential future course provider. Further work is planned to secure funding from the All-Island fund to work with the University of Limerick in undertaking further engagement in primary schools regarding how to support primary school teachers in building their confidence in delivering STEM education. The project also aims to design and implement pre-prepared engineering lessons for primary schools. The lessons will include engineering kits for children to build and will be designed and created by SERC students. This work will open new course delivery opportunities for the College in primary schools.

Pathfinder

Pathfinder was established in November 2019 in Bangor, Lisburn, and Downpatrick campuses. It is a place where members of the public, who are considering returning to education, can attend a main college campus once a month to access a range of educational support and guidance, gain confidence and get familiar with college life. With Covid-19, unfortunately Pathfinder had to be put on hold, however with restrictions lifted the plan is to recommence this service by end of January 2023.

See Evidence folder 1B- Engagement and Social Inclusion Report 22-23

Supportive Curriculum Planning Process

The strong community-based widening access approach is reflected in the 2022/23 Curriculum Plan with a focus on returners to education a key theme. The plan is informed by the Northern Ireland Programme for Government and resulting strategies to support the economic needs of Northern Ireland.

The Curriculum Plan inevitably works within the current economic climate and the challenges that this brings but STEM and priority skills are prioritised and demonstrates a continued commitment to upskill, develop and provide progression for under-represented groups and particularly those in areas designated as deprivation quintiles 1 and 2 within the SERC catchment area.

SERC continues to expand STEAM areas (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) and extend the employability and academic opportunities available. This has been further enhanced through the development of transversal skills (T Skills) at FE and meta skills (M Skills) at HE level. Significant investment has been made in extending flexibility particularly with the use of technology enhanced learning.

The last ETI Level 3 ETI Evaluation, in March 2020, noted regarding the science provision:

“The outstanding practice in planning for learning is predicated on a comprehensive knowledge of the students’ levels of prior attainment and experience”.

See Evidence folder 1C- ETI Evaluation March 20

Delivering remotely was significantly enhanced during the pandemic when online delivery supported by innovative use of learning technology was enhanced and quickly became a strength. A blended approach to delivery has been continued to assist in the development of digital skills for learners and included as part of the current Curriculum Plan.

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

For the period 2020/21 SERC aimed to:

- Provide appropriate support for those within the SERC catchment who fall within the Access to Success target groups to progress in the long-term towards higher education;
- Respond to the changing needs of the target groups through review and evaluation of strategies and data; and
- Continue to promote suitable progression routes towards higher education

Table 1 summarises the targets set for period 2020/21 against the actual enrolments for each area identified in the Widening Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 – 2022/23.

	Target for 20/21 (%)	Target for 20/21 (No.)	Actual for 20/21 (%)	Actual for 20/21 (No.)
Enrolments from MDM Quintile 1	9%	129	8.4%	135
Enrolments from students with a disability	9%	108	8%	124
Enrolments from students in receipt of DSA	-	21	-	22
Enrolments from young male students in MDM Q1	-	26	-	14
Enrolments from adult returners	40%	594	55.9%	898
Enrolments from students who have a Care Experience	-	12	-	17

Table 1- Target vs. Actual Enrolments for 20/21 and 21/22

Recruitment, Retention and Progression within the Target Groups

The position for 2020/21 reflects SERC's catchment for the target groups as measured within the most recent census and is expressed as a percentage.

Recruitment three-year average from 2018-2021 for deprivation areas Q1 and Q2 has remained stable at 25.0% on trend to previous periods.

The SERC's approach to WAPP through the development of Access and Restart opportunities for adult returners has shown a trended increase in PT HE recruitment

from 2017 at 571 adult learners to 864 in 2020/21 and an increase of 76 learners from 2019/20. This is a growth of approx. 51% over the 4-year period and approx. 9% from 2019/20.

The number of HE adult returners has increased by approx. 5.2% from 2019/20 to 898 in 2020/21.

The demand for PT HE study for adult returners is reflected in curriculum planning to suit this group of learners particularly within key STEM/ STEAM areas including computing, construction, engineering, media, performing arts and health and social care. Retention of these groups was strong with retention of 96% and achievement of 97%.

Encouraging students to declare continues to be a focus within admission and learning support processes. Pre-entry advice and guidance sessions as well as online and face-to-face events emphasise the importance of self-declaration to assist in gaining positive learning outcomes. The processes have been reviewed with early intervention and signposting services and the co-ordination of admissions and pastoral care and support with tutors and students has produced a more streamlined and timely approach. The effectiveness of the support has been acknowledged by ETI in recent review activity (ETI June 2020). Retention reflected the College benchmarks. Ensuring that students are supported will continue to be a specific focus and closely monitored by the College.

In 2020/21 there were 17 students recruited with Care Experience onto HE programmes which is an increase of 5 for our target for that year. In 2020/21 88% of the learners were retained, however achievement was impacted by Covid-19. This aspect of provision is closely aligned to the CDP with careful tracking mechanisms and close agency links to provide support.

Of note is the impact of bursaries on retention of target groups. SERC provided a 10% fee bursary to 112 students in 2020/21. The feedback from students was that they valued this payment and while it may seem small to the College it was of importance. In light of this SERC will continue to offer bursaries to this economically challenged group. The bursary increased in importance with the financial uncertainties faced by students during the Covid-19 restrictions.

Progression from the target groups remains strong for WAPP groups on HE programmes. The results of the graduate outcomes survey should provide clearer evidence but HE student satisfaction rates remain at 94% despite the challenges faced through the pandemic.

The majority of SERC's work in widening access is through opening routes towards HE. These routes start at Level 2 with Restart and Restart Plus leading to Access. This provides a measured and managed individual development route for those of whom the majority have no formal qualifications.

The appetite for this progression remains strong and Restart programmes in 2020/21 continued to be held across the SERC catchment with engagement from Glenward, Ards, Redburn Loughview, Clanrye and Sally Gardens.

In 2020/21 retention on the Restart programme increased by 5% to 87%, in comparison to 2019/20, however over the same period achievement dropped by 31%. This was a direct impact of Covid-19 with the course team noting that while significant numbers of learners actively participated in blended and face-to-face classes, despite support, advice, and encouragement, many of these students did not complete assessment activities.

In 2020/21 the Access provision with QUB was revalidated with the aim of further alignment to health, science, care and legal pathways. The validation of the provision by QUB is important to aspiring Access students.

Within the full Access suite of programmes the progression to QUB, Ulster University and SERC within the competitive programme areas of Social Work, Nursing, Podiatry, Physiotherapy, Health and Care continues to be strong. In 2020/21 retention in Access provision was 88% with achievement of 93% which was on trend with 2019/20. Over 96% of year 2 learners who achieved their Access Diploma qualification progressed to a positive outcome with 53% progressing to FT HE and 6% to PT HE.

The recruitment and retention of Young Males from Q1 remains a challenge with 10 recruited from this group. The Steps to Education (see Appendix A Part 2) initiative is focused on developing partnerships with hard-to-reach community leaderships. Community outreach is focused on Q1 and Q2 postcodes within Ards, Lisburn and

Down District catchment. The engagement of adult returners and Young Females is strong but Young Males continue to be difficult to attract. The community engagement strategy was digitised due to the pandemic.

See Evidence Folder 1D Community Engagement and Social Inclusion 20-21

The College will continue to invest in this area with a focus on developing relevant communication and support. The lessons learned through Covid-19 lockdown have been utilised in planning for Steps to Education projects for 2022/23 and moving forward.

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

For the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 SERC aims to:

- Provide appropriate support for those within the SERC catchment area who fall within the Access to Success target groups to progress in the long-term towards higher education;
- Respond to the changing needs of the target groups through review and evaluation of strategies and data; and
- Continue to promote suitable progression routes towards higher education.

Approach to Targeting

Targets are based on the College trends taking into account the DfE four-year trend and predictions based on the current climate. They form the basis of the targets going forward.

SERC is concerned that the current financial crisis may impact on targets moving forward. However, the College will take steps to continue to develop outreach opportunities.

The overall numbers of Higher Education enrolments both part and full-time, and the MaSN is continuing to decline but the College will continue to strive to meet the set targets and monitor the percentages within the target groups.

Future targets

Between 2023/24 – 2025/26 SERC aim to meet the targets identified below and enrol in Higher Education:

- 9% or 133 enrolments from MDM Quintile 1,
- 8% or 103 enrolments from students with a disability,
- 22 students are in receipt of DSA,
- 14 young male students in MDM Q1,
- 53% or 757 enrolments from adult returners, and
- 15 enrolments from students who have a Care Experience

1.3a 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)		Target/ Outcome		
4 Year Average		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
133	Number of Students	133	134	135

(i) Group: **Students with a Disability**

Outcome: **To increase the number of students who declare a disability**

Average (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)		Target/ Outcome		
4 Year Average		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
103	Number of Students	103	104	105

(ii) Group: **Students with a Disability**

Outcome: **To increase the number of students in receipt of DSA**

Average (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)		Target/ Outcome		
4 Year Average		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
XX	Number of Students	22	22	22

(iii) 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)		Target/ Outcome		
4 Year Average		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26

22	Number of Students	14	14	14
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- (iv) Group: **Adult Learners**
Outcome: **To increase the number of adult learners participating in HE**

Average (based on 4 years 2018- 2021)		Target/ Outcome		
4 Year Average		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
757	Number of Students	757	757	757

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.

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

Base Year		Target/ Outcome		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
19	Number of Students	15	15	15

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.)

Outreach activity

Returning Adults - pre-entry Access and Restart Plus

The University Access provision has been very successful. In 2020/21 the Level 2 Restart and Level 3 Access to HE (FT and PT) combined had a retention of 88% and 86% achievement leading to an overall success of 75%. Achievement was impacted by Covid-19 for this academic year. Whilst students engaged well with lessons throughout the year online, they struggled with submitting assessments for the programme

Covid-19 had an impact on how we could engage with community groups in the way we had done in the past. We maintained engagement by hosting online coffee mornings. Post pandemic, we are re-engaging with community groups in in hard-to-reach areas such as East End, Newcastle, Killyleagh, Drumaness and Kircubbin. The programme continues to focus on areas of high deprivation and social exclusion with the aim of providing the key skills in literacy, numeracy, science, social science and study skills necessary for progression. The programme is flexible and adapted to suit the needs of the learners on an individual basis.

Attracting males into these programmes remains challenging. We aim to continue to increase our level of male participants from Q1 and Q2 through targeted engagement, needs analysis and responsive and collaborative solutions to support these cohorts to access these programmes. The development of an enhanced engagement approach and strong community partnerships such as the Action Mental Health- Men's Shed, Biodiversity projects and working with GAA Sports Clubs will continue to be developed to meet the needs of this group.

The additional fee money will be used to support and enhance the learning experience of these groups with relevant activities including visits and guest speakers.

The Newcastle Creche initiative is thriving with learners travelling to avail of the facility and has 24 children being cared for while their parents learn. This opened in

October 2019 and despite the restrictions has proven to be a valuable addition to reducing barriers to education. While additional fee money will not be used in its support it illustrates the continued enhancement of facilities for adult returners.

As the Newcastle model was used as the showcase for the Beacon Award, the College is now preparing to role this model out across the other Campus'.

Steps to Education

SERC introduced an initiative in 2014/15 to raise awareness and maintain enrolments within higher education. While SERC normally holds or participates in a range of community-based activities along with continuous community contact throughout the year, this activity was severely curtailed due to Covid-19 related restrictions. Contact with community groups was maintained as far as possible through virtual coffee mornings however, the lack of face-to-face engagement has impacted the enrolment of Q1 young males and adult Returner to Education participants. Amidst restrictions, activities led by Community Planning Partners such as the Councils, Health Trusts and Community Voluntary Sector organisations and SERC, concentrated on ensuring allocation of food and digital support.

Engagement activities have recommenced targeting adult returners and young men in the catchment areas organised by SERC or in partnership with other statutory and community/voluntary sector partners. Engagement initiatives allow participants to build a relationship with SERC staff while highlighting the range of educational opportunities and financial support available to the target groups. Information on the comprehensive range of support services that SERC can offer is shared and participants are supported to have wide ranging questions answered on a one-to-one basis such as progression, impact on benefits etc. For those who decide to progress, support and advice is provided to prepare individual development plans. Engagement activity is supported by targeted marketing to Q1 and Q2 postcodes within the SERC catchment area including the enhanced use of social media.

See Evidence Folder 1D- Community Engagement and Social Inclusion 20-21

Research

The well-established self-evaluation review, student survey, market intelligence and GIS systems will continue to provide the information which can be used to populate the Kirkpatrick Model.

Retention

Getting the Edge – development of employability and enterprise skills

The college aims to introduce students to and develop competences in Transversal skills (T Skills) necessary to gain employment. T Skills are skills that are critical to success in a wide variety of contexts and work settings but that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular task, job or area of knowledge. Employers regularly report that graduates do not have the employability skills necessary within the workplace. Students within the WAPP groups tend to be at the greatest disadvantage. Research through the Curriculum Directorate has shown that many of the skills displayed by our students are entrepreneurial. The employability skill opportunities have been added to this retention initiative.

As part of induction, all full-time students undertake a group project, designing solutions to a real-world challenge, and presenting these solutions to internal and external judges in a college-wide expo event. Students complete a Level 2 OCN NI Innovation and Enterprise in practice award, demonstrating their T Skills development through practical application. This pedagogical strategy of project-based learning targets wider-skills highlighted in the NI Skills Barometer as lacking in graduates.

Research from Stranmillis University comprised evidence from 4000 SERC students and 46% of the SERC staff population, demonstrated the benefit of the Entrepreneur Club experience across all transversal skills categories, with improvement recorded in 55 out of the 56 component areas. Staff also reported increased enjoyment of teaching and improved efficacy of student learning. The research identified that 19% of SERC students were interested in setting up their own companies, which was over three times the Northern Ireland average of 5% of the population setting up businesses.

The Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Environment team provides opportunities to develop business ideas and skills using project-based learning as the catalyst. Mentoring is provided through dedicated enterprise staff and industry mentors, and supported through an Entrepreneur Club, which harnesses skills, expertise and inspiration from a wide range of individuals, including an Entrepreneur-in-Residence. Opportunities to trade are provided through on-campus markets, and support is offered to any student or staff who has an innovative or entrepreneurial idea.

Through a rich calendar of events, opportunities, skills development and 'roll on roll off' mentoring tailored to the specific needs of the individual/business, students are encouraged to develop their entrepreneurial skills, as well as their T Skills in all aspects of college life and work.

Support of those with a Care Experience

Students with Care Experience have been identified as having multiple barriers to entering and continuing in education. In 2020/21 4 care experienced learners were enrolled on HE programmes and a further 11 on PT HE.

Data indicates that in 2020/21 2% of FT FE students were from a care experienced background, whereas 0.8% of HE FT students were from this background, although given the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions during this period and their impacts on care arrangements, these figures must be considered with caution.

The College continues to ensure that care experienced young people are supported and encouraged to progress beyond level 3.

Furthermore, ongoing engagements with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, through the Community Planning partnerships indicate that there has been a significant increase in the number of young people experiencing care through the period of Covid-19, with this currently standing at approximately 500 needing to be placed in care of one form or another.

The College remains committed to both encouraging and assisting those with care experience to enrol at the College and has recently been working with for example Social workers and others, including the Fostering Network to promote the College and the learning pathways available.

In addition, the Pastoral Care Team engages with the social care sector, and where appropriate works with the social workers to support student throughout their time attending the College; this can include ensuring that assistance from Social Services is made available for the student in a timely manner and contributing to Trust reviews and case conferences.

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

The activities listed in the plan, target those groups which may be under-represented within the College catchment area. They also assist learners to progress to Higher Education.

The guidance and support provided by SERC provide long-term measures reducing the barriers to education and raising aspiration levels across target groups regarded as being underrepresented in Access to Success.

The projects have evolved over a number of years and provide greater development opportunities for progression to Higher Education, but it may take many years for the target groups to reach this goal especially as the strategy is currently focusing on the hardest to reach.

There has been an improvement particularly in recruitment for returning adult learners with a substantive growth between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

The activities aim to keep learners within the education process and support them as they progress through the system in a way that meets individual learner needs.

In 2020/21, 71% of students who achieved their Access qualification, achieved grades at the level appropriate to their first-choice offer.

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

Student Finance Advisors are based on the four main campuses and are the nominated source of information and advice for students on higher education fees and support mechanisms.

Throughout the application process all students are informed about financial support and are reminded to apply for support through the regular 'keeping in touch' email communications prior to the start of their course. The Student Finance Advisors are involved at the Student Induction sessions and Freshers Fairs. The team also carry out class talks, offer drop-in clinics for advice and take part in part time engagement evening sessions.

Online materials about Student Finance are also available and used during class tutorials. Interactive guides on financial support are available on the College website. The team are also available for one-on-one advice and support by email, telephone, teams calls and face to face appointments.

Academic tutors are briefed on support mechanisms and encourage students to share information. The student handbook includes information about financial support, and this is highlighted during induction and at key points in the year.

The Students' Union are briefed on the financial support available and assist in promoting Student Finance events and application deadlines to the students.

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

The Governing Body through the Education Committee review quality and performance targets twice a year. The Annual Report for the Department for the Economy provides further oversight. The Engagement Update Reports and the College development Plan progress reports provide further detail.

See Evidence Folder 1D Community Engagement and Social Inclusion 20-21 and Evidence Folder 1E College Development Plan and Updates 20-21

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.

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

Unfortunately, there was no survey responses for the Restart provision in 2020/21. However, focus groups with learners provided positive feedback on the support provided by staff through the pandemic and the online delivery. This resulted in 85% of students who achieved their Restart qualification progressing to study the Level 3 Access programme in 2021/22. Approximately 15% of the remaining learners progressed to other level 2 vocational areas within the College.

The feedback from Access learners remained high, despite the challenges of Covid-19 and online delivery with 88% of learners surveyed agreeing they were enjoying and satisfied with their programme. 94% of learners surveyed also agreed that they were developing skills that would help them in real life, with 89% providing positive feedback around teaching, learning and assessment. The reasons for this remain the support provided by staff, the flexibility of the programme and the achievement felt by participants.

The early support provided for adult returners and care experienced students is highly valued by these groups which brings achievement early in the

programmes. The students firmly believe that they are treated equally, and this increases confidence and self-esteem.

Tracking the change in perceptions during the programme remains significant particularly in terms of feeling of belonging to the student body. The small group teaching and ease of access to the individual allocated personal tutor is valued throughout the programme but soon it is belonging to the larger student body that is valued.

The Student Governor acknowledges the approach taken within the Widening Access and Participation Plan.

The Students' Union continues to embrace with WAPP ethos through its contribution to the development and implementation of the 'Developing Well-Being and Resilience Framework' which provides targeted support.

Level 2 Evaluation – Learning

The resulting increase in knowledge or capability

Student feedback has been obtained through focus groups and from the Big 14 Survey. Overall feedback from students was very positive with 88% of students confirming that they were enjoying their studies and 85% expressing satisfaction with the online resources and 86% for the level of pastoral support provided. In terms of teaching, learning and assessment 89% of students confirmed that tutors use different ways to help them learn and that they are provided with clear guidance around the standards of work expected and with appropriate support for assessments. 94% of students also confirmed that they are developing skills which will support them for real life.

In focus group meetings approximately 60% of students indicated that they viewed progression to Higher Education as the next step for them to develop their learning while 30% felt that they wanted to take some time to decide on their future plans.

See Evidence Folder 1F Big14 Survey 2020-21

Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer

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

A key element within both the Restart and Access programmes is the support provided to learners to overcome a lack of confidence and self-belief.

Pre-enrolment advice, guidance and course induction are key elements within the Access and Restart programmes. One-to-one, pre-enrolment face-to-face meetings with learners allows the course team to clearly understand the background of each individual learner and to start to explore potential barriers to learning and progression. These meetings also allow the learner to explore the requirements of the course and helps them to understand the levels of commitments required. While meetings were conducted via Teams as part of pre-enrolment and induction process in 2020/21 it is acknowledged that for some learners their level of digital skills impacted on the effectiveness of these meetings and that it was often more difficult to explore potential barriers to learning through an online environment.

Many learners who enrol on Access and Restart programmes lack confidence. These confidence issues can arise from their personal circumstances, their perceived failure in previous educational settings or in the timeframe from when they last engaged in formal education. Equally a significant proportion of learners have academic fears around their ability to cope with the demands of the course and in particular with English and Mathematics elements of the programme. To address this the course team, place a focus on ensuring that learners gain tangible skills as well as putting to rest fears over academic areas such as Mathematics and English. Equally for many learners the achievement of Mathematics and English is rightly viewed as opening doors to employment as well as new programme routes.

Resilience is another key theme developed through the Restart and Access programmes. Programmes are structured to allow learners time to develop confidence in their own abilities during the early parts of their programme and learners are supported to deal with challenges. The effectiveness of this approach is confirmed by 89% of learners who report that they are provided with appropriate support and encouragement.

Another important development centres around digital skills. The issue of age in transfer and progression in the use digital skills was seen as an issue for many

students at the beginning of study. There was concern that they were 'just too old' to learn and that no-one would take them seriously and through the planned support and learning activities these skills have been significantly developed.

Level 4 Evaluation- Results

Results- the effects resulting from performance

While enrolments to Restart and Access programmes remained relatively strong in 2020/21 this was a more challenging period. Restart enrolments declined from 130 in 2019/20 to 76 in 2020/21 and this is largely attributed to the social restrictions that were in place during the main period of enrolment. Equally Access enrolments declined from 330 in 2019/20 to 280 in 2020/21 however strong community links remain active and ensure that adult returners are aware of the opportunities available through the Access and Restart programmes.

In 2020/21 retention on the Restart programme increased by 5% to 87%, in comparison to 2019/20, however over the same period achievement dropped by 31%. The course team noted that while significant numbers of learners actively participated in blended and face-to-face classes, despite support, advice, and encouragement, many of these students did not complete assessment activities.

Retention (88%) and achievement (93%) on Access programmes remained high in 2020/21 and is broadly in line with 2019/20. Over 96% of year 2 learners who achieved their Access Diploma qualification progressed to a positive outcome with 53% progressing to FT HE, 6% to PT HE and 31% progressing to employment or self-employment. All learners who successfully completed year 1 of their Access programme progressed to a positive outcome with 86% returning to year 2 and 14% progressing to employment.

Retention and achievement of learners from quintiles 1 and 2 on the Restart and Access programmes in 2020/21 were broadly in line with the overall cohort of enrolled learners.

The overall satisfaction levels and retention and achievement point to the contribution made by the WAPP strategy. Challenges however remain around attracting young males and this remains central to the CDP as a resourced strategy within it.