



## **Widening Access Agreement 2017/18**

**SERC operate a widening access agreement with the Department for the Economy to support progression to and within higher education. This document outlines the approach and commitment made to widening access in the College.**

**Further information on the agreement can be obtained from the Head of Quality, Excellence and Development at SERC.**

## WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2017/18 – 2019/20

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

**1.1** Please provide a high level outline of the South Eastern Regional College 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. SERC's commitment to the strategies and widening access and participation is embedded within the College Development Plan 2016-19 and the aim of shaping the curriculum to provide programmes that promote greater engagement with 'hard to reach' learners and provide progression to higher level courses. This is supported through widening participation activities to encourage fair access, retention and performance. The ongoing development of the strategy has led to a greater concentration on 'hard to reach' areas and a refocus of activities and projects to meet a more clearly defined need. This development is reflected in the 2017/18 Curriculum Plan with a focus on returners to education is a key theme. 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.

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

For the period 2014/15 to 2016/17 SERC aimed 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.

The commitment to widening access is reflected in the College three-year average from 2012-15 where full-time higher education recruitment from Q1 and Q2 are 25% of the total number of higher education enrolments. This reflects the expected enrolments levels for the SERC catchment area. It demonstrates the continued contribution by SERC to the widening access agenda. Within curriculum provision STEM opportunities have increased with 51% of HE in STEM and 57% of student studying Foundation Degrees.

Higher Education retention and achievement for 2014/15 remained high at 97%. This reflects the considerable effort made by the College to reduce wastage and provide timely support and intervention. Six weekly student case conferences remain a feature for targeting support. The uptake in Downpatrick continues to be challenging and has led to a refreshed approach to communication with target groups including enhanced marketing events, parents' evenings and refocus on school partnerships. This approach will continue to be developed in 2016-18.

The recruitment for Q1 remained static at 8.5%. This broadly reflects SERC catchment area of 9.9% but the College acknowledges the particular need within Northern Ireland to provide strong, relevant routes to higher education and initiatives within the Restart and Access programmes seek to address the needs of this group. The marketing and support initiatives within catchment areas such as Ardglass, Ballymote, Cathedral, Conlig and Colin Glenn will continue through 2017-2020.

### **Target groups**

Opportunities for returning adults remains a priority and the introduction of the pre-access course has been of notable success addressing an identified gap. Within the Access provision WAPP students entering onto the one-year programme have strong retention, achievement and progression rates ranging from very good to outstanding. An analysis of the retention and achievement data and student evaluations for the two-year programme shows that many require additional preparation. The Restart programme addresses this need.

This bespoke qualification, developed in collaboration with SRC and OCN, was rebranded as 'Restart Education'. An acknowledgement of the possible lead-in time necessary before progressing to Access and HE and to highlight the range of progression opportunities from the programme. The expansion of this programme during 2016-18 will continue to target identified 'hard to reach' areas in Q1 and Q2.

As student data has continued to improve the gender split has caused concern within higher education enrolments showing a decline in proportion of females to male to 36% for 2015/16. This is particularly concerning in STEM areas of computing and engineering. Analysis of the Restart programme shows that 88% of the enrolments are female of which 46% have no qualifications and 44% from the lowest deciles. The focus of the programme is on literacy, numeracy, science, social science, personal skills and study skills. It attracts childcare and FE support. Of the 43 enrolments there has been an 84% retention of which 33% are progressing to two-year Access programmes and the remaining are either going into employment or onto FE level 3 programmes in Construction, Animal Care and Health and Care before progressing. The success of the programme relies on careful management of expectations, level of staffing and links with the community. In the longer-term it is hoped that the programme will provide a higher number of female enrolments into higher education particularly in STEM areas. The team is actively considering how the programme can be as attractive to males and particularly YPM. The development of this programme will continue to be a focus in 2016-18.

The recording of DSA remains problematic and will continue to be addressed during 2016-18. SERC will continue to identify and meet the requirements of this group.

The number of Young Care Leavers progressing from further education to higher education is low. There is currently no reliable regional data to establish expected targets. SERC has begun to track the group and intends to develop a greater understanding of the progression needs of these prospective students. The College will continue to manage the group according to demand.

### **Bursaries**

In the Access Agreement of 2014-2016 an average of 35% students paying an enhanced fee were in receipt of a bursary. Students receive the Access Bursary where they are in receipt through the Student Loan Company of a full maintenance grant or student support grant. This percentage of students receiving a bursary remained the same as that in 2013-14. SERC continues to work with students and the Student Loan Company to ensure that all students who are eligible are contacted and a bursary awarded.

### **1.3 Please outline the Widening Participation aims, objectives and targets for next 3 years for South Eastern Regional College.**

*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*

For the period 2017/18 to 2019/20 SERC aimed 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 sector information pre-populated on this plan based on the College average enrolments for the previous three years. This is analysed within the context of College detailed enrolment trends through GIS analysis, DEL Health Checks and the 2011 Northern Ireland census and the SERC catchment area.

### **Targets**

Between 2017/18-2019/20 SERC will aim to increase higher education enrolments to:

9% or 135 enrolments from MDM Quintile 1  
17% or 260 enrolments from MDM Quintile 2  
40% or 605 enrolments from adult returners  
10% or 145 enrolments from students with a disability  
10 enrolments from students who have a Care Experience  
22 young male students in MDM Quintile 1

### 1.3 (a) TARGETS

You will note that the tables numbered (i) to (vii) below have been pre populated with your institutions 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 2017/18 – 2019/20. 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 3 years 2012- 2015)	Targets/Outcome			
3 Year Average		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>128</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	130	132	135

(ii) Group: **MDM Quintile 2**

Outcome: **To increase participation of those from NI MDM Q2**

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012- 2015)	Targets/Outcome			
3 Year Average		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>249</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	252	255	260

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

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012- 2015)	Targets/Outcome			
	3 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2017/18	2018/19
<b>137</b>		140	142	145

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

Targets/Outcome			
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	40	40	40

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

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012- 2015)	Targets/Outcome			
	3 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2017/18	2018/19
<b>18</b>		20	21	22

(vi) Group: **Adult Learners**

Outcome: **To increase the number of adult learners participating in HE**

AVERAGE (based on 3 years 2012- 2015)	Targets/Outcome			
	3 Year Average	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>594</b>	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	598	602	605

HESA data is largely incomplete for this area. Therefore we are asking institutions to determine 2014/15 year as a base year using your own enrolment data.

(vii) Group: **Number of Care Experienced enrolments**

Outcome: **To increase the number of enrolments for those from a care background**

BASE YEAR	Targets/Outcome			
	2014/15	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
5	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	7	8	10

**1.4** Outline below the key programmes/projects financed from additional student fees that will contribute towards your Institution's performance? (It would be advisable to refer to the appropriate section of the guidance notes before completing this response)

**Outreach activity**

**1 Returning Adults - pre-entry Access**

Student feedback and RAS data for University Access provision highlighted the difficulties that returners face. The programme was rewritten and rebranded in 2015 with aim of providing the key skills in literacy, numeracy, science, social science and study skills necessary for progression. It has proven very successful with an 84% retention and achievement rate. It was particularly useful in attracting women returns who have proven difficult to enrol on a STEM heavy HE curriculum.

The aim is to extend and embed the provision to increase the level of male participants especially in Q1 and Q2 and provide further support for progression

## **2 Steps to Education**

Analysis of the participation of adult returners, those with Q1 and Q2 postcodes and young males from Q1 has indicated lower enrolments than would be expected within Ards, Lisburn and Down District catchment.

SERC introduced an initiative in 2014/15 to raise awareness and maintain enrolments within higher education. The building of awareness through enrolment on entry to Access and Access has developed greater involvement from hard to reach communities.

SERC will hold six community based events along with continuous community contact throughout the year. Two of the events will be in partnership with local community groups. These will target adult returners and young men in the catchment areas. They will highlight the range of educational opportunities and financial support available to the target groups. It will include information on the comprehensive range of support services that SERC can offer and provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions and obtain further information and for those who decide to progress to prepare individual development plans. It will be supported by targeted marketing to Q1 and Q2 postcodes within the SERC catchment area.

Continuity will be provided through the support of Community Development Officers.

### **Research**

#### **1 Implementation of Kirkpatrick model and tracking of Care Experienced students**

The College has comprehensive evaluation processes but these will be extended to include the Kirkpatrick model for WAPP groups and tracking of Care Experienced students.

### **Retention**

#### **1 Getting the Edge – development of employability skills**

The project aims to introduce students to and develop competence in soft skills necessary to gain employment. 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.

As part of induction all FT students undertake a competence based employability award. Students complete either a City and Guilds level 2 Employability or ILM Level 3 Leadership and Management award. The awards are delivered using a competence framework and activities are both practical and academic. Skills are developed through team building including presentations using media technology and by individual preparation which focuses on skills valuable in interviews and support preparing employment applications. Following review, the project has been extended to two weeks to assist in embedding skills and respond to student feedback. The additional fees help to support the practical nature of the initiative and the development of learning materials.



## **2 Support of those with a Care Experience**

Students with Care Experience have been identified as having multiple barriers to entering and continuing in education. The College has identified that over 70 students in FE are from a care background but very few progress to higher education. The College aims to engage and support students to progress to higher education and those who are engaged in level 4-7 study.

To provide comprehensive support the College has an agreed named primary point of contact with area Education and Library Boards and Health Trust Welfare Officers to oversee the implementation of the scheme and help identify prospective students. A student has to consent to being identified as being Care Experienced and marketing material has been revised and contact made with local schools and agencies to highlight opportunities available. On admission the student is provided with a dedicated member of staff as an advisor and point of contact throughout the duration of the student's course. The support provided for the student includes signposting on finance, health and accommodation issues as well as academic support. Progression is monitored by the advisor and access to SERC Extra advisors arranged as required. Specialist progression advice is provided on an individual basis.

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

The activities listed target those groups which are may be under-represented within the SERC catchment area and assist learners to progress ultimately to higher education. The support and guidance provided by the College are long-term measures to reduce barriers and raise aspiration and success across the target groups as defined by *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. The activities aim to keep learners within the education process and support them as they progress through the system in a way that meet individual learner needs.

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

Student Finance Officers are on every campus and are the nominated source of information and advice for students on Higher Education fees and support mechanisms.

At application stage all students are informed as part of a finance briefing about bursaries and support. This is reinforced through subsequent parent evenings in the year prior to the student commencing their course.

At enrolment student finance officers support students and encourage sharing of information through the SLC portal.

Academic tutors are briefed on support mechanisms and encourage students to share information.

The College website and student handbook includes information about financial support and this is highlighted during induction and at key points in the year.

Information on bursaries and support is updated regularly and current and prospective students are reminded about financial support through regular finance clinics and at pastoral tutorials.

The Students' Union are briefed on fees and bursaries as they are set.

All students who share financial information automatically receive a bursary.

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

Targets and achievements of outcomes will be monitored through CMT three times per year. To engage students in the process the Student Governor will be briefed and feedback taken through the student representation cycle. The Governing Body will be updated through the annual self-evaluation and quality improvement cycle.