WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2018/19 – 2020/21

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.

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 (CDP) 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 2018/19 Curriculum Plan with a focus on returners to education 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. SERC also plans to expand STEAM areas (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) to extend the employability and academic opportunities possible. Significant investment has been made in extending flexibility particularly with the use of technology enhanced learning. As part of the 2017 to 2021 CDP SERC is working with local community groups to develop access strategies to education through use of technology and providing tailored social support.

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 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.

In light of the re-profiling of targets in 2016 the update refers to the targets below that by 2017:

9% or 135 enrolments from MDM Quintile 1
17% or 260 enrolments from MDM Quintile 2
40% or 605 enrolments from adult returners
9% or 130 enrolments from students with a disability
10 enrolments from students who have a Care Experience
22 young male students in MDM Quintile 1

The position for the year 2015/2016 is:

10.7% or 157 enrolments from MDM Quintile 1
18% or 260 enrolments from MDM Quintile 2
39% or 595 enrolments from adult returners
8% or 124 enrolments from students with a disability
10 enrolments from students who have a Care Experience
29 young male students in MDM Quintile 1

Target groups

The commitment to widening access is reflected in the College three-year average from 2013-16 where higher education recruitment from deprivation areas Q1 and Q2 are 27% 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. In year 2015/16 there was a significant increase in enrolments from deprivations areas Q1 and Q2 which led to targets in these areas being achieved a year early. The recruitment for Q1 increased in 2015/16 to 10.7% from 8.5% where it had remained static since 2012/13. The College cautiously welcomes this increase and will monitor to establish if it is a trend or if the enrolment returns to the expected 9.9% within the catchment. This expectation has resulted in the target being set at beyond the three- year average excluding the unusual increase in 2015/16.

The College continues to acknowledge 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 will continue in Ardglass, Ballymote, Cathedral, Conlig and Colin Glenn through 2018-2021. Areas of Redburn (Holywood) and Tollymore and Donard in Newcastle will be added as part of this community focus. It is too early to claim that the improved levels will continue to be achieved but the general direction of travel is upwards. Analysis of the postal codes of enrolments from Q1 and Q2 demonstrated that targeting outreach had resulted in the slow but gradual increase in enrolments from these areas. 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 2015/16 remained high but the environment is challenging. Considerable effort was made to reduce wastage and provide timely support and intervention. Six weekly student case conferences remain a feature for targeting support and these were supplemented with enhanced case conferences to further review performance and tackle stubborn areas of social concern.

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. Initiatives within 'Education Restart' and development of alliances with local community groups including SureStart, Homestart, Apex Housing Association, YMCA and Men's Shed in the Newcastle/Downpatrick area were introduced in 2015/16. This approach proved positive in recruiting and shaping the programmes and will continue to be developed in 2018/19 – 2020/21. It is likely that the positive outcomes will be seen in further improvements in level 1-3 enrolments, achievements and success and progression to HEIs in NI.

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 and was introduced in 2014/15. Previous WAPP submissions acknowledged the possible lead-in time necessary before progressing to Access and HE. The first students from pre-entry Access (Restart) programme are now progressing to higher education and are holding offers for places at QUB, Ulster University and SERC in degree programmes including Social Work, Nursing (adult mental health and learning disability), HND Health and Care, English and Sociology. Over 50% of this cohort came with no qualifications.

The overall achievement rate (2015/16) of this programme remains high at 89% despite the very challenging issues which this group bring. The drop-out rate remains high (16% for 2015/16) with the main reason due to mental health issues, family concerns and the financial implications to benefits through return to study. There will be a refocus of the programme with front loading of the programme to ensure that the majority of the students have the opportunity to achieve an Award early if it becomes necessary.

The appetite among learners remains strong with a 25% increase in recruitment since 2014/15. The controlled expansion of this programme during 2018-2021 will continue to target identified 'hard to reach' areas in Q1 and Q2 by continuing to build a wider community network including housing associations, health groups, schools and social network support groups. New programmes will be introduced in Ballynahinch, Newcastle and Holywood. Currently, this approach has assisted in rebalancing the gender difference in recruitment. Higher education enrolments showed a decline in proportion of females to male to 36% for 2015/16. The proportion of females in Restart grew slightly to 27% females with 18% males.

Although the number of young males enrolled on HE from deprivation area Q1 has improved and targets set have been met, SERC continues to introduce new methods to support and communicate with this group. Social media has provided a valuable route to build dialogue supplemented by the role of the Community Development staff. Part of the strategy is to 'change attitudes' towards higher education through role developing adult returner role models in the 'Restart' groups. SERC remains cognisant that 37% of the population within the catchment area has less than a level 2 qualification and in addressing this pull through to higher levels grows.

The College addressed the internal data issues in relation to recording the numbers of those who have declared a disability and Young Care Leavers. There were eight YCL leavers in 2015/16 who enrolled on HE programmes. This rose to ten in 2017/18 and currently 90% are retained and achieving. There have been significant improvements in the tracking of achievement and this approach will continue as part of future plans. Through the development of community links and closer tracking of the group SERC has begun to develop a greater understanding of progression needs. Deeper links have been developed with local agencies resulting in closer links between students, social workers, tutors and learning support staff. The College will continue to manage the group according to demand.
There was a small decrease in the numbers of students with a self-declared disability but this reflected the general NI trend in 2015/16 for HE in FE and the College continued to enrol 3% more that the regional average. The downward four year is, however, downwards and the target has been adjusted to accurately reflect this. SERC remains committed to supporting these students.

Bursaries

From 2013-2016 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 of a full

maintenance grant or student support grant through the Student Loan Company. The percentage of students receiving a bursary in 2015/16 remained at 35% (200 students) 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. Additional checks were taken in light of the increase in numbers from MDM Q1 as it was expected that there would be an increase in bursaries awarded. All checks showed that levels of household income removed these students from eligibility.

Additional areas of focus

SERC is very successful at developing learners from levels 1-3 to progress to employment and further training/education. Through pull of SERC level 3 students to HE provision within the College is low. The majority (90%) progress to a university, mainly QUB or Ulster University. This trend is particularly strong in the STEM areas. This skill of developing young people to achieve at the highest level is not credited within the WAPP targets but SERC continues to keep the approach as a central outworking of its values and mission to maximise the potential of individuals, especially those who have been disadvantaged.

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.

For the period 2018/19 to 2020/21 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 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, DfE Health Checks and the 2011 Northern Ireland census and the SERC catchment area.

While SERC has exceeded targets for 2015/16 these have been achieved within a very difficult environment. Going forward, targets set, cautiously reflect this and 2016/17 enrolments have reflected that Q1 and Q2 enrolments have slightly decreased. In all cases the expected enrolments for the catchment area have been exceeded.

SERC does not have reliable figures for students in receipt of DSA and will therefore not set a target in this area.

Targets

Between 2018/19 and 2020/21 SERC will aim to enrol in higher education:

> 9% or 142 enrolments from MDM Quintile 1
> 40% or 600 enrolments from adult returners
> 9% or 130 enrolments from students with a disability
> 12 enrolments from students who have a Care Experience
> 31 young male students in MDM Quintile 1

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 4 years. You are now required to insert numerical targets for each of the groups identified across the 3 years 2018/19 – 2020/21. 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 2012-2016)	Targets/Outcome		
4 Year Average	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
135		138	140	142

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2012-2016)	Targets/Outcome		
4 Year Average	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
		130	132	132

134				

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2012-2016)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2012-2016)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
28		29	30	31

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2012-2016)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
		595	600	600

594				

As HESA data is largely incomplete for the following area, the figure that you provided in a previous WAPP for 2014/15 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			
2014/15	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
5		10	10	12

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

(i)

Group:

Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
2014/15		**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
	Number			
	Percentage			

(ii)

Group:

Outcome:

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
2014/15		**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
	Number			
	Percentage			

(iii)

| Group: |
| Outcome: |

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
2014/15		**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
	Number			
	Percentage			

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

Activity	Estimated Spend 2018/19 (£)	Estimated Spend 2019/20 (£)	Estimated Spend 2020/21 (£)
Bursaries	**47500**	**47500**	**47500**
Scholarships			
Other financial Support			
Outreach	64220	65183	66160
Retention	3000	3100	3200
Research Activity	2000	2000	2000
Staffing/ Administration	5500	5500	5500
TOTAL	**122220**	**123283**	**124360**

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

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 the aim of providing the key skills in literacy, numeracy, science, social science and study skills necessary for progression. It has proven very successful with a retention and achievement rate of 89% for 2015/16. It was particularly useful in attracting women returners 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. Three 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 including the enhanced use of social media.

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

Research

1   Implementation and embedding of Kirkpatrick model and establish and implement suitable methods to evaluate experiences of those from Q1 and Q2, Young adult Male and Disabled. The tracking of outcomes of Care Experienced students will be reviewed.

The College has comprehensive evaluation processes and has begun to extend these to include the Kirkpatrick model for WAPP groups as outlined above.

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 full-time 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 focus on the delivery has been extended to include project based learning. This pedagolocial strategy targets wider-skills highlighted in the NI Skills Barometer as lacking in graduates. The additional fees help to support the practical nature of the initiative and the development of learning materials and providing extra–curricular opportunities to implement newly acquired skills in a safe environment e.g. competitions and students cross-college sharing at such events as CAST, an interdisciplinary sharing of student project research.

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 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. There has been a modest improvement particularly in recruitment for MDM Q1. SERC believes that it is too early to view this improvement as embedded. 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

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 parents' 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 and meet the set criteria 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 College Management Team meetings 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.

1.8 Please provide an additional evaluation on how you think your institution is performing.
(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).

Approach
A focused questionnaire and series of focus groups were held with:
Access, Restart and Adult Learners.
A questionnaire on the value of the bursary was also issued.

Level 1 Evaluation – Reactions
What participants thought and felt about the programme

Previous research showed that the students from WAPP groups said that the hardest part of the programme was making the first contact with College. The development of partnerships between SERC and the community groups in particular St Vincent de Paul, APEX, Surestart and local mental health groups has assisted in overcoming this.   The positive rating on feedback, advice, support, organisation of course, progression and resources from students remained high at 95%. The use of social media especially SERC Facebook page allowed prospective students to build initially relationships in a secure setting.

Students' commented most frequently about the hope and motivation that the programme gave them. Relief from boredom was also cited on a number of occasions and simply feeling that they were completing a part of their life (education) that had been missed. A number of students quoted previous negative education experiences and compared the programmes in a positive light. All of the students were aware of the investment that they had had to make both personally and financially. Childcare remained a constant worry with female students. The importance of being a good educational role model for children was referred to frequently. The removal of the stigma of being 'a messer' and 'stupid' was a valued benefit. The students appreciated that their 'previous life/mistakes' was of no interest it was what they did now and in the future that mattered. One student commented that this was the only place that used their proper name rather than a nickname developed by their community to reflect past deeds.

All of the students commented on the feeling of measurable achievement that the programme brought.

The level of achievement of accredited qualifications remained high within Get the Edge. Effort had been made to refocus employability skills and embed them more clearly in vocational studies with the use of project based learning (pbl). Over 75% of students said that they enjoyed this method of learning and could see how it would enhance employability skills in particular the softer skills.

Level 2 Evaluation - Learning
The resulting increase in knowledge or capability

Access and pre-Access achieved significant development in literacy and numeracy skills. The majority of Access students developed level 3 equivalent skills in chosen academic discipline with 75% of fast-track students achieving these with STEM subjects.   This achievement declined to under 50% in two-year programmes and this remains an area of concern. The majority of students in pre-access developed the level of skills necessary to transfer to Access awards and diplomas.

In Restart Education, all students who remained on the programme achieved the literacy and numeracy skills necessary for progression. The development of soft skills including verbal communication and team working was noteworthy. This included the improvement in completing application forms and responding to interview questions.

The Getting the Edge project developed the soft skills highlighted in the skills barometer that are in highest demand by employers. Over 85% of higher education WAPP students continued to achieve a recognised qualification in employability skills.

Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer
Behaviour - extent of behaviour and capability improvement and implementation/application

Access and pre-Access progression rates remain high. The improvement in independent learning and study skills, along with confidence and clarity of progression options was notable in pre-access and fast-track access students. The two-year access students struggled to develop these skills.

The opportunities to develop student businesses, team-building, communication and negotiations skills were noticeable in WAPP students.

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

Progression rates for WAPP students were high. The majority of WAPP students including Access and pre-access students progressed to further study (primarily higher education) and employment. The majority of these students wish to progress to nursing, social work and psychology. The first group of Restart students have received HE offers and the outcomes of these will be reported on in future WAPPs.