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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

FGS McClure Watters has been commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to complete a review of the existing financial support initiatives designed to encourage Widening Participation in Higher Education (HE). The review covers the three academic years from 2006/07 to 2008/09. The review considers the following funding streams:

■ the Step-Up Programmes in Belfast and Londonderry;

■ the Discovering Queens Programme;

■ Widening Participation Premium Funding; and

■ Widening Access Disability Premium.

The review addresses the following questions:

■ Is the project funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the participation in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

■ What impact has the project funding had on increasing the participation in higher education of the target groups?

■ Is the widening participation premium funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the retention in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

■ Has the widening participation premium been effective in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups?

■ Do the outcomes achieved represent value for money relative to each other and to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes here in Northern Ireland and further afield?

■ The overall effectiveness of existing Widening participation programmes and the identification of areas for improvement.

1.2 Background to Widening Participation initiatives

Widening participation in HE by students from groups who are currently under-represented is a key goal of the Northern Ireland Executive. This goal is reflected in the NI Programme for Government 2008-2011 (PSA3) which tasks the Department of Education (DE) and DEL with a target relating to increasing participation in higher education – particularly for those from deprived areas.

Widening participation in HE is a key priority for DEL. The aim is to facilitate and increase the participation of those groups which are currently under represented in HE, i.e.: to ensure that

all those who have the ability to benefit from HE have the opportunity to do so. This is based on the premise that HE and the opportunities that it brings should be available to all, regardless of their background.

Since the overall participation rate for young people is already much higher in NI, the 50% target for HE has less significance for NI (than elsewhere in the UK) and as a result, DEL has not adopted this target. It has more specifically focused on widening participation to, rather than increasing participation in, HE.

The scope of this review is DEL's current funding initiatives to widening participation in HE and in particular:

- **Premium Funding:** intended to support the embedding of widening participation in the institutions and serves to underpin student success;
- **Project Funding:** used to build institutional capacity and partnership capability.

DEL premium funding supports a range of initiatives and activities within the universities – as described in their WP strategies. The premium funding is added to core teaching funds to recognise the additional costs associated with recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with supporting students with disabilities. DEL provides the HEIs with two types of premium funding through their annual grant letters of offer:

- **Widening Participation (WP) Premium -** paid to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in recognition of the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This funding stream recognises that there are extra costs involved, for example in relation to on-course support.
- **Widening Access (WA) Premium –** paid to HEIs for students with disabilities. The institutions might, for example, use this funding to provide specialist equipment or specific support for such students. The WA premium is allocated to each HEI based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). (Note: the WA Premium addresses some of the needs of students with disabilities but is not intended to cover all of their needs - DSA primarily meets the needs of students with disabilities).

DEL project funding supports projects in UU and QUB - Step-Up (UU) and Discovering Queens (DQ). This funding differs from the premium funding in that it is used for specific initiatives which have been developed and proposed by the HEIs in contrast to the broader scope of the premia funding.

HEIs are asked to produce a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA) each year which makes an assessment of the progress made against the targets and milestones in its WP Policy / Strategy, sets out the level of resource committed to WP and provides it with an opportunity to demonstrate and take credit for all that it is doing in respect of WP.

1.3   Conclusions

In this section, we present conclusions against each of the main areas within the Terms of Reference (these are used as sub-headings in this section) drawing on the evidence from desk research, consultation and benchmarking.

1.3.1   Targeting of project funding to encourage / support the participation in HE of the targeted under-represented groups

Is the project funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the participation in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

Project funding supports Step-Up in UU and Discovering Queen's in QUB – both focus on outreach work, but they do this in different ways.

■   **Step-Up Project**

Step-Up is a science-based programme of academic and vocational activities that are delivered by schools, the University of Ulster, industry and government. The highly structured programme provides an opportunity for disadvantaged pupils, who have low attainment levels and relatively low expectations, to improve their academic performance, self-esteem and motivation and gain entry to and complete programmes of study at university.

Step-Up is targeted at schools in areas of social and economic disadvantage and is designed to increase participation rates in higher education from lower socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 5–7). The programme currently operates in 16 secondary schools in areas of relative socio-economic deprivation in Derry/Londonderry (since 2000) and Belfast (since 2006).

Criteria for this programme are based on targeting first schools and then individuals within schools.

Schools in Belfast and Londonderry were identified on the basis of social and economic disadvantage using e.g.: the Townsend / Noble Deprivation Indices, Free School Meal entitlement, GCSE and A level attainment data, and HE progression figures. Equality of opportunity and geographical spread were additional factors considered in identifying the schools in the Greater Belfast area.

The pupil selection criteria for entry to the Step-Up programme are based on the following:

- little or no parental experience of higher education;
- limited family income;
- unskilled, semi-skilled or unemployed parent(s);
- living in a neighbourhood or other circumstances not conducive to study;
- living in an environment that has been seriously affected by political unrest.

As part of the UU Widening Participation Audit (2007) analysis of the data on students who have participated or were currently participating in the programme (N= 673) was undertaken. This revealed a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the intended target groups. More recent data quoted in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 Annual Reports (Magee) submitted to DEL indicate that there continues to be a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the intended target groups: The most recent profile

data for the Belfast Programme indicates that Step-Up is engaging with some of the most disadvantaged pupils in NI.

■ **Discovering Queen's**

Discovering Queens (DQ) aims to introduce HE to potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds through a range of activities primarily focused on outreach – with primary schools, secondary schools and FE Colleges. Events include lectures, welcome events, taster days, master classes, etc. and targeted various age groups – including school age and mature students. It aims to stimulate demand for higher education from under-represented groups, to raise aspirations and improve attainment and progression rates and effectively tackle the marginalisation and exclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For DQ, the criteria to access this type of intervention are set out in a Targeting Framework. Target groups include:

  i.   *Students from lower socio-economic groups;*

  ii. *Students from low participation backgrounds;*

  iii. *Underperforming cohorts at pre-entry and on-course levels;*

  iv. *First in Family;*

  v.   *Students with disabilities;*

  vi. *Students with a range of 'A' level equivalent qualifications;*

  vii. *Part-time students;*

 viii. *Care leavers;*

  ix. *Adult returners to study; and*

  x.   *Work-based learners.*

Currently 35 post-primary schools and 6 Colleges are registered as DQ Schools plus a further 19 Primary Schools. (Note: 10 of the Belfast schools and 2 of the Londonderry schools are also involved in UU's Step-Up project).

■ **Conclusion – Targeting of Project Funding**

Step-Up has a clear focus on specific target groups / individuals that it seeks to support. There is a tracking system in place so that Step-Up participants can be monitored throughout their engagement with UU. Based on available evidence (profile of participants supported), we can conclude that the targeting and recruitment process for Step-Up is successfully reaching those who are eligible to benefit from the opportunities that HE can provide. (Note: each year there are 340 pupils participating in Years 13 and 14 in Step-Up schools (140 pupils (70 Year 1, 70 Year 2) from Londonderry, 200 pupils (100 Year 1, 100 Year 2) from Belfast).)

DQ has a clear framework in place for providing support. However, owing to the nature of supports it provides (i.e. catering for school / class level activity rather than focused on individuals) and the scale of engagement (over 3,600 pupils in 2008/09), there is less clarity

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about identifying / tracking / monitoring specific individuals who engage with DQ. Clearly some of those it reaches are in the target groups but others may not be. Tracking of individuals in DQ does not take place in the same way as for Step-Up and given the scale of DQ, this would be a considerable undertaking. Based on available evidence, we can conclude that the DQ is targeting relevant groups; however in the absence of detailed monitoring information (profile of beneficiaries), we cannot conclude on the effectiveness of the targeting.

It is evident that UU's Step Up and DQ are targeting some of the same schools, but with different types of activities (e.g. DQ is focused on awareness-raising / outreach whereas Step-Up is clearly focused on educational attainment leading to progression to HE). However there is a need to ensure that the total range of supports are being co-ordinated to ensure that they are targeted effectively and efficiently and that there are no overlaps or gaps in provision.

1.3.2 Impact of project funding on increasing the participation in HE of the target groups

What impact has the project funding had on increasing the participation in higher education of the target groups?

■ **Trends in Participation (NS-SEC 4-7)**[1]

The NI population has a higher concentration of the lower SEC groups (SEC 4-7, also SEC 5-7) than elsewhere in the UK. This is also reflected in the student population.

NI domiciled students from lower SEC groups are more likely to enrol at NI HEIs; those from higher SEC groups at GB HEIs. More than a quarter of students at NI HEIs are from SEC 5-7.

Whilst NI performs relatively well compared to its UK counterparts as regards participation from targeted groups (SEC 4–7), the level (proportion of enrolments of full-time first year undergraduates) has changed relatively little over the period 2002-03 and 2007-08; the same is true for SEC 5-7.

There is, however, evidence of some variation between NI HEIs - with higher proportions (from SEC 4-7) in UU and St Mary's and lower proportions in QUB and Stranmillis (also true for SEC 5-7). Considering the proportions from SEC 4-7, QUB, UU and St Mary's are ahead of their UK benchmarks; Stranmillis is below its benchmark.

■ **Step-Up**

There is clear evidence of the positive impact of Step-Up on increasing participation in HE (as well as on a range of other metrics) and there are relevant baselines against which these can be compared: This is facilitated by a clear process for tracking students who engage in this intervention.

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[1] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

- Baseline: Targeted schools in Londonderry: Less than 5% of the target schools' intake progressed to HE compared to a 36% average across all schools in NI.
- Baseline: Targeted schools in Belfast: In 2003/4, the average progression rate across the Belfast target schools was 5.8% (with 7 schools having no pupils progressing that year) compared to an average of 36% of all school leavers in NI.
- Impacts: 97% of Step-Up Magee students for whom figures are available, have progressed directly to HE, FE or employment; and 96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to HE.

■ **Discovering Queen's**

For DQ, whilst there is considerable evidence of activity and engagement (outputs) and a focus on specific target groups, the information available on impacts (in terms of increased participation in HE) focuses at a school level rather than for individuals who have benefited from DQ. However, this demonstrates that a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally. The progression from summer school into HE is 75% (50% of summer school participants enter QUB).

In the absence of a system which tracks all those who engage with DQ, it is less clear (a) whether participation rates in HE have changed for the individuals with whom DQ engages and (b) how much of a contribution to increasing participation in HE (if this is evident) may be attributable to DQ.

■ **Conclusion – Increasing Participation in HE in Targeted Groups**

In considering trends in participation, it is important to consider the broader context i.e. that the NI population has a higher proportion of lower SEC groups (i.e. 5-7), that the level of participation has remained relatively high for some considerable time and that all of this has been achieved for lower funding compared with benchmarks.
There are also issues of culture, approaches and different target groups for UU and QUB to take into account: UU typically has a higher participation level for SEC 4-7 demonstrating its ability to attract more students from these groups. In contrast, QUB has increased the minimum tariff entry points (and hence level of academic achievement) required to secure a place – this is at odds with the broader policy of Widening Participation.

Turning specifically to project funding and its impact on participation, for the specific group of pupils that receives targeted support from Step-Up, we can conclude that there is a definite positive impact in terms of increasing participation in HE. On the other hand, in the absence of a system to track and monitor individuals who engage with DQ, we do not have the evidence available to conclude on whether DQ contributes to increasing participation in HE for these individuals. However, at a school level, a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally.

1.3.3   Targeting of widening participation premium funding to encourage / support the retention in HE of the targeted under-represented groups

Is the widening participation premium funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the retention in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

- **WP Premium Funding / Support for Retention**

Each of the HEIs have defined target groups on which they target WP support –as identified in their WP strategies. The HEIs also point to WP being embedded within the universities support structures. Whilst this is welcome in the sense that WP becomes an integral part of how things are done, rather than an "add-on", it does cause some difficulty in terms of accountability and tracking of interventions (funded by DEL) and the impacts that are attributable to these. DEL funding is combined with a wide range of other sources of funding and it is difficult to disaggregate what specifically the DEL funding is being used for and the added value that it is delivering. This issue is not unique to NI – as is evident in the benchmarking which highlighted similar issues in recent evaluations in England and Scotland.

- **Conclusion – Targeting of WP Premium to Encourage / Support Retention in HE of targeted under-represented groups**

The HEIs have activities in place in terms of addressing the issue of retention – and a key part of this is ensuring that students are "university ready" prior to enrolment. Through project funding, both Step Up and DQ play an important role in this regard.

In the absence of a system to track and monitor individuals who are specifically targeted and supported (through DEL premium funding) to encourage retention, we do not have the evidence to state that WP Premium is being appropriately targeted. However, feedback from those in receipt of interventions and / or close to them (e.g. students, teachers) indicate that the support is well regarded and valued by students in ensuring they are able to continue their studies.

1.3.4   Effectiveness of widening participation premium in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups

Has the widening participation premium been effective in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups?

Although HEIs perform favourably compared to the rest of the UK in terms of participation, they do not perform as well with regard to retention and in fact this is an area in which performance (from 2002/03 to 2008/09) has not improved.

- **Trends in Retention**
  The level of non-continuation following year of entry is higher in NI than elsewhere in the UK

- The level of non-continuation for full-time first degree students in NI HEIs has been highest (or second highest) compared to other UK HEI's (by country) since 2003/04 apart from 2006/07;

- Between 2002/03 and 2007/08, the level of non-continuation (first year) has increased from 9.4% to 10.2% in NI (although it has been higher and lower between these dates);

- In 2007/08 NI has a relatively high proportion (10.2%) no longer in HE (England lowest – 8.4% and UK overall 8.6%);

Considering the NI institutions, there is some variation in non-continuation following year of entry for full-time first degree entrants as demonstrated by data for 2007/08:

- UU (13.2%) had the highest level of non-continuation and Stranmillis (4.2%) the lowest. QUB (7.1%) and St Mary's (7.7%) lie between these two.

- QUB, UU, St Mary's are performing worse than their UK benchmarks[2] (UU significantly so). Stranmillis was performing better than its UK benchmark but not significantly.

Considering retention overall, it is clear that this is an area in which NI lags behind the rest of the UK. However, it is important to take into account other factors which have a bearing on this issue – including the profile of NI students. A consequence of the successes in terms of increasing participation from under-represented groups (and in particular lower SEC groups) is potentially causing an adverse effect in terms of retention. Research has shown that students from higher social classes are more likely to "survive" their first year.

The HEIs have activities in place in terms of addressing the issue of retention – and a key part of this is ensuring that students are "university ready" prior to enrolment. Both Step Up and DQ play a role in this regard.

As there is insufficient evidence available to conclude on whether WP Premium funding contributes to encouraging / supporting retention in HE in the groups that it targets, this also means that we do not have sufficient evidence to conclude on the effectiveness of WP premium funding in contributing to retention. However, given the overall HESA performance indicators (PIs), it is clear that this is an area in which more work is required owing to under-performance – but also in terms of understanding the broader issues arising from increased participation from SEC 4-7 and the implications this has for retention and strategies which would mitigate against this.

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[2] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

1.3.5 Value for money (including relative to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes in NI and further afield)

Do the outcomes achieved represent value for money relative to each other and to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes here in Northern Ireland and further afield?

In order to address this question, we considered: Level of funding allocated; Comparisons with England and Scotland; HESA PIs and the Counterfactual Case.

Level of Funding Allocated

Table 1-1

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to QUB, UU, St Mary's and Stranmillis

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	1,254,750	77%	1,398,420	78%	1,439,961	81%
Widening Access Premium	374,158	23%	391,507	22%	342,233	19%
Total	1,628,908	100%	1,789,927	100%	1,782,194	100%
Source:						
St Mary's 2006/07 data from St Mary's UC Director of Finance and Administration, Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to QUB, UU, St Mary's and Stranmilllis						

In addition, DEL provides funding for:

■ Step-Up (Magee Campus) – approx £170-180k pa;

■ Step-Up (Jordanstown) – approx £225k pa; and

■ Discovering Queen's – approx £230k pa.

This gives an annual total spend of £2.28m.

Comparisons with England and Scotland

Based on the Widening Participation and Widening Access premia funding that DEL provides to QUB and UU (in addition to DQ and Step Up funding):

■ NI has the one of the **lowest levels of funding per HEI per annum** (£1.138m) compared with England (£3.123m, almost 3 times higher than NI) and Scotland (£1.128m, on a par with NI).

■ NI has the **lowest level of funding per student per annum** (£60) compared with England (£278, over 4.5 times higher) and Scotland (£127, over 2 times higher)

Performance Metrics

Considering the HESA PIs:

- **Impact on participation (NS-SEC 4-7):** NI generally compares very favourably with England and Scotland e.g.**:** 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 41.7% of young full-time first degree entrants were from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.4% England, 28.2% Scotland and 32.3% UK overall)

- **Impact on participation (DSA):** NI generally compares less favourably with England and the UK overall but fares better than Scotland e.g.: 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 3.7% of undergraduates were in receipt of DSA (4.8% England, 3.4% Scotland, 4.7% UK overall);
  - Considering data from 2002/03 through to 2008/09, it is clear that NI has not performed as well as elsewhere in the UK;
  - However, there has been a substantial improvement in NI: the proportion of undergraduates in receipt of DSA has increased from 1.7% to 3.2% between 2002/03 and 2008/09;

- **Impact on retention:** NI generally compares less favourably with the rest of the UK with the highest levels of non-continuation – e.g.: 10.2% in 20078-08 (compared with 8.4% in England, 9.9% in Scotland and 8.6% in UK overall).
  - Considering data from 2002/03 through to 2008/09, it is clear that NI has not performed as well as elsewhere in the UK – with a similar level as Scotland;
  - Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, the level of non-continuation (first year) has increased from 9.4% to 10.2% in NI (although it has been higher and lower between these dates).

Counterfactual Case (Step-Up and DQ)

Research and statistics from both UU and QUB help to define what would happen in the absence of the WP interventions; these are summarised as follows:

- **Statistics cited in the (UU) Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal (2006)**
Prior to the introduction of the Step-Up programme in the target schools (Derry and Belfast), the level of academic performance was significantly lower than the NI average and progression to HE was negligible.

- **QUB research into academic confidence 2008/09**
A questionnaire was used to assess academic confidence before and after a QUB support and results showed a significant increase in confidence. This study shows that Head Start (HS) succeeds in raising the confidence levels of its participants in the long-term.

Conclusion - VFM

DEL provides funding of around £2.5m per annum to support WP. The level of funding in NI is lower than in both England and Scotland (based on funding per HEI per annum and funding per student per annum).

In terms of the HESA PIs, at NI level, there had been little change in participation in relation to NS-SEC 4-7, an improvement in participation in relation to DSA and deterioration with regards to retention (over the period 2002/03 and 2008/09.

The counterfactual case for the Step-Up programme (cited above from the Economic Appraisal for the Belfast programme) demonstrates the impact of that programme on academic attainment, progression to HE and retention. The counterfactual information for the DQ programme provides evidence of a tangible impact in terms of improving academic confidence (for those already participating in HE).

However, at an overall programme level, there is a lack of information in terms of isolating DEL funding (apart from Step-Up and DQ) to discrete interventions; there is also a lack of information on the impact (with regard to participation and retention) of interventions on specific groups or individuals (apart from Step-Up). Therefore it is difficult to (a) define impacts for specific interventions and (b) attribute any of these impacts to DEL funding.

Owing to the lack of specific information on the attributing impacts to DEL funding (apart from Step-Up), it is difficult to conclude on Value for Money. Given that NI HEIs receive the lowest levels of funding (relative to England and Scotland), the performance with regard to participation PIs is encouraging (particularly with regard to DSA which has improved; although the indicator for participation (NS-SEC 4-7 is virtually unchanged at an NI level which suggests the "status quo" is being maintained). However, the performance with regard to retention is clearly an area in which improvement is required.

We can however conclude that the Step-Up programme is Value for Money in respect of the following:

- the levels of funding involved: Step-Up (Magee) – approx £170-180k pa and Step-Up (Jordanstown) – approx £225k pa;
- the scale of the programme (70 pupils per annum recruited to Magee programme, 100 pupils per annum recruited to the Belfast programme);
- the impacts achieved with regard to:
  - **participation in HE**: 2002/09 cohorts in Magee – 92% went to UU or another HEI; 3% went to FE; 2007 and 2008 cohort in Belfast – 96% progressed to HE (relative to a baseline of less than 6%)
  - **retention**: all entering university 2002/07 (Magee) – 91% of those who enrolled, completed i.e. non-continuation rate of 9% (compared with levels of non-continuation which have varied between 12.6% and 15.2% in UU overall between 2002/03 and 2007/08).
  - It is also impressive in terms of **academic attainment** (typically at least 97% achieve Double Award Applied Science Qualification and **higher level qualifications** obtained (Cohorts 1-4 (Magee) – 65% achieved a First or Upper Second).

1.3.6   Overall Effectiveness and Areas for Improvement

Overall effectiveness of existing Widening participation programmes and the identification of areas for improvement

Conclusion - Effectiveness of WP Programmes

The HEIs are clearly committed to the WP agenda – this is evident in terms of additional funding (on top of DEL allocation) being allocated to support work in this area, and in the

embedding of the WP agenda within the HEIs' culture. There is evidence of considerable activity and engagement with school pupils and HEI students under the WP agenda; qualitative feedback is generally positive.

Performance with regard to participation PIs is encouraging (particularly with regard to DSA which has improved; although the indicator for participation (NS-SEC 4-7) is virtually unchanged at an NI level which suggests stability (at a higher level than elsewhere in the UK) but no additional impact. However, the performance with regard to retention is clearly an area in which improvement is required. HESA statistics provide a favourable comparison between NI HEIs and those in the UK with regard to participation but less so with regard to retention. Qualitative feedback from stakeholders (focus groups and interviews) also reinforced this latter issue.

Feedback from consultees (including stakeholders, school representatives and student focus groups) provides positive feedback (generally qualitative) on the nature of interventions and supports offered by the HEIs.

However at an overall programme level, the lack of information in terms of isolating DEL funding (apart from Step-Up and DQ) to discrete interventions and on the impact (with regard to participation and retention) of interventions on specific groups or individuals (apart from Step-Up) means that it is difficult to attribute impacts to DEL funding. This issue is not unique to NI; it is also reflected in England and Scotland. For example, a HEFCE review of Widening Participation activities (2006) noted a weakness in the evidence base for the impact of Widening Participation (e.g. relationship between discrete interventions at institution-level and outcomes at the level of the sector and society as a whole).

HESA PIs demonstrate relatively stable levels of participation (greater than UK comparators for NS-SEC 4-7), improving levels of participation (for DSA) but poor performance with regards to retention (relative to UK comparators and no signs of improvement over time). Available systems and information do not provide sufficient information to conclude on the extent to which DEL WP premium funding has influenced these PIs either for targeted groups or at an overall level. The Step Up project is the one exception to this – this project has provided evidence of making a positive contribution to participation and retention levels.

Conclusion - Areas for Improvement

Taking into account feedback from stakeholders together with the review of evidence available, we have identified a number of areas for improvement:

- There is a need to ensure that any funding allocated to WP projects is clearly accounted for and tracked to ensure delivery of WP objectives and targets;

- The targeted approach adopted by the Step-Up programme should be expanded to include initiatives in more schools and/or more subjects (i.e. focused programme catering for specific pupils and with clear tracking / monitoring in place);

- There is a need to ensure that the WP frameworks are sufficiently focused to address the needs of specific under-represented groups e.g.: NS-SEC 4-7 is too broad; there is a need to be more specific about groups targeted for support. Some suggestions include: mature students, ethnic groups, part-time, etc. This requires clear understanding of (a)

who these groups are; (b) what their needs are and (c) ensuring appropriate supports are provided to these specific groups to address their needs;

■ Retention targets should be set and delivered on. This would require investigation of the difficulties being faced and providing appropriate supports to overcome / address these.

■ The need to address raising aspirations not only amongst pupils / students but those in a position of influence e.g. teachers, parents (recognising that some work already takes place in this area);

■ The need to address / raising aspirations from early stage – hence engagement with primary schools (recognising that some work already takes place in this area);

■ There is recognition of a need for more 'joined up' approaches (e.g. through Regional Strategy) and this is welcomed by many stakeholders.

1.4 Recommendations

1.4.1 Continued Support for Widening Participation

There is a clear rationale and policy context for supporting the Widening Participation agenda. There is also evidence available that at an overall level in NI HEIs compare favourably with GB counterparts in terms of increasing participation. However NI HEIs compare less favourably in terms of retention.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DEL continues to focus on encouraging increased representation of under represented groups in HE. Support for increasing participation should be maintained, however, efforts with regard to improving retention should be given more focus and a greater priority.

1.4.2 Targeting Support for Widening Participation

Each of the HEIs has a definition of groups which it seeks to target with WP interventions. For some of the interventions that are tailored to individuals, these are tightly defined and with tracking of impacts, it is clear that support is reaching areas where it is needed. In the case of supports which are "embedded" and there is less tracking / monitoring of who benefits and what impacts it has, there is a need to revise the approach in order to ensure that there is VFM for public purse and that support goes where it is most needed. Some examples include – a tighter focus on NS-SEC groups e.g.: 5-7 rather than 4-7; and within socio-economically deprived groups a targeted approach to deal with particular groups e.g. Protestant working class males, children from ethnic minorities, children in care, etc recognising that lower educational attainment and progression to HE reduces life-time opportunities.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that funding is targeted more tightly at specific groups specified by DEL to ensure that support reaches those who are most in need.

1.4.3 Premium vs. Project Funding

The review of funding has demonstrated that it is difficult to track / attribute impacts to specific funding streams (from WP Premium funding) and this is a common issue across all of the benchmark examples considered.

For project funding, and Step-Up in particular, there is a much clearer evidence base in terms of the link between DEL funding and the performance of the project in raising educational attainment, increasing progression to HE and increasing retention within HE.

In order to assess the effectiveness and impact of funding, it is important to establish appropriate tracking and monitoring systems which can take into account the impact on specific individuals rather than generic groups which cannot easily be tracked.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the balance of funding shifts away from premium towards more project funding with greater accountability and tracking of impacts and that appropriate systems are put in place to track these impacts.

1.4.4 SMART Objectives

A lot of tracking and reporting of WP initiatives focuses on the details of activities undertaken; there is less information on outcomes achieved. This is a common problem - also evident in benchmark examples. Part of this may arise from a lack of SMART objectives and targets specified for the initiatives and therefore a lack of clarity on reporting and key metrics on which to focus. This means that it is not clear / easy to identify the value added that can be attributed to the WP premium funding; there is also scope for duplication of funding to arise.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that all of the funding streams and letters of offer incorporate SMART objectives and targets and that appropriate metrics are specified, against which each HEI must report.

1.4.5 Maximising Impact of Funding / Minimising Duplication

There is some overlap in some of the schools that both QUB and UU are targeting. Whilst this may be due in part to differing interventions being offered to different groups, there is a need to ensure that multiple supports are not all being focused on a relatively small number of schools / pupils, to the detriment of others who are receiving little or none. In order to ensure that DEL's WP resources are optimised, there is a need for a co-ordinating / central role to match interventions to target groups / areas.

This will need to take into account a range of approaches to fulfil DEL's WP objectives. This may range from broader focused interventions which provide aspiration-raising activity (e.g. albeit with a tighter focus in terms of NS-SEC 4-7, low performing schools in terms of progression to HE, etc.) complemented by more narrowly focused interventions (with stricter target groups taking into account the need to focus on specific sub-groups identified as being most in need of support (see 12.1.6 – Areas for Improvement) which would recruit / select individuals who would receive intensive support to encourage them to participate in HE. The Aim Higher approach may provide a useful model on which to base this proposed approach.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that interventions are managed to ensure that HEIs engagement with schools is not overlapping / duplicating. This would entail a

mapping of interventions (to understand purpose / target group), a coordinating function for HEIs / Working Group and a tighter definition of target groups).

1.4.6 *Widening Participation Through Raising Attainment*

In terms of attainment, the impact of Step-Up in particular is very positive (it also has positive impacts on increasing participation and retention). Whilst this is to be welcomed, the purpose of DEL funding is about increasing participation rates and retention rates; the responsibility for raising attainment in schools lies with DE. Interventions supported by DEL should focus on those areas for which DEL has responsibility (i.e. increasing participation in HE and increasing retention) and that where there are other responsible government departments involved in an issue relating to WP, then that department should also have a role to play i.e. DE's role with regard to educational attainment.

We recognise that DEL's goal of increasing participation in HE may be achieved by a variety of interventions: it is clear that early intervention is essential as is prolonged rather than ad hoc engagement. Whilst this means there is a role for DEL funding to play in interventions in schools, it is important that DEL does not take over DE's areas of responsibility with regard to educational attainment. Interventions in schools initiated from different policy leads should be complementary rather than overlapping / duplicating.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that DEL initiate a process to examine joint / shared working with DE to help achieve both departments' goals (improved academic attainment in schools (DE) leading to increased participation (DEL)).

2   INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1   Introduction

FGS McClure Watters has been commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to complete a review of the existing financial support initiatives designed to encourage Widening Participation in Higher Education. The review covers the three academic years from 2006/07 to 2008/09. This report presents the findings of the review.

This review along with input from four working groups (Targets, Aspiration and Attainment, Recruitment and Selection and Retention and Progression) will inform the development of a Northern Ireland Widening Participation Regional Strategy.

In this section we set out the background and the terms of reference for the review.

2.2   Background

2.2.1   Background to Widening Participation Funded Initiatives

Widening participation in Higher Education (HE) by students from groups who are currently under-represented is a key goal of the Northern Ireland Executive. This refers in particular to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Since the overall participation rate is already much higher in Northern Ireland (NI), the 50% target for HE has less significance for NI (than elsewhere in the UK) and as a result, DEL has not adopted this target. It has more specifically focused on widening participation to, rather than increasing participation in, higher education. Widening participation is taken to mean opening up third level education to those groups who are currently underrepresented at this level.

The scope of this review is DEL's current funding initiatives to widening participation in higher education and in particular:

■ Premium Funding: intended to support the embedding of widening participation in the institutions and serves to underpin student success.
■ Project Funding: used to build institutional capacity and partnership capability.

2.3   Terms of Reference for the Review

DEL requires a review of WP Funded Initiatives covering the three academic years from 2006/07 to 2008/09. The review must consider the following funding streams:

■ the Step-Up Programmes in Belfast and Londonderry;

■ the Discovering Queens Programme;

■ Widening Participation Premium Funding; and

■ Widening Access Disability Premium.

The review must address the following questions:

■ Is the project funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the participation in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

■ What impact has the project funding had on increasing the participation in higher education of the target groups?

■ Is the widening participation premium funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the retention in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

■ Has the widening participation premium been effective in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups?

■ Do the outcomes achieved represent value for money relative to each other and to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes here in Northern Ireland and further afield?

■ The overall effectiveness of existing Widening participation programmes and the identification of areas for improvement.

2.4 Methodology

The methodology used to undertake this review was agreed with the Project Steering Group at the Project Initiation Meeting on 31st March 2010 and set out in the Project Initiation Document. It involved 6 key work stages, which were as follows:

■ **Stage 1: Overall Project Planning:** This stage involved agreeing the detailed work programme, the desk research, selecting appropriate consultees and setting the timescales for completion of the evaluation;

■ **Stage 2: Desk Research and Strategic Context:** This stage involved reviewing strategy and policy documents in order to describe the strategic context for the Initiative. This contributes to the section on Strategic Context and Rationale (Section 3) which sets out a consideration of the strategic context in which Widening Participation Funding Initiatives operate including its contribution to local policies. We have also accessed a range of information relating to Widening Participation Premium Funding, Widening Access Premium Funding and Widening Participation Project Funding (to inform Sections 4-9).

■ **Stage 3: Consultations:** This stage involved meeting with a range of representatives from Government Departments, other strategic stakeholders and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). We completed focus groups and telephone surveys with schools benefiting from the Discovering Queen's and Step-Up projects as well as focus groups with students. A full list of consultees is included in Appendix 1; key findings are included in Appendix 15.

- **Stage 4: Benchmarking:** This stage involved reviewing 3 comparable programmes – Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Scottish Funding Council and Higher Education Authority (HEA) in the Republic of Ireland (RoI); and analysing key themes and issues arising from our benchmarking exercise highlighting lessons for Northern Ireland from other WP programmes (summarised in Section 11).

- **Stage 5: Analysis:** This stage involved an analysis of all the previous work stages in order to develop findings and conclusions regarding each element of the Terms of Reference; drawing on the evidence base gathered from desk research, consultation and benchmarking.

- **Stage 6: Presentation and Reporting:** the reporting and presentation of findings. Emerging findings were presented to the Project Steering Group and a draft report prepared for comment before production of the final report.

2.5   Report Outline

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 3: Strategic Context and Rationale for Widening Participation;
- Sections 4–7: Widening Participation–Premium Funding–QUB/UU/Stranmillis/St Mary's;
- Section 8: Widening Participation – Project Funding - Discovering Queen's;
- Section 9: Widening Participation – Project Funding - Step-Up;
- Section 10: Consultation;
- Section 11: Benchmarking;
- Section 12: Conclusions and Recommendations.

This report should be read in conjunction with the Appendices which contain detailed supporting information as follows:

- Appendix 1 – Consultees;
- Appendix 2 – Summary of HEI Access Agreements;
- Appendix 3 – Research into Widening Participation;
- Appendix 4 – Student Enrolments 2008/09;
- Appendix 5 – Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Statistics 2002/03 – 2008/09;
- Appendix 6 – Enrolments by SEC Group and Institution 2002/03 – 2008/09;
- Appendix 7 – QUB Widening Participation Policy Implementation;
- Appendix 8 – QUB WP Volume and Activity Report;
- Appendix 9 – UU Volume and Activity Data;
- Appendix 10 – Stranmillis WP Action Plan / Student Life Cycle;
- Appendix 11 – Discovering Queen's – Participating Schools;
- Appendix 12 – Discovering Queen's – Events and Activities 2008/09;
- Appendix 13 – Discovering Queen's – Annual Reports 2006/07-2008/09; and
- Appendix 14 – Step Up Data; and

■ Appendix 15 - School Survey – Summary of Responses.

2.6 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Project Steering Group members for being available for meetings and providing access to the information that we required for this evaluation.

We would also like to express our thanks to the HEIs, academics, students and other key stakeholders which we interviewed during the course of the study.

3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION

3.1 Introduction

This section considers the strategic context and rationale for Widening Participation Initiatives funded by DEL. It includes a review of the following:

- NI Strategic and Policy Context;
- Research into Widening Participation; and
- Statistical Trends.

3.2 NI Strategic and Policy Context

3.2.1 Widening Participation – Public Service Agreement (PSA) target (2008-2011)

Widening participation in HE by students from groups who are currently under-represented is a key goal of the Northern Ireland Executive. . This refers in particular to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This goal is reflected in the NI Programme for Government 2008-2011 (PSA3) which tasks the Department of Education (DE) and DEL with a target relating to increasing participation in higher education – particularly for those from deprived areas (see Table 3-1). This aims to ensure "fair access" in order to address the overall objective of increasing employment and reducing economic inactivity.

Table 3-1

PSA 3: INCREASING EMPLOYMENT Increase employment levels and reduce economic inactivity by addressing the barriers to employment and providing effective careers advice at all levels

Objective	Actions	Target	Responsibility
1.Tackle the skills barriers to employment and employability	Development and implementation of a regional strategy to widen participation in Higher Education by groups who are currently under-represented, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority ethnic communities and students with learning difficulties and disabilities	By 2011, make progress, year on year, towards fair access to higher education.	DE/ DEL
Source: Programme for Government 2008-2011			

DEL has a particular role to play in widening participation in HE by students from groups who are currently under-represented, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

3.2.2 *Widening Participation – Current Policy*

Widening participation in HE is a key priority for DEL. The policy area falls within the remit of the DEL Widening Participation Policy Branch. The aim is to facilitate and increase the participation of those groups which are currently under represented in HE, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities i.e.: to ensure that all those who have the ability to benefit from higher education have the opportunity to do so. This is based on the premise that higher education and the opportunities that it brings should be available to all, regardless of their background.

Since the overall participation rate is already much higher in NI, the 50% target for HE has less significance for NI (than elsewhere in the UK) and as a result, DEL has not adopted this target. It has more specifically focused on widening participation to, rather than increasing participation in, higher education. Widening participation is taken to mean opening up third level education to those groups who are currently underrepresented at this level. This depends on building aspirations and attainment through all stages of education including:

- support for HEIs in their efforts to reach out to students from non-traditional backgrounds, and provide them with the right pastoral and teaching support;
- encouragement for young people and their families to raise their aspirations and achieve more of their potential in examinations prior to entry to higher education; and
- an effective and fair system of student support that takes into account the different circumstances of an increasingly diverse student population.

Since 2000 the Department has been addressing the issue of under representation (of specific groups) in HE through a broad policy direction which has included the following tools:

- An increase in domestic HE (and HE in FE) provision;
- The introduction of Foundation Degrees;
- The introduction of Access Agreements: since the introduction of variable deferred tuition fees in 2006, HE providers are required to have Access Agreements in place which set out how the institution will provide support (including bursaries, scholarships and outreach activities) for applications from under-represented groups. The Access Agreement outlines the measures the HEI will take to safeguard and maintain fair access.
- Since December 2009, HEIs have been asked to produce a WPSA each year which makes an assessment of the progress made against the targets and milestones in its WP Policy / Strategy, sets out the level of resource committed to WP and provides it with an opportunity to demonstrate and take credit for all that it is doing in respect of WP.

These policy interventions are supported by DEL's funding mechanisms for widening participation which include:

- A widening participation premium paid to institutions in respect of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- A widening access premium paid to institutions for students with disabilities.
- Special project funding to each of the two NI universities to:

- Test widening participation approaches;
- Assist in developing partnerships with schools with traditionally low levels of participation;

■ DEL financial support for students from under-represented groups:

- Students from lower income backgrounds are eligible for a maintenance grant (up to £3,335 in 2008/2009);
- A range of supplementary allowances are available for students with a disability, including Disabled Students Allowances (DSA);

The scope of this review is DEL's current funding initiatives to widening participation in higher education and in particular:

■ **Premium Funding:** intended to support the embedding of widening participation in the institutions and serves to underpin student success (see Sections 4, 5, 6 and 7).

■ **Project Funding:** used to build institutional capacity and partnership capability (see Sections 8 and 9).

DEL premium funding supports a range of initiatives and activities within the universities – as described in their WP strategies. The premium funding is added to core teaching funds to recognise the additional costs associated with recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with supporting students with disabilities.

DEL provides the HEIs with two types of premium funding through their annual grant letters of offer:

■ **Widening Participation (WP) Premium -** This is paid to HEIs in recognition of the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This funding stream recognises that there are extra costs involved, for example in relation to on-course support.

■ **Widening Access (WA) Premium** – This is paid to HEIs for students with disabilities. The institutions might, for example, use this funding to provide specialist equipment or specific support for such students. The WA premium is allocated to each HEI based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). (Note: the WA Premium addresses some of the needs of students with disabilities but is not intended to cover all of their needs - DSA primarily meets the needs of students with disabilities).

DEL expects the HEIs to utilise these funds to sustain, and intensify where possible, their activities in accordance with their Widening Participation strategies/Access Agreements and Disability strategies. As a condition of grant, each HEI is required to provide information to DEL on the expenditure of the widening participation premia against specific activities undertaken in support of the target students. This information will be used for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the use of the premia.

DEL project funding supports projects in UU and QUB - Step-Up (UU) and Discovering Queens (DQ). This funding differs from the premium funding in that it is used for specific

initiatives which have been developed and proposed by the HEIs in contrast to the broader scope of the premia funding.

These funding streams are described in more detail in later sections of the report. Table 3-2 presents a summary of perceived merits and perceived limitations of each.

Table 3-2

Perceived Merits and Perceived Limitations of DEL WP Premium and Project Funding

WP Policy	Perceived merits	Perceived limitations
Widening participation project funding	• Funding is concentrated in on specific initiatives proposed by HEIs, and approved and monitored by DEL • Gives spending power and greater control to practitioners • Encourages innovation and supports developmental work.	• Funding can be short-term and unpredictable • Activities not outcomes are funded • Payment is not contingent on success • Maintains division between "WP" and mainstream
Widening participation Premium Funding	• Funding is non-competitive and is for both HEIs • Recognises ongoing essential costs of meeting diverse students needs • Encourages long-term / strategic approaches • Linked to HEIs WP Strategies and access targets • HEIs have autonomy to develop their own strategies • Encourages mainstreaming / embedding of widening participation.	• Funding formula is a blunt instrument • Does not encourage innovation • Difficult to disaggregate WP premia funding from other funding streams and attribute impacts • Responsibility across wide range of staff • Does not take account of the actual additional costs involved.

Source: FGS McClure Watters[3]

3.2.3 Variable deferred tuition fees and Access Agreements

In considering DEL's Widening Participation Funded Initiatives, it is important to take into account Tuition Fees and Access Agreements as both shape the environment which the WP initiatives seek to influence.

Variable Deferred Tuition Fees

Since 2006, HE providers have been permitted to charge tuition fees above the standard amount. Under "variable deferred tuition fee" arrangements, a higher education provider is required to use some of the money raised through tuition fees to provide financial support for applications from under-represented groups and specifically to have an Access Agreement in place which includes the provision of student bursaries and outreach activities. The philosophy behind Access Agreements is that the introduction of variable fees should not have a detrimental effect on widening participation and that institutions are explicitly committed to increasing participation rates of under-represented groups.

[3] Adapted and updated from Report on DEL Strategy and Initiatives to Widening Access in Higher Education (John Storan, Action on Access, March 2004

Variable Deferred Tuition fee legislation was introduced in 2006; its purpose is to:

- enable HEIs in NI to charge higher tuition fees (up to £3,000 in 2006). Fees were capped at £3,000 rising only with inflation until 2010.
- require institutions wishing to charge the higher fees to have an approved Access Agreement in place setting out the actions which they will take to increase participation by under-represented groups. This to include the provision of higher education institution bursaries for students from less well off backgrounds. In 2006 the minimum bursary was £300 for courses with a £3,000 fee.
- provide for DEL to approve Access Agreements for higher education institutions in NI thus reducing the need for additional expenditure which would have been involved in setting up a separate access regulator for NI. The legislation also provides for the Department to impose sanctions on institutions who fail to comply with their Access Agreements.
- introduce a graduate contribution scheme by providing for DEL to fund institutions to the extent that students choose to defer their fees. In doing so, students would then be able to choose whether to pay fees up-front or defer payment (payments begin once the graduate earns more than £15k per annum.

Access Agreements

In NI, all four HEIs and four of the six Further Education Regional Colleges have an Access Agreement in place. These set out how they will increase the participation of groups who continue to be under-represented in higher education, including students from the lowest socio-economic groups and students with disabilities using the additional fee income received.

A summary of each of the four HEI Access Agreements is presented in Appendix 2 as well as a summary of how individual institutions spent additional fee income in 2007-08:

- Institutions in NI spent over £5.4m on **bursaries and scholarships for low income or other under-represented groups**;
- 86% (of £5.4m) was spent on the students from the **lowest income group** i.e. those with a household income of less than £17,910;
- Institutions spent just over £1m on **additional outreach** – an increase of just over £250k compared to 2006-07;
- In total, institutions spent almost 24% of their additional fee income on **additional access measures**;
- Over 6,500 students from **lower income or other under-represented groups** have received a bursary or scholarship. Just over two-thirds of these students were from the lowest income group.

Other Factors Affecting Enrolments at HEIs

The QUB and UU Access Agreements highlight a number of other factors which will have a bearing on widening participation:

- A significant decline in the population of 17 year olds, approximately 12% over the next 10 years.

- The Age Participation Index (API)[4], and participation rates from lower socio-economic groups are already considerably higher than in GB.

- The overall number of full-time, undergraduate HE places in NI is limited by the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap.

- The acknowledgement by DEL that the introduction of variable fees may increase the competition for places within NI, as students who previously would have studied in GB, opt to stay in NI. This could potentially impact adversely on the participation of under-represented groups.

- Fall off in migration of students to study elsewhere in the UK (from 40% to 25%) – partly due to increase in places in NI by about 20% since 2000.

- Research suggesting that most students who leave NI "want to leave" and are more likely to be from better off backgrounds and to have higher 'A' level scores.

3.3 Widening Participation – key issues and influences

3.3.1 Research into Widening Participation

A wide range of research (of relevance to widening participation in HE) has been undertaken – relating to NI as well as broader UK studies. Key issues are presented in this section with further details on each of the studies included in Appendix 3.

Some factors influencing participation in HE

Participation in HE is influenced by various factors; a 2006 UU study[5] highlighted some of these including:

- **Gender** – girls were significantly more likely to want and to plan to go on to FE and HE; this was reinforced by the perception that there were fewer job opportunities for girls at 16;

- **Finance** - fear of debt acted as a deterrent to participation in HE; this was not viewed as an investment for the future particularly when contrasted with the alternative of getting a trade and earning straight away;

- **Geographic immobility** – this included both the limits to travel for disadvantaged pupils and also a consequence of a divided society (and potentially travelling further away to access a service rather than accessing it locally).

The study also noted a number of other issues of importance included **early information on the significance of AS and A level choices for future higher education courses of study**, the **importance of Open Days for choices** concerning especially local institutions and the **major need for information on student funding systems** [this latter point particularly focused on the new system that came into effect in 2006].

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[4] The API is the number of NI domiciled young entrants (aged under 21) to full-time undergraduate higher education (in the UK or the ROI) as a percentage of the 18 year old population in NI.
[5] HE in NI: A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and Migration (Osborne, B.; Smith, A. & Hayes, A., UU, May 2006)

[A HEPI 2008 report[6] also highlights the gap between male and female entry to HE, which itself reflects the much higher achievement of girls at 'A' level. The underperformance of boys in this respect shows no sign of abating according to the report.]

Further insights into participation are presented in a UK report (2006)[7] which categorised barriers to participation in HE – proposing three distinct categories:

■ **Situational** – such as direct and indirect costs, loss or lack of time, and distance from a learning opportunity, created by an individual's personal circumstances.

■ **Institutional barriers** – such as admissions procedures, timing and scale of provision, and general lack of institutional flexibility, created by the structure of available opportunities.

■ **Dispositional barriers**, in the form of an individual's motivation and attitudes to learning, which may be caused by a lack of suitable learning opportunities (e.g. for leisure or informally), or poor previous educational experiences.

This UK review also demonstrated that **patterns of participation in HE are highly influenced by family background and early experiences.**

In terms of approaches to widening participation, the research noted that most applicants with two or more A-levels in England progress to HE. This leaves **three alternative courses of action to widen participation** for most people:

■ **Educational attainment**: Increase the number of school pupils achieving two or more A-levels.

■ Find and sustain **alternative access routes into higher education.** At present a much lower proportion of students with suitable vocational qualifications continues to HE. There is some evidence available to suggest that once in HE these students can achieve as much as peers coming through A-level routes.

■ A form of **open access**. In common with other national systems, an alternative model of allocating HE places to all qualified students could be adopted to help ameliorate patterns of participation – especially those between HEIs. A threshold level, similar to a high school leaving certificate, could be required to gain entry to higher education. This could be two A-levels or equivalent, and places to specific institutions could be allocated by geography, disciplinary specialisation or randomly.

NI school pupils' attitudes and intentions towards FE and HE, training and employment, including an examination of the factors which are important to pupils when they make up their minds about applying to HE courses were explored in a recent (2008) research report[8]. This research found that **student choices are most heavily influenced by their desire to go to the best place for their chosen course**, rather than a strong desire to leave NI. The report also examined how the **availability of financial support influences pupils' decisions**

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[6] Demand for Higher Education (HEPI, December 2008)
[7] Review of Widening Participation Research: Addressing the Barriers to Participation in Higher Education - A Report to HEFCE by the University of York, HEA and Institute for Access Studies (July 2006)
[8] After School: Attitudes & perceptions of NI school leavers towards higher & further education, training and employment (DEL, June 2008)

about entering HE and also examined the key **factors that influence pupils' choices about HE including the role of peers, parents and careers guidance.**

It concluded that the macro issues of the **provision of places** and the **perceived benefits of undertaking a HE course in relation to potential accumulated debts and earnings** will play the more dominant role in determining the participation of those from less well-off backgrounds. There is also evidence from this research that the proportions of those not considering entering HE are higher in Protestant secondary schools than in Catholic secondary schools and that the widening access agenda (at that time) may still have to recognize this situation.

The report concluded with two issues for the HEIs in NI:

■ **Importance of visits and open days**: when potential students are considering whether to go into HE and where to study having visits to schools and holding open days remains a vital part of the processes of making decisions. Other information sources are significant including parents, teachers, and the internet but it appears that decisions still need the personal dimension.

■ **perceived accessibility of the institutions from an equality perspective**. The research recorded few negative perceptions of the HEIs in NI. However, the overwhelming view was that respondents did not know if institutions were welcoming to different sections of the community. While the institutions might point to the fact that students from many equality groups do enrol for their courses, the evidence suggests that there is still room for the HEIs to demonstrate that they welcome those with disabilities, from different ethnic backgrounds, from all socio-economic circumstances and from both ethno-religious traditions, across all their locations/campuses.

Rationale / Drivers for WP

A Higher Education Academy commissioned research project[9] noted that there was no agreed definition of WP. It indicated that definitions of WP held by research participants differed in two ways:

■ between a focus on pre-admissions and admissions and a focus on the whole of the student lifecycle
■ between a definition that rested on specific targeted groups and one that did not target but sought to be inclusive more generally.

The focus of this research – the business benefits to be derived from learner (customer) diversity – is not well developed. However, the research sought to summarise drivers for WP – based on a literature review and primary research (see Table 3-3).

Table 3-3

Summary of drivers for and benefit of WP and student diversity drawn from primary research

Driver	Potential benefits

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[9] Embedding Widening Participation and Promoting Student Diversity (HEA, July 2007)

Table 3-3

Summary of drivers for and benefit of WP and student diversity drawn from primary research

Driver	Potential benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities Better 'social mix'; breaks down barriers.
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development Enhanced reputation with stakeholders Become identified as leader in WP and diversity (enhanced reputation)
Response to government policy and legislation	Meet Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreement targets Compliance with requirements of antidiscrimination and equality legislation
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched social, learning and teaching experience for students and staff Add to knowledge base
Opportunity for recruiting students: recruitment	Sustain/expand student numbers Meet professional body targets for WP and diversity
Opportunity for recruiting students: tapping the pool of talent	Maximise opportunities; maintain high academic standards Survival of departments Alignment with professional bodies
Opportunities for business development	New products and diversification of business; new income streams Diversification of income New student markets New partnerships
Source: Embedding Widening Participation and Promoting Student Diversity (HEA, July 2007)	

WP Strategies

A HEFCE review of WP (2006)[10] highlighted a number of main themes with regard to WP at that time; many of these have a resonance with the current WP strategies in NI. Key areas include:

- Acknowledging the requirement for a **long-term commitment to WP** and the importance of sustaining this as well as funding;
- The commitment of institutions to WP, and the **embedding of WP** in the culture, mission and management of institutions identified as a high priority objective;
- A move away from discrete interventions to **sustained, planned, predictable and integrated contributions** to work with the wider learning community:
- **Acknowledgement of the weakness in the evidence base for the impact of WP;** and
- Continued support for initiatives to **broaden WP opportunities**, particularly for vocational learners through Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs), HE-FE partnerships and involvement of HE in the developing 14-19 curriculum.

Other relevant research findings[11] from projects commissioned by HEFCE (2008) include:

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[10] Widening Participation: A Review (HEFCE, November 2006)
[11] Widening Participation in Higher Education (Economic and Social Research Council, 2008)

■ Whilst the findings centre on the backgrounds of students defined in terms of being poor, disadvantaged, or working class, and to a limited extent on ethnicity, there was also **evidence of a key issue in relation to the age of students.**

■ Some of the research evidence suggested that **intervention to improve participation rates needed to occur well before the traditional point of entry into HE at 18 or 19 years old** if the attainment of children from poorer, disadvantaged or working-class backgrounds was to be improved. Key Stage 4 in state schools emerged as an appropriate point.

A 2009 Public Accounts Committee report[12] explored issues and factors associated with the under-representation of particular groups in HE, despite the overall participation in HE having increased since 1999/2000. Overall, socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity and place of residence were highlighted as factors with an impact on the likelihood of an individual attending HE, primarily because of their effect on attainment at school; and GCSE performance as a strong predictor of HE participation.

The key findings of the report reflect many of the issues evident in NI – key points were as follows:

1. Although the gap was narrowing, more than twice the proportion of people from upper socio-economic backgrounds went into HE than those from lower socio-economic groups.

2. **The funders** (Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) and the HEFCE) **knew too little about how universities had used the £392 million allocated to them over the last five years to WP.**

3. Guidance for young people on how to progress into HE was often of variable quality and not provided face-to-face.

4. In 2006/07, some 12,000 students did not apply for an institutional bursary, although many were likely to have met the necessary criteria.

5. **Although performance at school is a strong predictor of entry to HE and is influenced by a number of factors, early contact with universities can help overcome some young people's reservations about HE.** While more young people living in deprived areas were going to university, they were, as a group, still less likely to obtain good GCSEs and progress to HE than those not living in deprived areas. University mentoring of secondary school pupils living in deprived areas, primary school networks and pre-entry programmes could help raise the ambitions of young people.

6. **Despite the potential benefits for their pupils, some schools in England did not have links to a university and did not access WP activities.**

7. **Many universities, particularly those in the Russell Group, performed poorly in admitting students from under-represented groups.**

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[12] Widening Participation in Higher Education (House of Commons, Public Accounts Committee, February 2009)

8. **Data collected by universities and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) on the characteristics of the student population was incomplete.** Although data was collected nationally, it was considered incomplete, particularly for part-time students and in relation to the socio-economic background of full-time students. In addition, little was known about the extent to which disabled students and people from care participate in HE.

Retention in HE

Research undertaken into retention[13] in 2006 identified some factors which have a bearing on this; these include:

- **Gender:** women more likely to "survive" the first year than men;
- **Socio-economic class:** students from a professional social class more likely to survive the first year than those from an unskilled or semi-skilled social background. However, there was no significant difference between students from unskilled and skilled backgrounds.
- **Religion:** Catholic students less likely to survive their first year; no significant difference between the survival rates of students from "other" religions and Protestant students.
- **Usual domicile:** students from NI less likely to survive their first year than those domiciled outside NI.
- **Course type:** science / engineering subjects had lower levels of survival than arts (for example).

Relevant research findings[14] from projects commissioned by HEFCE in 2008 noted that the question of student retention versus drop-out could be seen in a new way if it was appreciated that diverse students acquire some qualifications that provide them with useful skills and knowledge for lifelong learning.

3.3.2 Inequalities in educational attainment

Education plays a key role in determining a person's life chances and opportunities in terms of social and economic mobility. Educational achievement has a profound influence on access to and advancement within employment. There is clear evidence that children and young people, who are already at risk of being marginalised in society, often have lower levels of educational attainment and hence are disadvantaged.

Recent Equality Commission reports (Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland, Equality Commission, (2007) and Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and A Strategy for Intervention (2008)) highlight groups where educational attainment and progression are considered to be issues from an equality perspective.

- **Gender:** males leaving school tend to be less qualified than females and are less likely to progress to HE, for example, in 2005/06, 38% of boys left school with at least one A-level, compared with 55% of girls while 6% of boys left school with no GCSE qualifications

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[13] Staying the Course: An Econometric Analysis of the Characteristics Most Associated With Student Attrition beyond The First Year of HE - Main Report (Mark Bailey and Vani K Borooah, UU; May 2006)

[14] Widening Participation in Higher Education (Economic and Social Research Council, 2008)

compared to 3% of girls. After leaving school, only 56% of boys progressed to FE or HE compared to 75% of girls. In relation to subject choice by gender, very stark differences in subject choices between girls and boys have lessened in some areas.

- **Underachievement and social and economic deprivation** – There is a particular pattern of underachievement among children living in or at risk of poverty; there are a number of interrelated and reinforcing factors for those on low incomes and risk of educational underachievement in NI. Considering Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME):

  - **fewer pupils with FSME attain 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C and 2 or more A levels than those not entitled to FSM**. Data for 2005/06 shows that only 26% of students with FSME gained 5 or more GCSEs A*-C including English and Mathematics, compared with 51% of those who were not entitled to FSM. Only 22% of students who were entitled to FSM achieved 2 or more A levels (or equivalent), compared with 49.9% of those who were not entitled to FSM.

  - **boys with FSME fare less well than girls with FSME at GSCE**. Data from 2005/06 shows that 15% of boys with FSME left school with no GCSEs, compared to 7% of girls with FSME; 32% of boys with FSME achieved 5+ GCSEs A*-C or higher (or equivalent) compared with 44% of girls with FSME.

  - [DE data for 2007/08 demonstrates that **for pupils from secondary/non grammar schools, those in the controlled sector fare less well than their counterparts in the maintained sector both in terms of GCSE attainment and in terms of progression to HE:** (this differential applies across **gender and FSME**).

- **Protestant working class boys** – Research commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in 2001 concluded that the educational non-progressor was most likely to be a Protestant working class male. A more recent report commissioned by DE found that lower than expected performing schools were clustered mainly in Belfast, and often in areas that were more than 75% Protestant in terms of community background. This report noted that the factors impacting on attainment were complex and that there may be similar contributory factors here as in other disadvantaged groups such as a *negatively perceived relevance of education, poor employment prospects in the area, negative parental experience of their own education, or lack of parental support with homework*.

- **People with disabilities:** Disabled people are less likely than people without a disability to achieve well academically and to be in employment. However, the available data is limited and ambivalent:

  - over two-fifths (41%) of disabled people had no qualifications, more than twice the proportion of non-disabled people (17%) – (2007);

  - Only 14% of disabled people have a university degree or HE qualification, compared to 30% of those without a disability (2008).

  - Research from 2006 noted that "*People with a learning disability are the largest group of persons with a disability aged under 65 years*" and that "*in future years the numbers will increase with more living into old age. Often those with mild or borderline learning disabilities are identified as children, but on leaving school most merge [back] into the general population and no longer make demands on services*".

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- **Looked after children and young people:** children in the care of the state in NI are 10 times more likely than school leavers in general to leave without gaining any qualifications at all. In 2005/06, just over half (51%) of care leavers were known to be in education, training or employment, which compares poorly with the 82% of all 19 year olds in NI. In 2005/06, half of all care leavers (51%) left school without gaining any educational qualifications, compared with 5% of all NI school leavers.

- **Young carers - research across the UK h**as found that almost a third have serious educational problems, with many failing to achieve any GCSEs at all. The Young Life and Times Survey (2006) identified that there are approximately 8,500 children and young people in NI who have caring responsibilities. However, there is little available NI data on the effects that caring has on a child's educational achievement.

- **Children from the Irish Traveller community –** the vast majority of whom have no formal educational qualifications (linked to non-attendance at school). This tends to be caused by three key factors which may not be unique to the Traveller community: *disillusionment* arising from what some Travellers felt to be the low expectations of teachers and thus the poor levels of education they felt they received; *a fear among the children of being bullied*, especially at secondary schools; for some of the children especially, *a view that education was just not relevant to them* and what they intend to do in the future.

- **Children from minority ethnic backgrounds** – their educational and employment achievements span the whole spectrum of outcomes.

  - A higher percentage of minority ethnic pupils leave with 2+ A Levels (49%), and with 5+ GCSEs A*-C (67% compared to 45% and 64% of all pupils respectively. .The proportion of minority ethnic school leavers who go on to FE and HE is higher (76%) than from the general population (66%).

  - At the other end of the attainment scale, a higher percentage of minority ethnic pupils (8.2%) leave with no GCSE qualifications, compared to 4.5% of all pupils.

The Equality Commission also highlights **children of new residents and migrant workers** and **children of different sexual orientation** as groups where differentials in educational attainment (which would have a bearing on progression to HE) may exist but where there is a lack of information. In the case of the former group, the Equality Commission notes that the numbers in this category are fluid. With regards to the latter group, there are very limited data, if any, on the presence of gay young people in the school system in NI and little research into the effects of homophobia on educational attainment.

3.4　　Trends in Participation and Retention in HE

3.4.1　　Introduction

In this section we discuss the main trends in participation and retention in HE drawing on a variety of data sources. The three areas on which we focus (as these link most closely with the aims of the DEL WP premium funding and all are measured on a UK wide basis by the HESA Performance Indicators) are:

- **Student Profile (Participating in HE) by Socio-Economic Classification (SEC);**

■ **Student Profile (Participating in HE) by Disability; and**

■ **Retention.**

A key source of data is the HESA Performance Indicators for HE in the UK (published annually). These provide comparative data on the performance of HEIs in widening participation[15], student retention, learning and teaching outcomes and research output. They cover publicly-funded UK HEIs (including the four locally established NI HEIs) – see Appendix 5 for more details.

3.4.2 Student Profile (Participating in HE) - by SEC

In this section we consider data relating to SEC of the population as well as of the student population.

3.4.2.1 NI Population Profile – by SEC

Comparing the profile of the NI population with England, Scotland and Wales, there are some notable variations in composition[16]. **Compared with other parts of the UK, a lower proportion of the NI population falls within the higher SEC categories (1-3) and a higher proportion of the population is in the lower SEC categories (4-7 and also 5-7).**

■ SEC 4-7: the proportions in England, Scotland and Wales in this category are 34.8%, 36.1% and 37.1% respectively; in NI, the proportion is 49.2%

■ SEC 5-7: the proportions in England, Scotland and Wales in this category are 27.8%, 30.4% and 30.0% respectively; in NI, the proportion is 40.5%.

3.4.2.2 HESA Enrolment Data – by SEC

Detailed data relating to NI domiciled undergraduates and undergraduates at NI HEIs is included in Appendix 4 Section 1.4 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here.

■ **NI domiciled students from lower SECs tend to enrol at NI institutions whereas those from higher SEC categories tend to enrol at GB institutions**[17].

 - The proportion of NI domiciled full-time first year undergraduates enrolled at NI institutions in SEC 1-2 is lower (40% vs. 51%) than the proportion of NI domiciled full time first year undergraduates enrolled at GB institutions; there are similar proportions of SEC 3 (18%) and the proportions of SEC 4-7 are higher (42% vs. 32%). The largest gap is in SEC 1 with 12% of those enrolled at NI institutions from this category compared with 20% enrolled at GB institutions;

 - A similar pattern is evident in comparing all NI domiciled full-time undergraduates in NI institutions and all NI domiciled full time undergraduates in GB institutions: i.e. lower proportions of SEC 1-2, similar proportions of SEC 3 and higher proportions of SEC 4-7 enrolled at NI institutions than at GB institutions.

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[15] The 50% target which had been set in England (HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-11) – achieve a target of 50% of 18-30 year olds participating in higher education by 2010 - has not been adopted by DEL.

[16] Source: Census data (2001)

[17] These generally consist of two main groups: "determined leavers" and those who may not get the grades to go to QUB or UU but secure a place in GB and can afford to go there

■ **More than a quarter of students enrolled in NI HEIs are from the SEC 5-7 category.**

- Considering only SEC 5-7, 29% of *NI domiciled* full-time first year undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs fall into this category, as do 29% of *all* full-time first year undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs. Further, if we consider *all* full-time undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs, 27% of *NI domiciled* undergraduates and 26% of *all* undergraduates fall into the SEC 5-7 classification.

3.4.2.3   *HESA Performance Indicators (Participation in HE - SEC 4-7)*

Detailed data relating to participation of under-represented groups in HE (and in particular SEC 4-7) is included in Appendix 5 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here.

■ **NI compares favourably with other parts of the UK in terms of SEC 4-7 i.e. higher proportion of students from SEC 4-7;**

- this pattern (higher proportions in NI) has been evident for some time (consistently higher for more than the last 5 years;

- Data for 2008/09 illustrates the point: 41.7% of young full-time first degree entrants were from SEC 4-7 in NI compared to 32.3% in the UK overall (32.4% in England, 32.5% in Wales and 28.2% in Scotland);

- However, the proportion in NI (% of young full-time first degree entrants from SEC 4-7) has remained relatively unchanged from 2002/03 to 2008/09[18] (around 41%);

■ **Considering the NI institutions, there is some variation in the proportions of students from SEC 4-7 as demonstrated by data for 2008/09:**

- QUB, UU and St Mary's are ahead of their UK benchmarks[19] (QUB and UU significantly so). Stranmillis is below its UK benchmark (but not significantly).

- UU (49.4%) and St Mary's (46.8%) have higher proportions from SEC 4-7 than QUB (32.9%) and Stranmillis (27.9%).

- Between 2006/07 and 2008/09, the proportions of young full-time first degree entrants from SEC 4-7 have fluctuated with generally a decrease from 2006/07 to 2007/08. Data for 2008/09 is not directly comparable:

  o QUB decreased from 35.2% to 34.4% to 32.9%;

  o UU decreased from 47.6% to 46.5% then increased to 49.4%;

  o Stranmillis increased from 33.5% to 34.9% then decreased to 27.9%;

  o St Mary's decreased from 52.4% to 46.9% to 46.8%.

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[18] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

[19] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

3.4.2.4 *Participation in HE (NI Enrolments by SEC 5-7)* [20]

Detailed data relating to participation of under-represented groups in HE (and in particular SEC 5-7) is included in Appendix 6 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here.

- The proportion of young full-time first year first degree enrolments at NI HEIs from SEC 5-7 has changed little between 2002/03 and 2007/08.
- The profile in 2008/09 is different – with a higher proportion in NS-SEC 6 and a lower proportion in NS-SEC 4 – however, 2008/09 data is not directly comparable with previous years.
- Data for 2008/09 shows the proportions from SEC 5-7 as follows: QUB (22.1%); UU (33.2%); Stranmillis (20.7%) and St Mary's (29.7%).

3.4.3 *Student Profile (Participating in HE) - by Disability*

In this section we consider data relating to students with a disability and those in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) (used as a proxy for the number of students who have a disability).

3.4.3.1 *HESA Enrolment Data – by Disability*

Detailed data relating to NI domiciled undergraduates and also for undergraduates at NI HEIs by disability is included in Appendix 4 Section 1.6 and 1.7 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here.

- **The majority of NI domiciled students are characterised as not having a disability (94% of all undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs)**
  - The majority of NI domiciled first year undergraduate enrolments are characterised by students with no known disability (2008/09 statistics for no known disability are: 95% of those enrolled at NI HEIs, 92% at GB HEIs and 94% at UK HEIs overall).
  - Similarly, the majority of NI domiciled all undergraduate enrolments are characterised by students with no known disability (2008/09 statistics for no known disability show: 94% of those enrolled at NI HEIs, 91% at GB HEIs and 93% at UK HEIs overall).
  - The proportion of NI domiciled enrolled students with no known disability is slightly higher at NI HEIs than at GB HEIs.
- **The majority of all students enrolled at NI HEIs are characterised as not having a disability (94% of all undergraduate enrolments)**
  - In 2008/09, the majority of both first year and of all undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs had no known disability (95% and 94% respectively).
- **A very low proportion of all students enrolled at NI HEIs are in receipt of DSA (3% of all undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs)**

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[20] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

- In 2008/09, amongst first year undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs, 3% of full-time students, 0.4% of part-time students and 2.1% of all (full and part time) students are in receipt of DSA.

- The corresponding statistics for all undergraduate enrolments at NI HEIs are 3.5% of full-time students, 1.3% of part-time students and 3.0% of all (full and part time) students are in receipt of DSA.

3.4.3.2 HESA Performance Indicators (Participation in HE - DSA)

Detailed data relating to participation of under-represented groups in HE (and in particular those in receipt of DSA) is included in Appendix 5 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here. (Note: This presents a different view from that in Table 3-4 (highlighting the issue of consistency / definitions)).

- **NI compares less favourably with other parts of the UK in terms of disability status i.e. lower proportions of students in receipt of DSA;**

  - this pattern (lower proportions in NI) has been evident for some time (consistently lower for more than the last 5 years;

  - Data for 2008/09 illustrates this pattern: 3.7% of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA in NI compared to 4.7% in the UK overall (4.8% in England, 5.8% in Wales and 3.6% in Scotland);

  - However, there has been a substantial improvement in NI: the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA has increased from 1.7% to 3.7% between 2002/03 and 2008/09;

  - There is also evidence of an upward trend in England, Scotland and Wales and hence the UK overall: with increases from 2.6% to 4.7% in the UK overall between 2002/03 and 2008/09 (all full-time undergraduates).

- **Considering the NI institutions, there is some variation in the proportions of students in receipt of DSA; these are below UK benchmarks but increasing:**

  - Within NI, there are some differences within the HEIs as demonstrated by data for 2008/09: UU (4.1%) and QUB (3.4%) have higher proportions (of full-time first degree students) in receipt of DSA compared with St Mary's and Stranmillis (both 2.5%).

  - In 2008/09, the proportions of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA for QUB, UU, Stranmillis and St Mary's are all below their UK benchmarks[21]

  - Between 2006-07 and 2008-09, the proportions of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA has generally improved in each of the NI HEIs: QUB (3.2%, 3.1%, 3.4%); UU (3.5%, 4.0%, 4.1%); Stranmillis (2.3%, 1.9%, 2.5%); and St Mary's (2.0%, 2.6%, 2.5%).

1. **DEL Statistics – Enrolments at NI HEIs – disability (self assessed)**

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[21] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

Table 3-4 provides statistics on enrolments at NI HEIs (in total) by disability / non disabled (based on student's self-assessment). Using this measure, we note that the proportion of students with disabilities has been gradually increasing up to 2007/08 (7.2%) but reduced in 2008/09 (to 6%).

Table 3-4

Enrolments at NI HEIs by available equality category – disability

Disability*	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Disabled	2,655	2,805	3,220	3,125	3,465	2,745
Not disabled/not known	48,370	50,125	49,625	45,730	44,730	45,495
Total	51,025	52,930	52,845	48,860	48,200	48,240
% Disabled	5.2%	5.3%	6.1%	6.4%	7.2%	6.0%

Note: * Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment.

Source: DEL Statistical Fact Sheet 4 – Enrolments at NI HEIs by available equality categories 2003/04 - 2008/08 (HESA, 2009), DEL

3.4.3.3 QUB and UU data – Self Reported Disability / Registered Disability

Table 3-5 provides a proxy for participation in HE by those with disabilities in QUB: this uses the measure of those registered with Disability Services. Since Disability Services was established in 2000, there has been significant growth in the numbers of students with disabilities studying at Queen's – this is considered to be due to the work of Disability Services in promoting awareness of disability issues and support available at the University.

Table 3-5

QUB - No. of Students registered with Disability Services: 2000/01 – 2007/08

Academic Year	HESA PI (% in receipt of DSA)	No. of Students registered with Disability Services
2000-01	1.1%	20
2001-02	1.6%	88
2002-03	1.6%	168
2003-04	2.3%	287
2004-05	2.2%	450
2005-06	3.0%	560
2006-07	3.2%	650
2007-08	3.1%	1,125

Source: QUB WPSA Annex C

UU data – illustrating self reported disability by year from 2005-06 to 2008-09 is included in Table 3-6. This shows a decrease in the total number self-reporting from 2005-06 to 2006-07 (580 to 404) followed by an increase (to 568, 10%) in 2007-08 and a decrease again to 8% (447) in 2008-09.

Table 3-6

UU – Full Time Undergraduate Entrants Declaring a Disability

Year	No. Self Reported(FT)	Self Report as % of all
2005-06	580	9%
2006-07	404	8%
2007-08	568	10%

Table 3-6

UU – Full Time Undergraduate Entrants Declaring a Disability

2008-09	447	8%
Source:		
2005-06, 2006-07 data from UU Report of Widening Access Audit Group (2008); 2007-08, 2008-09 data from UU		

3.4.4   Retention / Attrition Rate

In this section we consider data relating to students' non-continuation following year of entry within HE.

3.4.4.1   Introduction

A recent report undertaken on behalf of DEL[22] notes the lack of a common definition of retention. It also explores "survival rates[23]" across a range of factors including socio-economic class: compared to those students coming from an unskilled or semi-skilled social background, the probability of surviving the first year was 4.1 points higher for students from a professional social class; however, there was no significant difference between the survival rates of students from unskilled and skilled backgrounds.

3.4.4.2   HESA Performance Indicators (Retention)

Detailed data relating to non-continuation following year of entry is included in Appendix 5 (for reference) – the key points are summarised here.

- **The level of non-continuation following year of entry is higher in NI than elsewhere in the UK**
  - The level of non-continuation for full-time first degree students in NI HEIs was second highest (Scotland highest) in 2003/04 and 2004/05; highest in 2005/06 and 2007/08 but third highest (Scotland and Wales higher) in 2006/07;
  - Between 2002/03 and 2007/08, the level of non-continuation (first year) has increased from 9.4% to 10.2% in NI (although it has been higher and lower between these dates);
  - In contrast, the overall level in the UK has varied between 8.6% and 9.5% - it appears to be more stable. The levels in England and Wales tend to mirror the pattern in the UK overall.
  - In 2007/08, NI has a relatively high proportion (10.2%) no longer in HE (England lowest – 8.4% and UK overall 8.6%);
- **Considering the NI institutions, there is some variation in non-continuation following year of entry for full time first degree entrants as demonstrated by data for 2007/08:**

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[22] Staying The Course: An Econometric Analysis of the Characteristics Most Associated With Student Attrition Beyond The First Year Of Higher Education Main Report (Mark Bailey and Vani K Borooah, University of Ulster, January 2007)
[23] Survival refers to the student successfully completing their 1st year and proceeding to the 2nd year of study.

- Within NI, there are some differences within the HEIs as demonstrated by data for 2007/08: UU (13.2%) had the highest level of non-continuation and Stranmillis (4.2%) the lowest. QUB (7.1%) and St Mary's (7.7%) lie between these two.

- In 2007/08, QUB, UU, St Mary's are performing worse than their UK benchmarks[24] (UU significantly so). Stranmillis was performing better than its UK benchmark but not significantly.

- Between 2005-06 and 2007-08, the proportions of full-time first degree students no longer in HE one year after entry improved in UU and QUB between 2005-06 and 2006-07 but otherwise has deteriorated:

    o QUB decreased from 7.5% in 2005-06 to 6.3% in 2006-07 and increased to 7.1% in 2007-08);

    o UU decreased from 15.2% in 2005-06 to 12.4% in 2006-07 and increased to 13.2% in 2007-08.

    o Stranmillis increased from 2.2% in 2005-06 to 4.2% in 2006-07 and 4.2% in 2007-08.

    o St Mary's increased from 5.2% in 2005-06 to 7.0% in 2006-07 and 7.7% in 2007-08.

3.4.4.3   QUB data

The universities track various data with regard to retention – for example in the QUB Widening Participation Policy 2008-11:

- Appendix 6 reports drop out data by school and by entry session;
- Section 3.2 notes that there was little available data on progression and retention statistics of students from Access Courses and WP backgrounds prior to the introduction of systematic tracking/analysis by the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs in 2006-07.
- Analysis illustrating the characteristics of students withdrawing from their programme (see below) notes a correlation between lower entry standard of students that appears significant in retention.
- QUB notes concern about withdrawal rates higher than those of other Russell Group universities.

Table 3-7

Characteristics of students withdrawing across the QUB[25]

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Gender	Males	Males	Males	Males
Age on Entry	19 – 20	19 – 20	19 – 20 17 – 18	

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[24] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

[25] Source: UOB paper, prepared by the Centre for Educational Development, on Student Progression and Attainment

Table 3-7

Characteristics of students withdrawing across the QUB[25]

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Level of Entry	Level 0	Level 0	Level 0	Level 0
UCAS Tariff Points	No A-levels < 300 points > 400 points	No A-levels < 300 points	No A-levels < 300 points	No A-levels < 300 points
Region of Domicile		GB students		
Community Background	Catholic Undeclared	Other Undeclared	Undeclared	Catholic Undeclared
Multiple Deprivation	Poorest areas	Poorest areas		
Transferring School or Pathway		Transferring School	Not transferring School or Pathway	
Source: QUB WP Policy 2008-11 Appendix 3 (relates to WP Policy 2004-08)				

Further analysis highlighted that key characteristics of students withdrawing were: entering at Level 0; entering with less than 300 tariff points; and with community background 'undeclared' or 'other', that is students from GB. Level 0 courses have since been withdrawn from the University, the last intake being September 2008.

3.4.4.4 UU data

A 2007 UU report[26] provides some insights into issues affecting retention. This noted that:

- **First year retention**: "*Differences between faculties in attrition in part reflect national differences between subjects, however, a large number of subjects have attrition rates above the national average for the attained student entry qualification tariff for that subject. The main reason given by students for leaving was wrong choice of course.*"
- **Second year retention**: *"The rate of early leaving was less than among first years, but the failure rate at the end of second year was not much lower than at the end of first year."*
- **Factors influencing retention and progression in first year students**: Factors that had a bearing on early leaving or lack of progression at the end of the year (failing or being asked to repeat) included:
  - *Accommodation type***:** Students in rented accommodation do slightly worse in terms of both early leavers and lack of progression;
  - *Social engagement*: Fewer of those who joined clubs or societies were early leavers;
  - *Reason for coming – interest*: Students with lower average interest score are more likely to be early leavers;
  - *Disability*: In 2004-05, students with declared disabilities were significantly less likely to be early leavers;
  - *Social class*: For students with record of social class, those in classes IIIM, IV and V (or 4-6) were less likely to proceed in 04-05.

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[26] Source: Retention and Progression in the University of Ulster 2003-06 (Report on the TQEF-funded Induction / Retention / Progression Project) (Clare Carter, January 2007)

- *Type of school/college attended*: Those from grammar school or FE College are more likely to proceed;
- *Entrance tariff (UCAS points)*: Degree students with less than 220 UCAS points are less likely to proceed. A slightly greater proportion in the 320+ group progresses; there is no difference in those with intermediate scores;
- *Mode of entry*: Conditional Firm (CF) are most likely to proceed, direct entry are the next most likely;
- *Hours of employment*: Of students with a job, more of those that work >10 hours a week do not progress
- *Independent study hours – week 8-10*: Twice as many students who studied less than 5 hours outside class failed to proceed.

◼ **Pilot Projects:** The report highlighted that the most successful projects in terms of attrition were those in which several activities were undertaken e.g. attendance monitoring and first year tutorials or first year review (including more focussed induction, attendance monitoring, increased coordination of teaching and assessment across modules). It noted the link between attendance monitoring and module performance: 8% of students who attended more than 90% of teaching sessions in a module failed at the first sit, while 69% of those who attended less than 50% of the sessions did so.

3.4.5 Summary

3.4.5.1 Summary – Participation - Profile by SEC Group

The NI population has a higher concentration of the lower SEC groups (SEC 4-7, also SEC 5-7) than elsewhere in the UK. This is also reflected in the student population.

NI domiciled students from lower SEC groups tend to enrol at NI HEIs; those from higher SEC groups at GB HEIs. More than a quarter of students at NI HEIs are from SEC 5-7.

Whilst NI performs relatively well compared to its UK counterparts as regards participation from targeted groups (SEC 4–7), the level (proportion of enrolments of full-time first year undergraduates) has changed relatively little over the period 2002-03 and 2007-08; the same is true for SEC 5-7.

There is, however, evidence of some variation between NI HEIs - with higher proportions (from SEC 4-7) in UU and St Mary's and lower proportions in QUB and Stranmillis (also true for SEC 5-7). Considering the proportions from SEC 4-7, QUB, UU and St Mary's are ahead of their UK benchmarks; Stranmillis is below its benchmark.

3.4.5.2 Summary – Participation - Profile by Disability

There are a variety of measures available with regard to participation of students with a disability in HE – not all are consistent.

The majority (at least 94%) of NI domiciled students enrolled at NI, GB and UK HEIs are characterised by students with no known disability. A very low proportion (3%) of all undergraduate enrolments across NI HEIs are in receipt of DSA.

NI compares less favourably with other parts of the UK in terms of disability status i.e. lower proportions of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA. Whilst this has been consistently lower for some time, there is evidence of improvement: in NI: the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA has increased from 1.7% to 3.7% between 2002/03 and 2008/09.

Within the NI institutions, there is some variation in the proportions of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA; UU and QUB have higher proportions (of full-time first degree students) in receipt of DSA than St Mary's and Stranmillis. These are all below UK benchmarks but the levels have been increasing.

3.4.5.3   *Summary – Retention*

The level of non-continuation following year of entry is higher in NI than elsewhere in the UK and has been highest (or second highest) in the UK since 2003/04, apart from 2006/07. In 2007/08, the proportion for NI was 10.2% compared with 8.6% in the UK overall (England lowest).

Within the NI institutions, there is some variation in non-continuation following year of entry for full time first degree entrants. In 2007/08: UU (13.2%) had the highest level of non-continuation and Stranmillis (4.2%) the lowest. QUB (7.1%) and St Mary's (7.7%) lie between these two.

Compared to each of their respective benchmarks in 2007/08, the level of non-continuation is higher in QUB, UU and St Mary's (UU significantly so). Stranmillis was performing better than its UK benchmark but not significantly.

4 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PREMIUM FUNDING - QUB

4.1 Widening Participation - Objectives

4.1.1 Widening Participation Policy 2008-11 – Core Commitments

QUB's Widening Participation Policy 2008-11 reflects recent developments in Government policy at both national and regional level and supports the University's Vision. Within the context of Strategy 435(i)[27], the main components of the WP policy are built on the following commitments:

(i) Commitment One: increasing the number of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds via outreach, pre-entry engagement, raising awareness and aspirations and facilitating entry;

(ii) Commitment Two: intensifying transition support systems to enhance attainment, retention and progression of widening participation cohorts and Students at Risk; and

(iii) Commitment Three: enhancing information advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study.

Support for these commitments is embedded across a wide range of services and activities within the University. Table 4-1 illustrates the way in which widening participation activity is embedded in a number of key strategies, policies and protocols.

Table 4-1

QUB – Integration of Widening Participation in Related Strategies, Policies and Activities

Other University Strategy/Policy	WP Policy Commitment		
	(i) Increasing the no. of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds via outreach, pre-entry engagement, raising awareness & aspirations & facilitating entry	(ii) Intensifying transition support systems to enhance attainment, retention and progression of widening participation cohorts and Students at Risk	(iii) Enhancing information advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study
Widening Participation Policy 2008-11	✓	✓	✓
Education Strategy 2008-11	✓	✓	✓
Domestic Recruitment Strategy 2009-12	✓		
Admissions Policy (Reviewed Annually)	✓		
Academic Plan 2009	✓	✓	✓
Student Employability and Skills Strategy 2008-11	✓	✓	✓

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[27] Source: The Corporate Plan, 2006-11. 435i is the University's strategic intent to increase the UCAS entry tariff to an average of 400 points, to increase our post graduate population by 30% and achieve a 5 % increase in externally derived income. i refers to the desire to increase international student recruitment.

Table 4-1

QUB – Integration of Widening Participation in Related Strategies, Policies and Activities

Other University Strategy/Policy	WP Policy Commitment		
	(i) Increasing the no. of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds via outreach, pre-entry engagement, raising awareness & aspirations & facilitating entry	(ii) Intensifying transition support systems to enhance attainment, retention and progression of widening participation cohorts and Students at Risk	(iii) Enhancing information advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study
Queen's in the Community Strategy 2006-09 (under review)	✓		
Student Mental Health Strategy		✓	✓
Students' Union Strategic Plan		✓	✓
Degree Plus		✓	✓
Transition Toolkit	✓	✓	✓
e-Learning and Distance Learning Policy		✓	
Student Care Protocol		✓	
Source: QUB WP Strategic Assessment (December 2009)			

4.1.2   Widening Participation Policy 2008-11 – Implementation Plan

QUB's Widening Participation Policy Implementation Group is responsible for initiating the activity identified in the WP Policy Implementation Plan. The WP Policy Implementation Plan is built around five aims (with associated tasks):

1. The increase in the number of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds in the pool of applicants to the University via outreach, raising awareness and aspirations and facilitating entry.
2. The further development of tailored, transition support systems to facilitate attainment, retention and progression of WP cohorts and students at risk.
3. The provision of information, advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study.
4. Develop communication strategy to ensure greater externalization of widening participation.
5. Strong co-operation and management of cross-University initiatives that contribute directly or indirectly to WP.

Appendix 7 includes details of status (at December 2009) against aims and tasks.

4.2 Groups Targeted by QUB WP Strategy

4.2.1 QUB Approach to Targeting – WP Cohorts

QUB's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA) (December 2009) notes the following with regard to targeting of activities / initiatives to support WP:

*Widening participation programmes can be **targeted at areas, individuals, cohorts with shared characteristics or in response to wider strategic priorities**. Where demand for programmes is high, **access criteria** have been established to ensure that those who have indicators of disadvantage in their profile are given priority."*

QUB's WP Policy 2008-11 provides further details on QUB's approach to targeting interventions (and particularly for the DQ activities):

*"Activities linked to these **targeted** interventions can include, but are not limited to, WP cohorts. These can include for example, other students at risk and are to be prioritised annually and aligned with University commitments within the Access Agreement, the Widening Participation Policy and key targets within other related Strategies and Policies. The WP Policy Implementation Group will advise on short, medium and long-term objectives for activities aligned to the tasks and outcomes contained in the WP Policy Implementation Plan, WP Unit Development Plan, and Discovering Queen's aims and objectives as agreed with DEL."* (Source QUB Widening Participation Policy Appendix 4).

Refer to Section 8.4 for the DQ Targeting Framework which identifies specific groups that are targeted by DQ interventions.

4.3 Funding for WP including DEL Premium funding

4.3.1 DEL Premium Funding to support WP

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £600-£650k pa to QUB in the form of premium funding (see Table 4-2 and notes below table for basis of funding). The majority of this is the WP Premium funding which accounts for the greater proportion (77%-78%) of premium funding - around 3.5 times as much as the WA Premium funding. In 2008/09, the total amount of premium funding offered to QUB increased (relative to previous years). Overall there was a 5% increase in funding from 2007/08 to 2008/09 but this masks a 3% increase in WP Premium funding but a greater increase (11%) in the WA Premium funding.

Table 4-2

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to QUB

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	471,786	78%	484,760	78%	498,091	77%
Widening Access Premium	130,786	22%	135,291	22%	150,308	23%
Total	**602,572**	**100%**	**620,051**	**100%**	**648,399**	**100%**

> *Note:*
> *-WP Premium - paid on basis of the no. of students enrolled from disadvantaged backgrounds.*
> *-WA Premium – based on no. of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of DSA*
> *Source: Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to QUB*

4.3.2 Total Funding to support WP

QUB draws on a number of dedicated funding streams to support widening participation activity, such as widening participation and disability premium funding (described in Section 4.3.1), Discovering Queen's funding (more details in Section 8), employer investment and Access Agreement commitments. Table 4-3 provides a breakdown of all funding streams that contribute to WP in 2008/09.

DEL premium funding (£498k WP and £150k WA) accounts for around 7% of the total funding (£8.902m invested in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from Access Agreements (£3,228k or 36% in 2008/09).QUB have indicated that DEL Premium Funding tends to be used on outreach type activities i.e. those which are engaging with potential students and seeking to raise aspirations.

Table 4-3

QUB – Widening Participation Funding Streams 2008/09 to 2009/10 (£'000)

Commitments	Funding Stream	2008/09	2009/10
1+2+3	Widening Participation (DEL)	498	508
	Discovering Queen's (DQ)	235	255A
	Access Agreement - Academic and Student Affairs	683	712
	Access Agreement - Student Plus	150	150
	Sub-total	1,566	1,625
1+3	Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)	133	149
	Sub-total	133	149
2+3	Premium Disability Funding	150	72
	Access Agreement – Other	0	69
	Sub-total	150	141
1 Only	Employer Sponsorship - FG Wilson	4	13
	Sub-total	4	13
2 Only	Student Support Funding	888	888
	Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS)	276	297
	Targeted Allocations (Part-time and Accelerated Provision)	1,457	1,364
	Induction and Enrolment & Registration	90	90
	Hardship Fund	55	59
	University Health Centre (UHC)	50	50
	Childcare	254	241
	Staff Training & Development Unit: Postgraduate Certificate in HE Teaching	38	39
	Staff Training & Development Unit: Diversity Now On-Line Module	25	0
	Access Agreement – Bursaries	3,228	3,740
	Access Agreement – Finance	52	56
	Sub-total	6,413	6,824

Table 4-3

QUB – Widening Participation Funding Streams 2008/09 to 2009/10 (£'000)

Commitments	Funding Stream		2008/09	2009/10
3 Only	Postgraduate Training (Roberts Funding)		450	450
	Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP)		0	9
	NICENT Entrepreneurship Programme		186	0
		Sub-total	636	459
	Grand Total		8,902	9,211

Note:

-Commitments 1, 2 and 3 refer to the 3 core commitments which form the basis of QUB's WP Policy 2008-11 – see Section 4.1.1

- A - The DEL Letter of offer approved £235k for 09-10.

Source: QUB WP Strategic Assessment (December 2009)

4.4 Widening Participation – Activities

4.4.1 Widening Participation – University Wide Activities

In QUB, WP activity is based on five key stages of the student experience, a continuum ranging from Pre-entry; On-entry; On-course; Pre-departure to Post-qualification. These WP activities contribute to the three core Commitments of the QUB WP policy (which are described in Section 4.1.1). Activities which QUB pursues in order to widen access to and support progression through HE are described in detail in QUB's WPSA.

A brief description of the core, embedded and bespoke activities that deliver on the WP is included in the following subsections. QUB's WPSA (Annex C, the 2008-09 Volume and Activity Report), provides details of School-based activity, embedded (central) activity and bespoke activity which contributes to each of the Commitments. Details in Appendix 8 supplement the information in the following sub-sections.

4.4.2 WP Commitment (i): increasing the number of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds via outreach, pre-entry engagement, raising awareness and aspirations and facilitating entry

QUB delivers a range of activities to engage with primary and secondary pupils early in their learning journey. The extent to which WP is embedded is illustrated by the fact that all Schools and Services support and deliver activities that contribute to the University's outreach and pre-entry engagement including Open Days. In addition, the dedicated Widening Participation Unit which delivers DQ also significantly contributes to this Commitment.

Typical themes of work and activities which support this commitment are outlined below - these approaches focus on the pre-entry stage of the widening participation process.

■ Working with Primary Schools to Raise Awareness of HE University Schools Activities (see Section 8.6 for DQ activities in this area);

■ Working with Secondary Schools to Raise Aspirations and develop personal effectiveness (see Section 8.6 for DQ activities in this area);

■ Further Education (see Section 8.6 for DQ activities in this area); and

■ Fair Access: Facilitating Entry of Students from Diverse Backgrounds
  - Student Recruitment
  - Admissions Policy
  - Alternative Access Routes
  - Flexible Provision.

In addition to the above bespoke activity, further school-based activity, embedded (central) activity and bespoke activity contribute to this commitment. Examples of activity include: workshops, summer projects, work experience, courses for teachers, demonstration lectures, careers advice, school competition, Taster Days, etc.

QUB also facilitates study at various levels including pre-university and university level through a range of collaborative provision. A Register of Collaborative Provision (UK and Ireland) is included in WPSA Annex C.

4.4.3 WP Commitment (ii): intensifying transition support systems to enhance attainment, retention and progression of widening participation cohorts and Students at Risk

QUB has embedded transition and retention systems; these are supported via enhanced activities delivered by the University Schools, including, amongst others Disability Advisers and School-based Induction Programmes.

One of the principles of the Widening Participation Policy is that all students are treated equally and this is achieved by embedding much of the WP support within regular support activity offered to all students. There are exceptions to this, for example, bespoke transition support and ongoing support for mature students. Students from widening participation backgrounds who are admitted to the University are offered tailored transition support. Discovering Queen's currently offers two core programmes that address transition issues; the Year 13 Summer Programme and the Head Start Programme.

Typical activities which support this commitment are outlined below (and described in more detail in the QUB WPSA):

■ The Year 13 Summer and Head Start Programme (these are both part of DQ -see Section 8.6);

■ Wider Transition Support and Induction to the University;

■ Personal Development Planning (PDP) including Degree Plus;

■ Learning Development Service;

- Peer Mentoring;

- School Retention Projects;

- Student Guidance Centre;

- Students with Disabilities;

  - Students declaring a disability are provided with an individual appointment to assess their support needs and assigned a Disability Officer, who is a point of contact for any queries or difficulties arising. Each School also has a Disability Adviser, who is a point of contact for queries relating to their studies. Students registered with Disability Services are surveyed annually to determine satisfaction with their experience and to identify areas for improvement.

- Mature Students;

- Student Mental Health Strategy;

- Student Care Protocol;

- Accommodation Support;

- Personal Tutoring;

- OFFA Bursaries.

Further details of School-based activity, Embedded (central) activity and Bespoke activity which contribute to this commitment includes: peer mentoring, buddying scheme, enhanced Staff-Student Tutoring, focused events for e.g. mature students, WP cohorts, etc. Note – the embedded activity includes the provision of Support Services to 1125 registered students by Disability Services.

4.4.4 WP Commitment (iii): enhancing information advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study.

QUB's WP Policy recognises the importance of ensuring that widening participation students have access to high quality advice and guidance on graduate opportunities. This is achieved through the following:

- **Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG)** – provision embedded within programmes at all levels and is supported by PDP;

- **Employability and Skills -** employability and skills embedded within the curriculum; QUB also supports a range of activities to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study, including:

  - (i) Career Development Programmes such as Queen's Employability and Skills Award or Tutoring in Schools;

- (ii) work experience which may be gained through volunteering or part time work supported by the Queen's Job shop and which may contribute to the award of Degree Plus;

- (iii) work placement through the Summer Internship programme, which allows students to develop employability skills through spending approximately eight weeks on placement with Queen's and with external employers. The programme is aimed at pre-final year students studying non-vocational disciplines.

■ **Employer Engagement -** Where appropriate, employers, many of whom are alumni, are involved in running skills workshops, delivering guest lectures, case studies or visits to organisations. Careers, Employability and Skills links directly with employers for recruitment purposes: a vacancy database and a series or recruitment fairs and presentations are held throughout the academic year. In addition, Careers, Employability and Skills works closely with specific employers through its Careers Forum where employer members represent certain sectors and act in an advisory capacity to inform future planning of the service.

■ **Entrepreneurship and 'Enterprise for Life' -** embedded entrepreneurship education into the curriculum of all Schools to build entrepreneurial attitudes and aspirations amongst students and develop their entrepreneurial skills. Teaching incorporates an '*Enterprise for Life*' agenda which addresses employability skills such as interpersonal skills, presentation, negotiation and selling skills, creativity and idea generation, recognising opportunity, and networking. It also stimulates active learning and self development and crucially builds self confidence. In some disciplines, such as engineering, there can be added dimension focussing on '*Enterprise for New Venture Creation'*. Teaching the '*enterprise for new venture creation'* agenda involves topics such as business planning, intellectual property and sources of finance, making students more aware of, and better prepared for, the possibility of new venture creation at some time in their careers. Enterprise SU, the Students' Union's enterprise and employability unit opened in 2007, provides extra-curricular support and information on key activities for students.

■ **Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP) -** a 26-week work placement programme in which graduates complete a project or piece of work and study for a Graduate Certificate.

Further details of School-based activity, and Embedded (central) activity which contribute to this commitment include: e.g.: literature and web-based information career fairs and events, recruitment fairs, vacancy advertisements, etc.

4.5 Measures of Participation and Retention

The primary measures that QUB uses to monitor the implementation of the Widening Participation Policy are those reflected in the University's Access Agreement. These include the HESA performance indicators, which provide an overview of the characteristics of the current cohort of students and provide an insight into performance in widening participation.

In this section, we focus on those measures that are of most direct relevance to the DEL WP Premium funding.

4.5.1   Student Profile[28][and 29]

■ **NS-SEC 4-7:**

- the proportion of applicants to QUB for entry in 2008 was 36.1%; this meets the Access Agreement milestone for 2008-09 (36-38%).

- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from SEC 4-7 (HESA PI) was 32.9% for 2008-09; this is slightly below the Access Agreement milestone (35-37%) however performs significantly above its UK benchmark[30] of 25.8%.

- Across 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has declined from 35.2% to 34.4% to 32.9%.

■ **NS-SEC 5-7**:

- the proportion of enrolments from NS-SEC 5-7 was 22.1% in 2008/09; this is close to meeting the Access Agreement milestone for 2008-09 (23-24%).

- This proportion has remained fairly constant (varying between 21.3% and 22.5%) since 2002-3.

■ **Low income households** (number of students in receipt of bursary support by income threshold):

- Information from the Office For Fair Access's second annual Access Agreement Outcomes report shows that in 2007-08, 26% of Queen's full-time undergraduate students had an assessed household income of less than £17,910;

- QUB's Access Agreement Monitoring Report 2008-09 shows that in 2008-09, 26.9% of students had assessed household income of less than £18,361 and overall 41.7% of students had income below £33,360 and received a bursary in the range £105-£1,155.

■ **Disabled Students Allowance** (DSA):

- as a proxy for the number of students at QUB who have a disability, we consider the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA: 3.4% in 2008-09. This exceeds the Access Agreement milestone of 2.4-2.6%.

- From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has remained fairly steady from 3.2% to 3.1% to 3.4%. However this remains below its UK benchmark (4.2% in 2008/09);

- In 2008/09, there were 1,125 students registered with Disability Services, an increase from 850 in 2007-08. 349 students were assessed and 394 reassessed between 01/06/08 to 31/05/09.

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[28] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years
[29] Further details included in Section 3.4 and Appendices, 4, 5, and 6
[30] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

Table 4-4

Summary of QUB applicants, enrolments (Entrants to QUB via UCAS)

Year	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	08 target (Access Agreement)
SEC 4-7 applicants (1)	36.8%	36.3%	37.2%	36.3%	36.1%	36-38%
SEC 4-7 enrolments	34.4%	34.4%	35.2%	34.4%	32.9%	35-37%
SEC 5-7 enrolments	21.6%	22.0%	22.5%	22.4%	22.1%	23-24%
Students in receipt of DSA	2.2%	3.0%	3.2%	3.1%	3.4%	2.4-2.6%
Note						
(1) – the number of applicants with unknown SEC is significant at around 26% and this limits comprehensive monitoring of this measure						
Source: QUB Access Agreement Monitoring Report 2008-09 (December 2009) based on UCAS data and HESA PIs						

4.5.2 Student Retention

HESA Performance Indicators (see Section 3.4 and Appendix 5) for QUB show that the proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are no longer in HE one year after entry was 7.5% in 2005-06 6.3% in 2006-07 and 7.1% in 2007-08. In 2007-08 QUB was performing worse, but not significantly so compared against its UK benchmark of 6.1%

QUB note that in its 2008 Academic Plan, minimum undergraduate student retention targets were established for each School. For 2008-09, an initial, internal analysis suggests an improvement for several University Schools (according to WPSA).

4.6 Summary

QUB presents its approach to WP in its WP Policy and associated Implementation Plan; this is also embedded within a number of QUB strategies. The WP Policy is based on the following main commitments:

(i) increasing the number of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds via outreach, pre-entry engagement, raising awareness and aspirations and facilitating entry;

(ii) intensifying transition support systems to enhance attainment, retention and progression of widening participation cohorts and Students at Risk; and

(iii) enhancing information advice and guidance to ensure successful progression to employment or postgraduate study.

QUB's WP Policy includes its approach to targeting WP support: this can be on the basis of targeting participants, areas, individuals, cohorts with shared characteristics or in response to wider strategic priorities. Where demand for programmes is high, access criteria have been established to ensure that those who have indicators of disadvantage in their profile are given priority. (see also Section 8.4 for the DQ Targeting Framework which identifies specific groups that are targeted by DQ interventions.).

In 2008/09, DEL premium funding (£498k WP and £150k WA) accounted for around 7% of the total funding (£8.902m invested in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from Access Agreements (£3,228k or 36% in 2008/09).

■ **Participation**[31]

- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from **SEC 4-7** was 32.9% in 2008/09; this is significantly better than the relevant UK benchmark and has been for at least 5 years;

- the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of **DSA** was 3.4% in 2008-09; this is below its UK benchmark of 4.2% and has been for at least 5 years. However the proportion is increasing.

■ **Student Retention**

- The proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are **no longer in HE** one year after entry was 7.1% in 2007-08. This is worse, but not significantly so compared to its UK benchmark of 6.1%. In 3 of the last 5 years, QUB was at the same level or better than its UK benchmark.

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[31] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

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5 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PREMIUM FUNDING - UU

5.1 Widening Participation - Objectives

During the academic years 2007/08 and 2008/09 the University of Ulster (UU) undertook a Widening Access Audit and revised its Access Agreement. In light of these activities, a decision was taken to revise the overall Widening Access and Participation Strategy. The new strategy (described in UU's WPSA 2009) specifies UU's goals in Widening Access as follows:

<u>**Strategic Aim 1:**</u> **To raise aspirations and encourage a positive attitude towards educational progression and ultimately participation in HE especially amongst communities and social groups not traditionally associated with third level education.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To develop and support a range of outreach activities to raise the aspirations of potential applicants;
- To provide a variety of safe yet challenging learning environments that encourage students to engage and progress;
- To strengthen links with community and voluntary organisations (and local industry and employers) in order to identify new opportunities to engage with the groups they represent;
- To keep under review internal funding mechanisms for outreach activities in order to ensure timely, targeted and effective interventions with under-represented groups and communities;
- To enhance opportunities for existing students to undertake outreach activities and act as ambassadors for HE in general and the University in particular.

<u>**Strategic Aim 2:**</u> **To target and recruit students from under-represented groups who have the potential to benefit from Higher Education.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To develop a series of student marketing activities and materials tailored to the needs of identified target schools;
- To work collaboratively and in partnership with appropriate stakeholders in order to target and recruit a diverse range of students;
- To promote innovative curriculum development, particularly in relation to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and ERSS (Economically Relevant Skills Shortage) disciplines in order to meet local and regional skills needs;
- To devise and provide a variety of courses and programmes that are aimed at communities and social groups not traditionally associated with third level education.

Strategic Aim 3: **To ensure the University's Admissions Policy recognises the diversity of routes that students might follow prior to seeking entry to Higher Education and to respond flexibly.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To ensure that inclusivity and diversity underpin all aspects of student marketing, promotion and outreach activities in order to increase the number of applications from traditionally disadvantaged and excluded communities;

- To maximize opportunities for transition between Further Education (FE) and HE by developing and promoting a variety of progression pathways;

- To develop support and mentoring processes to ensure ease of application and seamless transition between different levels and forms of learning.

Strategic Aim 4: **To address actively student retention, progression and success within the undergraduate population.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To ensure widening access/participation data are available to appropriate levels of staff throughout the University, to inform and facilitate decision-making;

- To promote the development of students' key skills, including numeracy and literacy, to enhance their overall performance, their continuation and aid their progression into labour market employment and/or further study;

- To seek to improve the identification of groups and/or cohorts of students at risk or in need of additional support;

- To provide a range of study skills advice throughout the first year (including study support for the re-sit period) in order to maximise student progression and success.

Cross-Cutting Support Aim 1: **To provide financial, embedded learning and pastoral support, that is appropriate and sustainable, especially for students from non-traditional backgrounds.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To monitor processes, practices and functions in relation to Bursary and Scholarship activity and implement adjustments, as necessary;

- To promote learning resources and teaching methods that take account of a variety of learning styles and prior learning experiences and are accessible to students;

- To increase the use of VLEs (virtual learning environments), mobile learning technologies and blended learning approaches, to make courses as accessible as possible;

- To maximise the quality of the overall student learning experience by providing appropriate student support services that are responsive to student need and delivered in a timely manner.

Cross-Cutting Support Aim 2: **To work in partnership with a range of stakeholders, as appropriate, to improve access to and participation in Higher Education regionally.**

Key Supporting Objectives:

- To develop and promote flexible frameworks of study, which are accessible to individuals and groups and maximise recognition and transferability of skills throughout the region;

- To encourage the development of educational partnerships, with and between under-represented groups across the region, to promote high levels of community engagement with HE;

- To maintain and enhance the use of real life (work-based) project work within the curriculum;

- To work with industry and local employers in order to promote education and learning through the integration of academic knowledge and vocational practice, with particular reference to mature students.

Links Between Widening Participation and Other University Strategies

Widening access and participation is an integral part of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy – evident in one of its four strategic aims "*to target, recruit, support and retain a diverse range of students*". This supports the institutional commitment to widening participation and ensuring that it maintains its position nationally as a leader in recruiting students from under-represented backgrounds and communities. The Teaching and Learning Strategy also articulates with other institutional strategies, policies and plans, in particular, the Corporate Plan (2006/07 – 2010/11), the Widening Participation Strategy. The Teaching and Learning Strategy (2008/09-2012/13) has informed the preparation and update of other relevant University strategies, and in particular, the Widening Participation Strategy.

5.2   Groups Targeted by UU WP Strategy

The UU WP strategy focuses on the most disadvantaged sectors of society and those from the geographically most deprived areas whose participation remains below other groups and communities. It identifies and monitors representation in full-time undergraduate entrants for the following four social groups:

- Disability;
- Ethnicity;
- SEC; and
- SEC and Religion.

The UU WPSA notes that challenging statistical milestones were set in the revised Access Agreement for the three year period 2009/10 to 2011/12, for these metrics as detailed in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1

UU – Representation of key underrepresented groups of NI domiciled full-time undergraduate entrants (groups targeted by Access Agreement)

Key Under-represented Groups	Actual %		Milestones %		
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Disability	10.4	10.6	10.8	11.0	11.1

Table 5-1

UU – Representation of key underrepresented groups of NI domiciled full-time undergraduate entrants (groups targeted by Access Agreement)

Key Under-represented Groups	Actual %		Milestones %		
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Ethnicity[1]	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.4
SEC[2]	46.6	46.6	46.8	47.0	47.2
SEC and Religion[3]	15.9	16.0	16.2	16.4	16.6

Notes:

1) The Ethnicity figures indicate the percentage of student entrants from a non-white background.

2) The Socio-economic classification (SEC) figures indicate the percentage of student entrants from the 4 lower SEC groups.

3) The Religion and SEC figures indicate the proportion of the students from the 4 lower groups who are Protestants (e.g. in 07/08 the 46.6% from the lower groups is split into 15.9% Protestants, 29.5% Roman Catholics and 1.2% others/unknowns). The identification of the under-representation of this group was identified in the report of the DEL Widening Access Experts Report (2005).

Source: UU WP Strategic Assessment (2009)

The review of the Access Agreement determined that more targeted action was needed to encourage black and ethnic minorities to engage with the University. To this end, the University plans to open discussions with organisations representing the largest group, i.e. the Chinese community, to establish why the current situation exists and to identify how greater demand for HE can be stimulated. While initiating these activities with the Chinese community, the University will also seek to identify and work with other minority groupings, as feasible.

5.3 Funding for WP Including DEL Premium Funding

5.3.1 DEL Premium Funding to support WP

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £1m pa to UU in the form of premium funding (see Table 5-2). The majority of this is the WP Premium funding which accounts for the greater proportion (76%-77%) of premium funding - around 3 times as much as the WA Premium funding. In 2008/09, the total amount of premium funding offered to UU reduced slightly overall, although there was an increase in WP premium funding but a large decrease (27%) in WA Premium funding (see notes below table for basis of funding). This meant that the balance shifted with a greater proportion (83%) accounted for by WP Premium funding rather than WA Premium funding.

Table 5-2

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to UU

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	782,964	76%	804,496	77%	826,620	83%
Widening Access Premium	243,372	24%	236,216	23%	171,925	17%

Total	1,026,336	100%	1,040,712	100%	998,545	100%

Note:

-WP Premium - paid on basis of the no. of students enrolled from disadvantaged backgrounds.

-WA Premium – based on no. of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of DSA.

Source: Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to UU

5.3.2   Total Funding to support WP

UU also draws on other funding sources to support its Widening Participation Strategy. Table 5-3 provides a breakdown of all funding streams that contribute to WP in 2008/09. DEL premium funding accounts for 13% of this total funding (£7.4m in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from student fee income (£4.956m or 67% in 2008/09).

Table 5-3

UU WP – Funding Streams 2008/09

Funding stream	Amount invested in WP (£)	Proportion of total WP investment (%)
DEL WP allocation (incl. mainstream disability allocation)	£998,545	13%
DEL teaching grant	£985,436	13%
DEL Learning and teaching /TESS allocation	£134,221	2%
Other DEL funds	£260,119	4%
Charitable sources	-	-
Student fee income	£4,956,165	67%
Other private income (e.g. endowments)	£99,347	1%
Total	**£7,433,833**	**100%**

Source: UU WP Strategic Assessment (2009)

5.3.3   Expenditure to support WP

Table 5-4 provides a breakdown of UU's expenditure on WP commitments in 2008/09. The area of spend which accounts for the greatest proportion is Bursaries and Scholarships – accounting for over 60% of the total (£7.4m) in 2008/09.

Table 5-4

UU WP – Funding Commitments by WP category 2008/09

WP commitments	Total funding committed 2008/09	
	(£)	%
School/ College links	£741,517	10%
Student Support	£668,191	9%
Centralised Support	£264,546	4%
Outreach	£686,324	9%
Disability	£443,949	6%
(OFFA Eligible) Bursaries and Scholarships	£4,629,306	62%
Total	**£7,433,833**	**100%**

Source: UU WP Strategic Assessment (2009)

UU has embedded their approach to WP within its broader strategies and culture; therefore DEL WP premium funding is allocated to WP activities along with funding from other sources. Given that approximately 40% of the Ulster student population is from disadvantaged backgrounds, UU consider that it would be extremely resource intensive to both identify and support individual/groups of students. Instead, UU has taken the approach that since this group makes up such a significant proportion of the overall student population then any measures to support and retain these students can equally benefit all students. WP Premium funding is devolved to Faculties who have put in place a number of measures (particularly in relation to the first year) which have helped to support, retain and progress students. Activities include improved levels of communication with prospective students from point of application until enrolment, enhanced induction and orientation, small group teaching, attendance monitoring and increased pastoral support.

All of these activities are integral to the Teaching and Learning Strategy and contribute to an enhanced student experience. Without the additional funding from DEL such resource intensive activities would be significantly cut back.

5.4   Widening Participation Activities

Table 5-5 summarises UU WP Outreach Activities for 2008/09:

Table 5-5

UU WP – Outreach Activities by Funding Source 2008/09

Funding stream	Projects
Access Agreement Fund	Uni4u Initiative Formula Student Project Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark Cultural Development Programmes Assistive Technology Provision
External Funding and Sponsorship (DEL, Wellcome Trust, Seagate Technologies, Bank of Ireland, the Honourable The Irish Society)	Step-Up Programme Science in Society Forward Thinking Northern Ireland Advance Programme Bring IT On Seagate Summer School
University Funded	Tutoring in Schools Cross-Community Schools Liaison (summer schools)
Jointly Funded (combinations of the funding sources listed above, plus contributions from local secondary schools)	Sparking the Imagination Ulster Elks Community and School Sport Programme Science Shop Sports Outreach Programme STEM Days GetSET (Science, Engineering and Technology) programmes

Source: UU WP Strategic Assessment (2009)

Appendix 9 includes details of volume and activity undertaken in 2008/09.

5.5 Measures of Participation and Retention

In this section, we focus on those measures that are of most direct relevance to the DEL WP Premium funding.

5.5.1 Student Profile[32][33]

■ **NS-SEC 4-7:**
- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from SEC 4-7 was 49.4% (HESA PI) for 2008-09 which was significantly above its UK benchmark of 35.6%.
- From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has declined and then recovered from 47.6% to 46.5% to 49.4%.

■ **NS-SEC 5-7**:
- the proportion of enrolments from NS-SEC 5-7 is 33.2% in 2008/09.

■ **Low income households** (number of students in receipt of bursary support by income threshold):
- Information from OFFA's second annual Access Agreement Outcomes report shows that in 2007-08, 30% of UU's full-time undergraduate students had an assessed household income of less than £17,910;
- The WPSA 2009 shows that in 2008-09, 34% of students had an assessed household income of less than £18,361

■ **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA):**
- as a proxy for the number of students at UU who have a disability, we consider the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA.
- From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has increased steadily from 3.5% to 4.0% to 4.1%. However this remains below its UK benchmark of 4.8% in 2008/09.
- UU's WPSA (2009) notes that in the past 3 years the number of students using Disability Services has risen from 500 to 1100.

Table 5-6

Summary of UU data

Year			06-07	07-08	08-09	
SEC 4-7 enrolments			47.6%	46.5%	49.4%	
SEC 5-7 enrolments			29.8%	29.9%	33.2%	
Students in receipt of DSA			3.5%	4.0%	4.1%	
Source: DEL, UU WPSA (2009)						

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[32] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years
[33] Further details included in Section 3.4 and Appendices, 4, 5 and 6

5.5.2   *Student Retention*

HESA Performance Indicators (see Section 3.4 and Appendix 5) for UU show that the proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are no longer in HE one year after entry was 15.2% in 2005-06, 12.4% in 85.9% in 2006-07 and 13.2% in 2007-08. In 2007-08 UU was performing significantly worse than its UK benchmark of 9.7%.

5.6   Summary

UU's WP Strategy sets out its approach to WP; this is also embedded within a number of other UU plans and strategies. The main aspects of UU's approach to WP are based on 4 strategic aims and 2 cross-cutting support aims:

■ Strategic Aim 1: To raise aspirations and encourage a positive attitude towards educational progression and ultimately participation in HE especially amongst communities and social groups not traditionally associated with third level education.

■ Strategic Aim 2: To target and recruit students from under-represented groups who have the potential to benefit from Higher Education.

■ Strategic Aim 3: To ensure the University's Admissions Policy recognises the diversity of routes that students might follow prior to seeking entry to Higher Education and to respond flexibly.

■ Strategic Aim 4: To address actively student retention, progression and success within the undergraduate population.

■ Cross-Cutting Support Aim 1: To provide financial, embedded learning and pastoral support, that is appropriate and sustainable, especially for students from non-traditional backgrounds.

■ Cross-Cutting Support Aim 2: To work in partnership with a range of stakeholders, as appropriate, to improve access to and participation in Higher Education regionally.

UU targets a number of specific groups within its WP strategy: it focuses on the most disadvantaged sectors of society and those from the geographically most deprived areas whose participation remains below other groups and communities. It identifies and monitors representation in full-time undergraduate entrants for the following four social groups: Disability; Ethnicity; SEC; and SEC and Religion.

In 2008/09, DEL premium funding (£998k WP and WA) accounted for around 13% of the total funding (£7.4m invested in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from student fee income (£4.956m or 67 % in 2008/09).

■ **Participation**[34]

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[34] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from **SEC 4-7** was 49.4% in 2008/09; this is significantly better than the relevant UK benchmark and has been for at least 5 years;

- the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of **DSA** was 4.1% in 2008-09; this is below its UK benchmark of 4.8% and has been for at least 5 years. However the proportion is increasing.

■ **Student Retention**

- The proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are **no longer in HE** one year after entry was 13.2% in 2007-08. This is significantly worse, than its UK benchmark of 9.7%. UU has performed worse than its UK benchmark for at least 5 years.

6 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PREMIUM FUNDING - STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

6.1 Widening Participation - Objectives

In its WP Strategic Assessment (December 2009), Stranmillis University College recognises that WP, '*is a long-term commitment because the under-representation it addresses is deeply rooted in more general socio-economic disadvantage*'. Since 2006 the College has followed the framework below:

Strategic Aim 1: Structures and Processes

- To develop further the University College's ability to meet its ambitions for widening participation.

- The effective co-ordination of central and departmental processes to promote widening participation.

- The successful implementation, co-ordination and monitoring of the strategy.

Strategic Aim 2: Aspiration and Access

- The raising of aspirations regarding entry among the targeted groups.

- The development of admissions procedures to encourage widening participation.

- The further development of pre-entry support for non-standard students.

Strategic Aim 3: Retention and Employability

- The delivery of co-ordinated and effective processes to ensure a successful entry to higher education.

- A positive and effective induction to the University College and the course of study.

- The monitoring of student progress and maintenance of a supportive personal and academic environment.

- A structured pathway to employment.

A more detailed action plan is included in the WPSA (p67-70).

6.2 Groups Targeted by Stranmillis WP Strategy

The Stranmillis WPSA (December 2009) notes that at the establishment of the initial Access Agreement, HESA baseline data figures indicated that the College was below its benchmark in relation to recruitment from **social classes V to VII**. **Young Protestant males from these social classes** in general appeared to be less interested in higher education opportunities

than should be the case In addition the number of students from **local ethnic minority backgrounds** at the College was low, a situation which was, however, replicated at other NI institutions. Based on this information, the College Widening Participation Strategy (2006-2009), set in place the initial developments to reach the milestones articulated in the Access Agreement and 3 of these aimed to increase the number of:

■ **mature students;**

■ **students with disabilities;**

■ **students from lower socio-economic groups.**

In addition to these 3 groups, the college placed an obligation on setting targets to increase the number of males entering initial teacher education – in particular the BEd Primary pathway.

According to Stranmillis UC's WPSA, the Widening Access and Participation Strategy is now embedded within the University College's vision, mission and value statements and the Strategic Development Plan 2006-2009.   Under the Access Agreement (March 2006), Stranmillis UC was able to undertake specific interventions to target students from underrepresented groups through a variety of means across the student life cycle and significantly through the provision of financial support. The Access Agreement (March 2007) set out two central projects for Widening Participation within Stranmillis UC:

■ **Project 1 – Attracting more students from under-represented groups**

■ **Project 2 – Males into Teaching: Role Modelling Scheme**

6.3 Funding for WP including DEL Premium Funding

6.3.1 DEL Premium Funding to support WP

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £56-60k pa to Stranmillis UC in the form of premium funding (see Table 6-1 and notes below table for basis of funding). The majority of this is the WP Premium funding which accounts for the greater proportion (82%-83%) of premium funding.

Table 6-1

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to Stranmillis

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	n/a	n/a	46,722	82%	49,327	83%
Widening Access Premium	n/a	n/a	10,000	18%	10,000	17%
Total	**n/a**	**n/a**	**56,722**	**100%**	**59,327**	**100%**

Note:
-WP Premium - paid on basis of the no. of students enrolled from disadvantaged backgrounds.
-WA Premium – based on no. of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of DSA.
Source: Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to Stranmillis

6.3.2   *Total Funding to support WP*

Stranmillis UC also draws on other funding sources to support its Widening Participation Strategy. Table 6-2 provides a breakdown of all funding streams that contributed to WP in 2008/09. DEL premium funding accounts for 16% of total funding (£364k in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from student fee income (£305k or 84% in 2008/09).

Table 6-2

Stranmillis WP Funding Streams – 2008/09

Funding stream	Amount invested in WP (£)	Proportion of total WP investment (%)
DEL WP allocation (incl. mainstream disability allocation)	£59,327	16%
Student fee income	£304,782	84%
Total	**£364,109**	**100%**

Source: Stranmillis University College Strategic Assessment for WP (December 2009)

6.3.3   *Expenditure to support WP*

Table 6-3 provides a breakdown of Stranmillis UC's expenditure on WP commitments in 2008/09. The area of spend which accounts for the greatest proportion is Bursaries and Scholarships – accounting for around 90% of the total (£190.8k) in 2008/09.

Table 6-3

Stranmillis WP Funding – by Area / Commitment 2008/09

WP commitments	Total funding committed 2008/09	
	(£)	%
20 Presentations and Workshops GCSE Easter Revision School Access Evening NI Careers Service Briefing for Part-Time HLS Course – Mature Entry NIHE Education Partnership Forum Meetings	£7,561	4%
Courses and Conferences	n/a	n/a
Student Support Bursaries	£171,413	90%
Halls Bursaries	£7,905	4%
Communication Skills Centre Training Costs Peer Tutor Costs	£3,955	2%
Total	**£190,834**	**100%**

Source: Stranmillis University College WP Strategic Assessment (December 2009)

6.4   Widening Participation - Activities

Stranmillis WP activity operates across the student life cycle (illustrated in Appendix 10) – with stages defined as: Aspiration raising at a younger age; Pre-Entry; Entry, Induction and term/semester

1; Components of the programme (i.e. supports such as counselling, study skills support, etc. in place during period of study); Retention, progression, completion; and Moving On (see Appendix 10). In the period 2006/08 Stranmillis WP activity may be summarised as follows:

■ **Establishing Formal School Partnerships:** Stranmillis targeted those schools with little or no history of sending students to the college. During 2006/08 the vast majority of partnership activities included pupils from eight schools: *Ashfield Boys' High School; Belfast Boys' Model School; Carrickfergus College; Glastry College; Lisnagarvey High School; Monkstown Community School; Orangefield High School; The High School Ballynahinch.*

■ **The Student Ambassador Scheme:**

- **Campus Tours:** At Widening Access Events Student Ambassadors conduct campus tours giving their own insight into what Stranmillis University College has to offer.

- **Subject Talks:** Student Ambassadors give talks specifically about their course and what it involves. As well as what they enjoy most, placement opportunities and career plans.

- **Student Life Talks:** Student Ambassadors give talks to visitors about what it is really like to be a student at Stranmillis University College.

- **Schools Liaison:** Student Ambassadors visit schools and colleges in the local area to talk to students about higher education, sharing their own experiences and giving advice on student life

■ **Stranmillis Campus Visits and Open Days/ Evenings**

■ **The Stranmillis Communications Skills Centre**

■ **Summer School Provision:** It was essential that the pupils met the following criteria; i.e.::

(a) have the ability to proceed to Higher Education (HE); and

b) meet one or more of:

  (i) first person in their immediate family to go into HE

  (ii) low family income

  (iii) in receipt of benefits/EMA/Free School Meals/Uniform Allowance

  (iv) adverse family circumstances

  (v) have a disability

  (vi) member of an ethnic group

In June 2007, it became apparent that there would not be a sufficient number of pupils interested in participating to make it viable to run. No summer school took place during the summer of 2008 due to the change in Access Coordinator at this time. Rather, Stranmillis worked in conjunction with QUB to contribute to part of their Summer School.

- Mentoring by Stranmillis Students

- The Stranmillis GCSE Easter Revision School

- Information Presentations/ Workshops

- Males into Teaching

- Northern Ireland Housing Executive Education Forum

- Bursary Support for Students

Table 6-4 summarises Stranmillis' WP activity for the period 2008/09.

Table 6-4

Stranmillis' WP Activity – Volume Measure

Activity	Number/ reach of activities
School Presentations/Workshops WA Coordinator and other Staff	*20 events attended*
Peer Mentors Appointed	*39 Registered Peer Mentors*
GCSE Easter Revision School	*One Easter School 2 days, 40 pupil attendees, 2 Student Ambassador Tutors, 4 Peer Tutors*
Access Evening	*25 Attendees, 6 Student Ambassadors*
NI Careers Service Briefing for Part-Time HLS Course – Mature Entry	*30 Attendees*
Student Support Fund Bursaries	*183*
Halls Bursaries	*3*
Communication Skills Centre	*100 Student appointments undertaken and facilitated by Student Peer Tutors*
Open Day	*37 Mentors in attendance Male Survey Undertaken 55 returns*

Source: Stranmillis University College Strategic Assessment for WP (December 2009)

6.5   Measures of Participation and Retention

6.5.1   Student Profile[35and 36]

- **NS-SEC 4-7:**

  - the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from SEC 4-7 was 27.9% (HESA PI) for 2008-09, which was below, but not significantly, its UK benchmark[37] of 37.4%. (Although the difference is 10 percentage points, this is not significant according to the definition used by HESA: *Significantly better / worse than*

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[35] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

[36] Further details included in Section 3.4 and Appendices, 4, 5 and 6

[37] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation.)

- From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has declined from 33.5% to 34.9% to 27.9%.

■ **NS-SEC 5-7**:

- the proportion of enrolments from NS-SEC 5-7 is 20.7% in 2008/09.

■ **Low income households** (number of students in receipt of bursary support by income threshold):

- Information from OFFA's second annual Access Agreement Outcomes report shows that in 2007-08, 20% of Stranmillis UC's full-time undergraduate students had an assessed household income of less than £17,910;

■ **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA):**

- as a proxy for the number of students at Stranmillis who have a disability, we consider the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA.

- From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has ranged from 2.3% to 1.9% to 2.5%. However this remains below its UK benchmark of 4.0% in 2008/09.

- With regard to with students with a disability it can be seen below that there has been both an increase in students with a declared disability and number of students in receipt of a DSA.

Table 6-5

Stranmillis – Students who declared a disability / Students in receipt of DSA

Year	No. of students who have declared a Disability	No. of students in Receipt of DSA
2006/07	64	31
2007/08	67	28
2008/09	68	41
Source: HESA Performance Indicators – Stranmillis UC WP Strategic Assessment (Dec 2009)		

Table 6-6

Summary of Stranmillis WP data

Year			06-7	07-08	08-09	
SEC 4-7 enrolments			33.5%	34.9%	27.9%	
Students in receipt of DSA			2.3%	1.9%	2.5%	
Source: Stranmillis, HESA						

In addition to these targets, Stranmillis also has a particular interest in mature students and male students. Progress in these areas is noted below:

■ **Mature Student Targets**

Considerable progress has been made in relation to the recruitment of mature students (defined as students 21 years of age and over). Mature students now represent 14% of

student intake to the BEd which is an increase of 6% from 2008. The mature students qualified for entry on the basis of 'A' levels and Access (Foundation) courses. Also of interest is the percentage growth of mature male entrants, in particular for the primary BEd.

■ **Male Student Entrants**

Whilst there has been a dip in male applications, very encouraging figures have been returned for entrants.

Table 6-7

Stranmillis – Entrants by Genre 2009

Genre	2009			2008			% Change
	Pr.	Pp.	Total	Pr.	Pp.	Total	
Men	17	21	38	10	18	28	+10 (+36%)
Women	73	29	102	68	33	101	+1 (+1%)
Total	90	50	140	78	51	129	+11 (+9%)
Source: Stranmillis University College WP Strategic Assessment (Dec 2009)							

6.5.2 Student Retention

HESA Performance Indicators (see Section 3.4 and Appendix 5) for Stranmillis show that the proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are no longer in HE one year after entry was 2.2% in 2005-06, 4.2% in 2006-07 and 4.2% in 2007-08. In 2007-08, Stranmillis was performing better than its UK benchmark of 6.3%, but not significantly.

6.6 Summary

Stranmillis UC's approach to WP articulated in its WP Strategic Assessment is built on 3 strategic aims:

■ Strategic Aim 1: Structures and Processes

■ Strategic Aim 2: Aspiration and Access

■ Strategic Aim 3: Retention and Employability

Stranmillis UC targets a number of specific groups within its WP strategy: including benchmarking performance in relation to recruitment from **social classes V to VII**. **Young Protestant males from these social classes,** the number of students from **local ethnic minority backgrounds.** The College's Widening Participation Strategy (2006-2009), set in place the initial developments to reach the milestones articulated in the Access Agreement and 3 of these aimed to increase the number of:

■ **mature students;**

■ **students with disabilities;**

■ **students from lower socio-economic groups.**

In addition to the 3 groups above, the college placed an obligation on setting targets to increase the number of males entering initial teacher education. The Access Agreement (March 2007) set out two central projects for WP within Stranmillis UC:

■ **Project 1 – Attracting more students from under-represented groups**

■ **Project 2 – Males into Teaching: Role Modelling Scheme**

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £56-60k pa to Stranmillis UC in the form of premium funding. Stranmillis UC also draws on other funding sources to support its WP Strategy; the DEL premium funding accounts for 16% of the total funding (£364k in 2008/09). The greatest proportion of funding for WP is derived from student fee income (£305k or 84% in 2008/09).

■ **Participation[38]**

  - the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from **SEC 4-7** was 27.9% in 2008/09; this is below the relevant UK benchmark (but not significantly) and has been lower than its benchmark for at least 5 years;

  - the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of **DSA** was 2.5% in 2008-09; this is below its UK benchmark of 4.0% and has been for at least 5 years. However the proportion is increasing.

■ **Student Retention**

  - The proportion of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are **no longer in HE** one year after entry was 4.2% in 2007-08. This is better, but not significantly so compared to its UK benchmark of 6.3% and has been better than the UK benchmark for at least 5 years.

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[38] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

7 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PREMIUM FUNDING - ST MARYS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

7.1 Widening Participation - Objectives

In its Widening Participation Strategy 2006-2011, St. Mary's University College describes the overall purpose of the Widening Access and Participation strategy as being to fulfil the conditions of its Access Agreement. In its broadest sense, the WP strategy aims to make an impact on disadvantage by **increasing participation of the identified target groups**, **supporting them through their HE experience** and **optimising their personal, social and professional development**.

In its Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (2008-09), St. Mary's University College describes its strategic objectives for Widening Participation for 2009-12:

- To raise aspiration and increase participation;
- To facilitate access through fair admissions;
- To address retention and support of students;
- To enhance the student experience; and
- To monitor widening participation.

The WP Strategy 2006-2011 sets out the strategic direction describing the outputs and outcomes that widening participation activities will deliver – these will:

i. raise aspiration and awareness of the personal, social, and intellectual benefits of HE;
ii. increase participation in HE from the target groups;
iii. ensure that actions with mature students and those close to making entry decisions will be institutionally focused and linked to the work of the Admissions Office and the College's Marketing and Recruitment Policy;
iv. maintain and enhance synergy with schools/colleges, Widening Participation in FE and the Careers Service(NI);
v. provide details on financial support and additional funding for widening participation target students;
vi. support equitable provision for target students.

7.2 Groups targeted by St Mary's WP Strategy

St. Mary's University College's Widening Participation Strategy is focused on ensuring a high level of participation on College courses from two target groups:

(i) students from the lowest socio- economic groups, NS SEC classes 4-7;
(ii) students with disabilities.

This approach aims to contribute to widening participation at a regional level. Given the College's location, outreach activities are particularly extended to include another category:

(iii)   to the economically and socially disadvantaged areas of North and West Belfast.

7.3   Funding for WP including DEL Premium Funding

7.3.1   DEL Premium Funding to support WP

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £72k pa to St Mary's UC in the form of premium funding (see Table 7-1 and notes below table for basis of funding). The majority of this is the WP Premium funding which accounts for the greater proportion (86%-87%) of premium funding. The funding is not hypothecated.

Table 7-1

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to St Mary's

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	£62,000	86%	62,442	86%	65,923	87%
Widening Access Premium	£10,000	14%	10,000	14%	10,000	13%
Total	**£72,000**	**100%**	**72,442**	**100%**	**75,923**	**100%**

Note:

-WP Premium - paid on basis of the no. of students enrolled from disadvantaged backgrounds.

-WA Premium – based on no. of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of DS A.

Source: 2006/07 from St Mary's UC Director of Finance and Administration, 2007/08 & 2008/09 from Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to St Mary's

7.3.2   Total Funding to support WP

Table 7-2 provides a breakdown of all funding streams that contribute to WP in 2008/09. This is based on St Mary's WP Strategic Assessment 2008/09 which provides details of total investment in WP by source including DEL funding (around 5% of the total). WP is central to the mission of St. Mary's UC; consequently the College argues that it is especially difficult to disaggregate expenditure on academic provision, services and support for widening participation. St. Mary's estimates that it spends in the region of 20% of total Learning and Teaching expenditure on widening participation; that represents over 60% of the total WP spend. According to St Mary's UC, if DEL funding was not available there would be "*a major impact on widening access and participation at the College*".

Table 7-2

St. Mary's WP Funding Streams – by Source – 2009/09

Funding stream	Amount invested in WP (£)	Proportion of total WP investment (%)
DEL WP allocation (incl. mainstream disability allocation)	76,000	5%
DEL teaching grant **(20% Estimate)**	1,040,000	62%
DEL Learning and teaching /TESS allocation	-	-
Other DEL funds	-	-
Charitable sources	-	-

Student fee income (**44% of additional fee income**)	561,000	33%
Other private income (e.g. endowments)	-	-
Total	**£1,677,000**	**100%**

Source: St. Mary's University College – WP Strategic Assessment 2008/09 (January 2010)

7.3.3   Expenditure to support WP

Table 7-3 provides a breakdown of St Mary's expenditure on WP commitments in 2008/09. The area of spend which accounts for the greatest proportion is Learning and Teaching – accounting for 66% of the total (£1.67m) in 2008/09.

Table 7-3

St Mary's WP – Funding Commitments by WP category 2008/09

WP commitments	Total funding committed 2008/09	
	(£)	**%**
School Links	66,000	4%
Learning and Teaching	1,103,000	66%
Student Support	76,000	5%
Admissions	27,000	2%
Bursaries	405,000	24%
Total	**£1,677,000**	**100%**

Note:
-WP Premium - paid on basis of the number of students enrolled from disadvantaged backgrounds.
-WA Premium – based on number of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance.
Source: St. Mary's University College – WP Strategic Assessment 2008/09 (January 2010)

7.4   Widening Participation – Activities

To deliver on the objectives specified in Section 7.1, St. Mary's University College will undertake actions in the following areas (as specified in the WPSA).

7.4.1   Raise aspiration and increase participation

1.1 Extend education outreach programme into each of the learning groups as outlined in the chart below.

Table 7-4

WP – Raise Aspiration & Increase Participation – Extend education outreach into learning groups

Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Post 16	Mature Students
Introduction to HE	Raising Aspiration Workshop	Careers Talks	Expanding Boundaries	Returning to Study workshops
Student Ambassador Presentations	College based subject activity	Student Ambassador Presentations	Guest Speakers on the College Experience	Campus Visits

Table 7-4

WP – Raise Aspiration & Increase Participation – Extend education outreach into learning groups

Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Post 16	Mature Students
Coordination of student-pupil mentoring programmes	Student Ambassador Presentations	Revision/Study Skills	Campus Visits	Student Ambassador Presentations
	Coordination of student-pupil mentoring programmes	Benefits of engaging with HE	Taster Days	Taster Days
		Student Ambassador Presentations	Student Ambassador Presentations	Subject Specific Sessions
		Interview Skills	Subject Specific Sessions	Transition to HE
		Coordination of student-pupil mentoring programmes	Coordination of student-pupil mentoring programmes	Coordination of student-pupil mentoring programmes Interview Skills/ Personal Confidence
Note: Implementation of this programme will involve the development of three new contacts each year. Source: St. Mary's University College – Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (2008/09).				

1.2 Map and improve targeting of students from low participation neighbourhoods.

1.3 Promote the Taster Days in the identified schools and communities.

1.4 Further promote the support and accessibility of the College for students with disabilities.

1.5 Increase involvement with the local area learning partnerships.

The WP Strategy 2006-11 also notes the following with regard to **Raising Aspirations and Increasing Participation.** *"St. Mary's University College will:*

(i)   *work with appropriate partners to contribute to and support activities which seek to raise standards of achievement and aspiration in the target schools/colleges;*
(ii)   *provide opportunities to inspire our target groups in order to raise aspirations towards education in general and HE in particular;*
(iii)   *develop and produce specific information, advice and guidance that appropriately caters for the needs of the identified target groups;*
(iv)   *provide information and awareness raising seminars for those who are key influences on the target population e.g. parents/carers, school principals, careers teachers, community facilitators, Careers Service(NI);*
(v)   *engage in collaborative working partnerships with schools, FE Colleges, HE institutions, business and commercial sectors;*
(vi)   *provide specific activity workshops for the target groups;*
(vii)   *participate in local, regional and national events that encourage the raising of aspiration and involvement with HE;*
(viii)   *encourage staff and students within the College community to contribute to Widening Participation activities;*
(ix)   *ensure that the College's admission system is fair and provides equal opportunities for all applicants regardless of social class and background."*

7.4.2 To facilitate access through fair admissions

1.1 Maintain current standards of fairness and transparency through on-going staff training on the aims, policies and procedures of admissions with particular reference to widening participation.

1.2 Monitor each academic year the composition of the student body to assess the inclusion of students from low participation neighbourhoods, identified post code areas and those with disabilities.

1.3 Continue to review and update clear and accurate information regarding the application and admissions procedures.

1.4 Organise distribution of a College produced brochure that highlights important issues for potential students to consider prior to entering higher education.

7.4.3 To address retention and support of students;

1.1 Promote campus orientation visits for identified target groups prior to the start of the academic year.

1.2 Organise distribution of the Introduction - Welcome Card that provides College information and contact details of the Senior Tutor Student Affairs and the Widening Participation Coordinator to all new students.

1.3 Continue to improve the induction programme and the return to college programme to ensure relevance for targeted groups.

1.4 Consolidate the monitoring and evaluation of students in terms of academic progress and attendance.

1.5 Continue to develop the use of the College website, the Student Handbooks and College display boards as ways of highlighting the support personnel and mechanisms available to students.

1.6 Continue to implement and review Personal Development Planning as a strategy for supporting all students.

1.7 Expand the Student Ambassador programme and Buddying scheme.

The WP Strategy 2006-11 also notes the following with regard to Facilitating Retention and Progress of Target Students: *"St. Mary's University College will:*

(i) *deliver appropriate induction programmes for transition and continuing students;*
(ii) *provide staff development and training that relates to enhancing the support and guidance offered to the target students;*
(iii) *develop and support specific department/subject based Widening Participation initiatives that further support the target students;*
(iv) *maintain the support services offered by the Student Affairs and the Widening Participation offices from pre-entry activity through to graduation;*

(v)   continue to identify and develop appropriate tracking, monitoring and evaluation systems to measure target students' progress, achievements, attendance and exit destinations;

(vi)   target additional student funding support arrangements through the College bursary scheme;

(vii)   provide assistance and information to the target students in terms of available funding in HE;

(viii) provide clear and accessible information to prospective and existing students about the fees they are liable to pay and the financial support they can receive;

(ix)   provide teaching and learning opportunities and experiences that will prepare our graduates for employment in a global environment."

7.4.4   To enhance the student experience

1.1 Continue to consolidate and expand the international links with academic institutions throughout Europe and the USA and promote the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students and Business Education Initiative to all students.

1.2 Expand working partnerships with schools, business, commerce and industry.

1.3 Ensure development of Estates management to enhance the College ambience for all students.

7.4.5   Summary of WP Activities 2008/09

St. Mary's UC engages in a range of WP activities; Table 7-5 summarises St. Mary's WP outreach and partnership activity for the period 2008/09. The College sees that its WP strategy needs strategic partners on board to make it successful and therefore works with others on a range of activities for example:

■ Delivery of raising aspiration and HE opportunities presentations and workshops with a significant number of schools/colleges, Careers Service(NI), UCAS and partner HE institutions;

■ Participation with raising aspiration events organised by the West Belfast Partnership, Down District Business Partnership, Omagh Learning Community, North Belfast Learning Partnership and Magherafelt Area Learning Partnership; and

■ Contribution to community regeneration initiatives.

Table 7-5

St. Mary's WP Activity 2008/09– Volume Measure

Activity	Number/ reach of activities
Outreach Activity	
Open Day Events QUB, Methodist College Options Careers Exhibition	3 external Open Day – 1,500 learners
In-house Open Days	2 Open Days – 695 learners
Taster Days Taster Days: 50 prospective students from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and England attended over a four day period	4 days – 50 learners
Careers Fairs and Seminars	35 events – several thousand learners

School Outreach Links facilitated through Widening Access Office	69 post-primary schools and colleges – 1,700 learners
Links with schools and colleges in the post-coded areas.	17/24 schools were contacted, 74% had a direct contact with the WP activities of the College. Target for 2009/10 is to maintain these contacts but also to engage with schools that have had limited engagement.
Liberal Arts Interactive Seminar opportunity for the Liberal Arts students to meet the academic tutors and fellow students and to participate in seminars associated with their degree programme.	1 day event – 110 learners
Facilitation of Easter exam revision for GCSE pupils	1 day event – 300 learners
Subject specific A level preparation	1 day event – 300 learners
Ambassador Programme:	Training and participation of 54 students from BEd and BA programmes.
Participation in local community activities e.g. West Belfast Festival, West Belfast Partnership Board activities to promote higher education.	
Partnerships	
Area Learning Partnerships	5 partnership events – several hundred learners
Specialist Information Seminars for Careers Teachers and Advisers	4 held throughout Northern Ireland – 85 delegates
Outreach programmes to schools and community groups.	
Participation in the Disability Forum Meetings at QUB.	
Senior Management involvement with the Widening Participation Regional Strategic Group	
Meeting with the Frank Buttle Trust	

Source: Adapted from St. Mary's UC – WP Strategic Assessment 2008/09 (January 2010)

7.5 Measures of Participation and Retention

7.5.1 Student Profile[39and 40]

■ **NS-SEC 4-7:**

- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from SEC 4-7 was 46.8% (HESA PI) for 2008-09, which is above, but not significantly, its benchmark[41] of 36.1%. (Although the difference is 10 percentage points, this is not significant according to the definition used by HESA: *Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation.)*From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has declined from 52.4% to 46.9% to 46.8%.

- The St. Mary's targets are to have an average participation rate for young, full-time first degree entrants from NS SEC classes 4-7 of 3% above the NI average over the duration of the agreement and to have a rate of at least 49% by 2010-2011.

■ **NS-SEC 5-7:**

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[39] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years
[40] Further details included in Section 3.4 and Appendices, 4, 5, and 6
[41] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

- the proportion of enrolments from NS-SEC 5-7 was 29.7% in 2008/09.

- The St. Mary's targets, as set out in its Access Agreement are to increase its participation rate for young, first-time degree entrants from NS SEC classes 5-7 to 29% by 2008-2009 and 30% by 2010-2011.

■ **Low income households** (number of students in receipt of bursary support by income threshold):

- Information from OFFA's second annual Access Agreement Outcomes report shows that in 2007-08, 37% of St Mary's UC's full-time undergraduate students had an assessed household income of less than £17,910;

■ **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA):**

- as a proxy for the number of students at St Mary's who have a disability, we consider the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of DSA. From 2006-07, 2007-08 to 2008-09 this has ranged from 2.0% to 2.6% to 2.5%. However this remains below its UK benchmark of 4.1% in 2008/09.

- The St. Mary's targets are to increase its participation rate of students with disability as measured by the percentage of those in receipt of DSA to 0.7% by 2008-2009 and to 1% by 2010-2011.

- During the academic year 2008-2009, 29 students were on the College disability register. Of these, 24 received DSA and one student was awaiting assessment.

- It is worth noting that the majority of students enrolled at St. Mary's UC undertake Initial Teacher Education and the enrolment on these courses is subject to DE guidance regarding medical fitness to teach.

Table 7-6

Summary of St Mary's WP data

Year			06-07	07-08	08-09	
SEC 4-7 enrolments			52.4%	46.9%	46.8%	
Students in receipt of DSA			2.0%	2.6%	2.5%	
Source: St Mary's, HESA						

■ **Participation - students from North and West Belfast**

In its Access Agreement St. Mary's proposed to monitor participation rates of students from North and West Belfast. It decided to set targets for increasing the percentage of students recruited from these areas based on students' home postcodes, particularly the participation rate of students with postcodes BT11 – BT15 and BT17. The St Mary's figure averaged over the three years 2001-02 to 2003-04 was of 13%.

Targets: The St. Mary's targets are to increase its participation rate of students with home postcodes BT11-BT15 and BT17 to 15% by 2008-2009 and to 17% by 2010-2011.

Progressing towards achieving Targets: Admissions data show that the St Mary's participation rate for full-time, first degree entrants with home postcodes BT11-BT15 and BT17 for the period 2008-2009 was 20%.

■ **Participation – pupils from the Protestant community**

The WP office engages with all second-level schools and FE colleges in NI. The WP office engages in the following activities so that it can engage, support and encourage pupils from the Protestant community to raise aspiration and consider applying to HE and to St. Mary's College.

- All controlled schools are on the WP data base and mail shots regarding College news are circulated to the schools and careers teachers.
- Careers visits and seminars.
- Invitations to attend the College Open Days and Taster Experience.
- Participation in interview skills sessions.
- Attendance at North Belfast Business Education Partnership, North Down Area Learning Partnership, Carrickfergus Business Education Partnership, Portrush Learning Partnership which provides excellent opportunities to engage with pupils, parents and staff from the controlled school sector.
- Pupils from the Protestant community have attended the College Open Days and Taster experience.

As a result of these activities, the College receives applications and has enrolled students from the Protestant community.

7.5.2 Student Retention

HESA Performance Indicators (see Section 3.4 and Appendix 5) for St Mary's show that the number of full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) who are no longer in HE one year after entry was 5.2% in 2005-06, 7.0% in 2006-07 and 7.7% in 2007-08. In 2007-08 St. Mary's was performing worse than its UK benchmark of 6.9%, but not significantly.

7.6 Summary

St Mary's approach to WP is articulated in its WP Strategy; it is also embedded within the organisation's ethos. It is founded on the following strategic objectives:

■ To raise aspiration and increase participation;
■ To facilitate access through fair admissions;
■ To address retention and support of students;
■ To enhance the student experience; and
■ To monitor widening participation.

St. Mary's UC WP Strategy is focused on ensuring a high level of participation on College courses from two target groups:

(iv)   students from the lowest socio- economic groups, NS SEC classes 4-7;

(v)   students with disabilities.

This approach aims to contribute to widening participation at a regional level. Given the College's location, outreach activities are particularly extended to include another category:

(vi)   to the economically and socially disadvantaged areas of North and West Belfast.

Over the three academic years 2006/07 to 2008/09, DEL has provided around £72k pa to St Mary's UC in the form of premium funding. This is around 5% of the total investment in WP in St Mary's UC.

■ **Participation[42]**

- the proportion of enrolments (young, full-time first degree entrants) from **SEC 4-7** was 46.8% in 2008/09; this is better than the relevant UK benchmark (but not significantly) and has been for at least 5 years;

- the proportion of full-time first degree students in receipt of **DSA** was 2.5% in 2008-09; this is below its UK benchmark of 4.1% and has been for at least 5 years. However the proportion is increasing.

■ **Student Retention**

- The proportion of full-time first degree entr**ant**s (young and mature) who are **no longer in HE** one year after entry was 7.7% in 2007-08. This is worse, but not significantly so compared to its UK benchmark of 6.9%. In 3 of the last 5 years, St Mary's was better than its UK benchmark.

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[42] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

8 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PROJECT FUNDING – DISCOVERING QUEEN'S

8.1 Discovering Queen's – Rationale / Evidence of Need

Discovering Queens (DQ) was introduced in the 1999-2000 academic year. DQ activities are a direct response to under-representation of specific groups in HE and are intended to encourage potential students to enrol in HE. The DQ initiative encompasses a range of activities; a number of these focus on outreach work and aspiration raising; these are aligned to Commitment One in QUB's Widening Participation Policy (see Section 4.1.1 and Section 4.4.2). DQ activities also align with Commitment Two (See Section 4.1.1 and Section 4.4.3).

8.2 Discovering Queen's – Aims and Targeting Framework

The **aims** of the "Discovering Queens" programme are:

■ to stimulate demand for HE from underrepresented groups;

■ to raise aspirations and improve attainment and progression rates and effectively tackle the marginalisation and exclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In January 2009, the QUB Widening Participation Policy Implementation Group (WPPIG) approved a refined DQ Targeting Framework 2009/10. This was developed in the absence of any NI / regional priorities and reflects the best practice of relevant WP collectives such as 'Aimhigher', 'Action on Access', the Russell Group Advisory Group for WP, 'Access Made Accessible'. It also adheres to HEFCE 2007/12 Good Practice in Targeting Disadvantaged Learners. The **objectives** set out in the framework are as follows:

1. To raise awareness and aspiration of targeted underrepresented groups by promoting engagement with students who have the potential to benefit from higher education, but who experience real or perceived barriers to progression.

2. To develop the personal effectiveness and autonomous decision making skills associated with progressing to and moving through HE

3. To contribute to knowledge transfer and student attainment.

4. To facilitate entry and lay the foundations to ensure retention and progression.

5. To tackle the problem of educational under-achievement and, by means of appropriate on-course support, to improve retention and/or enable progression to employment / post graduate study.

6. To undertake on-going sample evaluation of the participant experience and the associated progression and retention in higher education and to provide a reliable evidence base for identification and targeting of WP cohorts and for monitoring the effectiveness of interventions via appropriate KPIs.

7. To roll out and embed the best practice developed within Discovering Queen's.

The **key targeting principles** of DQ highlighted in the framework are:

1. Student Lifecycle Model - moving from pre-entry outreach and raising aspirations through attainment, transition and on-course support and progression to postgraduate study.

2. Interventions are possible at each transition stage which, within the current model of Education, FE and HE in NI, are:

- Primary into Secondary;

- Year 10 GCSE subject selection;

- Years 12 GCSE studies;

- A level subject selection;

- Year 13 IAG and Year 14 UCAS applications;

- preparation for transition to University;

- First semester in University;

- Longer term on-course support for students at risk; and

- Post-qualification including progression to postgraduate study.

Activities represent a comprehensive 'cradle to grave' approach with each activity/ programme aiming to address one or more of the 12 Steps of the Discovering Queen's Pyramid (see Figure 8-1).

Figure 8-1: QUB – Widening Participation – 12 Steps of the Discovering Queen's Pyramid

Source: Provided by QUB
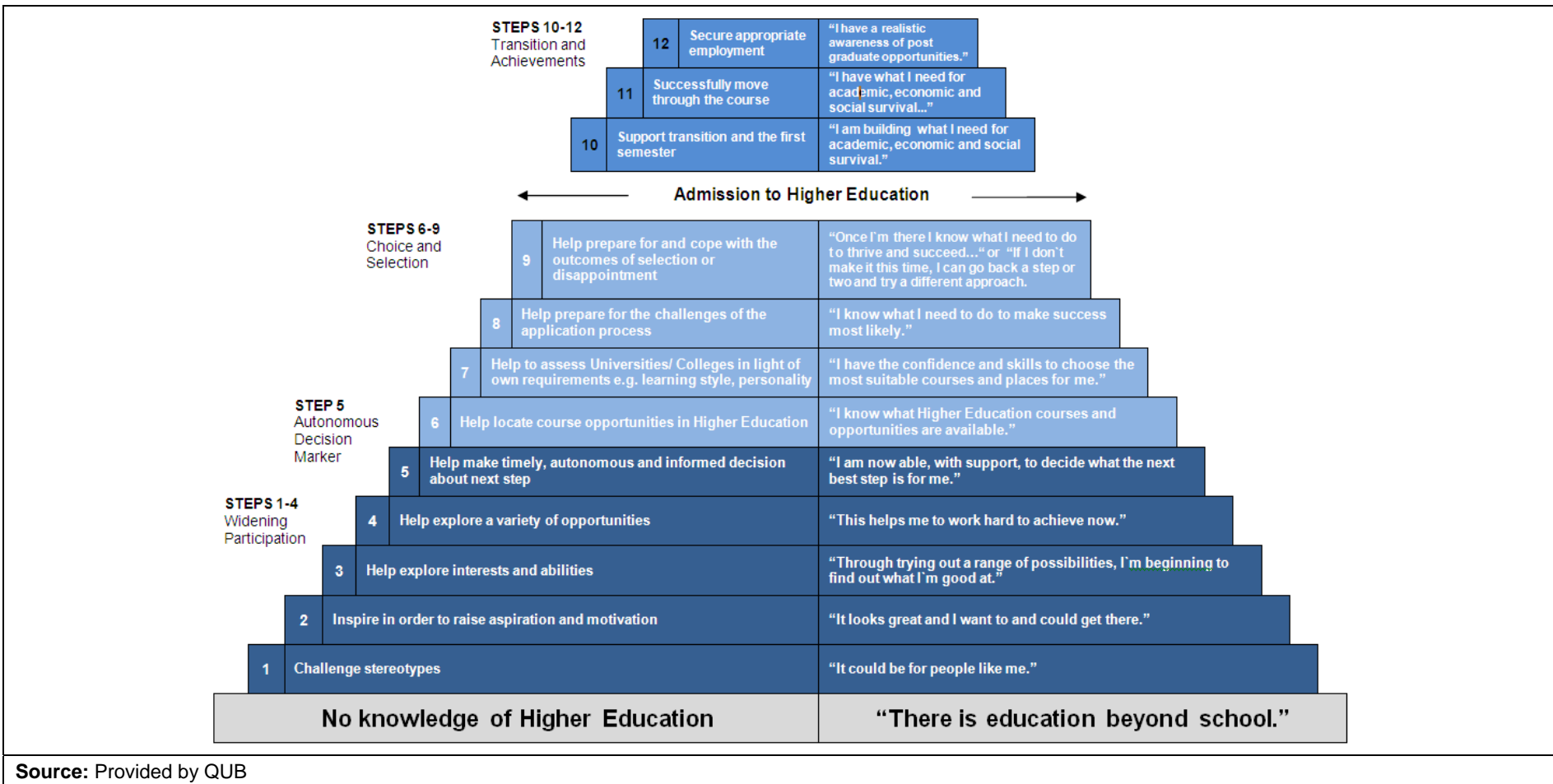
8.3   Discovering Queen's - Target Groups

8.3.1   QUB Approach to Targeting – WP Cohorts

QUB's approach to targeting is discussed in Section 4.2 – this covers the wider prioritising of target groups and targeting of embedded activities. The DQ programme specifically targets pupils in primary schools in areas of low participation, non-selective secondary schools and FE Colleges who have experienced disadvantage of opportunity, in particular students who have no family experience of higher education, limited family income, members of an ethnic minority group, or whose progress has been limited by adverse personal circumstances.

8.3.2   QUB Target Groups and Levels of Engagement

QUB's WP Policy 2008-11 (Appendix 4) provides details of the Targeting Framework. The refined DQ Targeting Framework was approved by the WPPIG in January 2009 (as discussed in Section 8.2).

Target groups include:

   i.   *Students from lower socio-economic groups.*

   ii.   *Students from low participation backgrounds.*

   iii.   *Underperforming cohorts at pre-entry and on-course levels*

   iv.   *First in Family*

   v.   *Students with disabilities.*

   vi.   *Students with a range of 'A' level equivalent qualifications.*

   vii.   *Part-time students*

   viii.   *Care leavers*

   ix.   *Adult returners to study*

   x.   *Work-based learners.*

The Targeting Framework presents four different **levels of engagement based on different targets:**

■ *Level 1 Engagement — Area Level Targeting i.e. Geographical - with focus on Primary, Lower Secondary and FE Target Groups i and ii.*

■ *Level 2 Engagement — Learner Level Targeting - with targeted cohorts of 'most able, least likely' in upper Secondary and Further Education. Target Group iii.*

■ *Level 3 Engagement — Tailored programmes for First in Family, Students with Disabilities, Care leavers and FE participants including, but not exclusively, part-time students, students undertaking A Level equivalent qualifications and adult returners. Target Groups iv, v, vi, vii, viii and ix above.*

■ *Level 4 Engagement — Response to Wider University Strategic Requirements i.e. STEM recruitment; flexible provision (Target Group x); attainment, retention and progression. Students at risk etc.*

8.3.3 Access Selection Criteria

Where demand for programmes is high and there is oversubscription, access criteria have been established to ensure that those who have indicators of disadvantage in their profile are given priority. Where places are oversubscribed, priority will be given to those who meet one or more of the Access criteria. For example, Access Selection Criteria applied for the 2009 Year 13 Summer School and Head Start are presented below.

■ *Are you the first person in your immediate family (i.e. parent / guardian / brother / sister) to go into Higher Education?*

■ *Is your family residual income below £23,360?*

■ *Are you in receipt of:*   *Benefits*

                                    Free School Meals

                                    Uniform Allowance

                                    Education Maintenance Allowance

■ *Are you the main carer for a family member or other dependant?*

■ *Have you been in/left residential care within the last 12 months?*

■ *Do you consider yourself to have a disability?*

8.3.4 QUB – Discovering Queens Target Schools

In 1998-9, five pilot secondary schools were selected - based on recommendations from Professor Bob Cormack's research in participation in HE in NI. In 2000, this was extended to 26 schools based on recommendations from the 5 Belfast Partnership Boards. In 2004/05, the list was expanded to include secondary schools with A Level Science provision, to support recruitment to Highway to Science and Engineering. In 2006, all NI secondary schools were invited to join.

Primary School engagement developed through the delivery of the National Primary Network (NPN) Professor Fluffy Programme. Initial targeting criteria focussed on their feeder status to established DQ schools.

Currently 41 Schools and Colleges are registered as DQ Schools plus a further 19 Primary Schools. See Appendix 11 for details of all schools; these include:

■ Post Primary (x 35, 19 are in Belfast) [Note: 10 of the Belfast schools and 2 of the Londonderry schools are also involved in UU's Step-Up project].

■ Colleges (x6);

■ Primary (x9, 6 are in Belfast); and

■ National Primary Network (NPN) Primary Schools (x10, all in Belfast).

8.4 Discovering Queens - Funding

DEL provides funding for the DQ project through annual letters of offer of around £230k per annum. The project is supported by the DEL Widening Participation strategy funding. A breakdown of this funding is presented in Table 8-1.

Table 8-1

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to QUB for Discovering Queens

Activity / Objective	2006/07 (A)		2007/08 (B)		2008/09 (C)	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual (D)	Budget	Actual (E)
1. To raise awareness and aspiration by promoting engagement with potential students from under-represented groups via enhanced outreach programme	36,800	44357.89	31,650	78,285	70,500	43,549
2. To facilitate entry and lay the foundations to ensure retention and progression. *(numbered as Objective 4 in 08/09)*	10,260	12,142.99	32,500	14,203	18,800	26,295
3. To tackle the problem of educational under-achievement and by means of appropriate support, improve progression and retention *(numbered as Objective 5 in 08/09)*	7,000	638.24	19,550	335	1,750	4,122
4. To undertake on-going evaluation of the participant experience *(numbered as Objective 6 in 08/09)*	1,000	2,506.41	3,000	155	4,700	2,654
5. To develop the personal effectiveness and autonomous decision making skills associated with progressing to HE *(numbered as Objective 2 in 08/09)*	10,000	??	n/a	n/a	2,350	15,730
6. To contribute to KT and student attainment *(numbered as Objective 3 in 08/09)*	??	??	n/a	n/a	9,400	8,863
Activity Sub-Total	67,560	??	86,700	92,978	107,500	101,214
Staffing Sub-Total	139,000	144,414.47	145,159	133,232	148,476	132,231
DQ Total	216,560	??	231,859	226,210	255,976	233,445
DEL contributions (from LoO)	204,560	204,060	231,859	231,859	235,000	235,000
Other contributions	??	??	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

(D) Variance against budget in 2007/08: the alignment of DQ activities to support the Implementation Plans of the new WP Policy resulted in activities and expenditure focused on Activity 1.

(E) Variance against budget in 2008/09: developmental activity accounts for the virement between Objectives 1& 2 (08/09) – (these are listed as 1 and 5 in the list above). Priorities were delivered against Objective 2 in order to support the conversion of progression to University. A combined underspend of £13.5k between Objectives 1 & 2 was achieved via efficiencies generated by the newly appointed Outreach Officers (funded from the Access Agreement); delivering workshops previously provided by external providers; and savings in transport costs. These savings allowed for the development of activities under Objectives 4 & 5 (08/09) (listed as 2 & 3 in the list above) supporting the expansion and embedding of transition and on-course support activities for WP cohorts.

?? – No information available

Sources:

A) DEL Funding Allocation and Invoice documentation

B) Discovering Queen's Annual Monitoring Report 2007/08 and Plans for 2008/09 / LoO 16th April 2008

C) Discovering Queen's Annual Monitoring Report 2008/09 and Plans for 2009/10 / LoO 10th July 2009.

8.5   Programme Management of Discovering Queen's

DQ is managed within the Widening Participation Unit in QUB. This Unit coordinates work with schools and young people through DQ both locally in Belfast and throughout NI. Staffing comprises a WP Coordinator, two outreach officers (funded by Access Agreement), an administrator, a research assistant and clerical support. All of these staff are on short term annual contracts. This does not include the voluntary contribution made by academic staff.

8.6   Discovering Queen's – Activities

Discovering Queen's activities include:

■ Working with Primary Schools to Raise Awareness of HE University Schools Activities
   - Outreach to Primary School Pupils
   - National Primary Network - Professor Fluffy Programme
   - Primary ConneXions
■ Working with Secondary Schools to Raise Aspirations and develop personal effectiveness
   - Taster Days
   - Pathways to the Professions – career planning and personal effectiveness
   - Supporting Student Attainment and Academic Enrichment
   - UCAS Master Classes
   - STEM Promotion and skills development programmes (including programmes in partnership with employers)
   - Student Led Outreach
   - Shared Education Programme
   - Engagement with Parents and other Key Influencers
■ Further Education
   - Taster Days, Master Classes and UCAS workshops
■ The Year 13 Summer and Head Start Programme
   - The Year 13 Summer Programme promotes aspects of University life which have a positive impact on the personal effectiveness of young people and their likelihood to progress to University. Participants find out more about themselves and their future options by attending a range of interactive workshops and sessions which are aimed at developing Transferable Skills; Personal, Social and Health Education; Citizenship; Learning for Life and Work; and Personal and Professional Effectiveness. The programme challenges participants to make the most of their last year at school/college so that they can achieve a place on their chosen course at university.
   - The Head Start programme provides students from secondary schools with the foundations for successful transition from school to university. In this programme, students cover topics such as finance, the student experience, critical thinking, study skills, as well as practical areas; such as how to use the campus library facilities.

The DQ Event Schedule in Appendix 12 illustrates the range of activities undertaken in 2008/09 – across 51 events / programmes, there were 3,623 participants. Events included

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lectures, welcome events, taster days, master classes, etc. and targeted various age groups – including school age and mature students. Since 2000, DQ has engaged with over 15,000 participants.

QUB provides Annual Reports on DQ to DEL - these track progress for the previous year and planned outcomes for the year ahead across a range of core activities (see Appendix 13 which includes summaries for 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09). These give specific details of events and activities undertaken (including numbers of attendees) and are generally focused on outputs.

8.7   Discovering Queen's – Impacts

The QUB WPSA (December 2009) notes the following with regard to DQ impacts in 2008-09:

■ success in combining the joint university imperatives of WP and STEM. DQ was responsible for bringing the inaugural 'For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology' (FIRST) international LEGO League event to NI. A series of STEM events were also delivered in collaboration with FG Wilson Ltd, a key employer engagement initiative.

■ The number of applicants from DQ Schools to QUB has continued to increase between 2001 and 2008. The Destination of School Leavers data (DE) shows that a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally. The progression from summer school into HE is 75%, with 50% of summer school participants entering QUB. As entry tariffs to QUB have increased year on year, the number of pupils applying from DQ schools and being accepted into the University has been maintained.

■ A study on the short and long-term impact of Head Start transition support programme found that the programme had a significant effect on participants' academic confidence, bringing it from a level below that of the general incoming student population to a level exceeding their peers. This effect continued into semester 2, showing that the programme had an impact on participants' levels of academic confidence in the long-term as well as in the short-term.

8.8   Summary – Discovering Queen's

Aims

The overall aims of the DQ programme are:

■ to stimulate demand for HE from underrepresented groups;

■ to raise aspirations and improve attainment and progression rates and effectively tackle the marginalisation and exclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In January 2009, the QUB WPPIG approved a refined DQ Targeting Framework 2009/10. The objectives set out in the framework are as follows:

1. To raise awareness and aspiration of targeted underrepresented groups by promoting engagement with students who have the potential to benefit from higher education, but who experience real or perceived barriers to progression.

2. To develop the personal effectiveness and autonomous decision making skills associated with progressing to and moving through HE

3. To contribute to knowledge transfer and student attainment.

4. To facilitate entry and lay the foundations to ensure retention and progression.

5. To tackle the problem of educational under-achievement and, by means of appropriate on-course support, to improve retention and/or enable progression to employment / post graduate study.

6. To undertake on-going sample evaluation of the participant experience and the associated progression and retention in higher education and to provide a reliable evidence base for identification and targeting of WP cohorts and for monitoring the effectiveness of interventions via appropriate KPIs.

7. To roll out and embed the best practice developed within Discovering Queen's.

Target Groups

DQ targets pupils in primary schools in areas of low participation, non-selective secondary schools and FE Colleges who have experienced disadvantage of opportunity, in particular students who have no family experience of higher education, limited family income, members of an ethnic minority group, or whose progress has been limited by adverse personal circumstances.

Target groups include:

i. *Students from lower socio-economic groups.*

ii. *Students from low participation backgrounds.*

iii. *Underperforming cohorts at pre-entry and on-course levels*

iv. *First in Family*

v. *Students with disabilities.*

vi. *Students with a range of 'A' level equivalent qualifications.*

vii. *Part-time students*

viii. *Care leavers*

ix. *Adult returners to study*

x. *Work-based learners.*

Where demand for programmes is high and there is oversubscription, access criteria have been established to ensure that those who have indicators of disadvantage in their profile are given priority (these include e.g.: first in family, family residual income, benefits recipients, carers, disability).

Currently 41 Schools and Colleges (35 Post Primary, 6 Colleges) are registered as DQ Schools plus a further 19 Primary Schools.

Funding

The programme is supported by DEL Widening Participation strategy funding. This consists of annual letters of offer for the DQ programme of around £230k per annum.

Summary of Impacts

In 2008/09 – across 51 events / programmes, there were 3,623 participants. Since 2000, DQ has engaged with over 15,000 participants.

For DQ, there is considerable evidence of activity and engagement (outputs) and a focus on specific target groups. The main evidence with regard to impacts includes:

- **Increased progression from DQ schools to HE**: a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally. The progression from summer school into HE is 75% (50% of summer school participants enter QUB).

- **Increased academic confidence**: the Head Start transition support programme has a significant effect on participants' academic confidence, bringing it from a level below that of the general incoming student population to a level exceeding their peers. This effect continued into semester 2.

9 WIDENING PARTICIPATION – PROJECT FUNDING – STEP-UP (UU)

9.1 Step-Up – Rationale / Evidence of Need

Prior to the introduction of the Step-Up programme, in the schools which it targets, the level of academic performance was significantly lower than the NI average and few pupils progressed to HE (source: Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal (2006)).

■ **Educational Attainment in Targeted schools**

- **Londonderry**: In 2000, the average A-Level or equivalent UCAS points score for students across all target schools was less than eight (120 Tariff Points). The average UCAS points requirement for entry to courses in NI universities was eighteen points (240 Tariff Points);

- **Belfast**: Performance of school leavers from the target schools was significantly lower than the NI average for GCSE and A-Level qualifications. 18% of target school pupils achieved three or more A-Levels compared to 84% of all other school leavers.

■ **Progression to HE in Targeted schools**

- **Londonderry**: Less than 5% of the target schools' intake progressed to HE compared to a 36% average across all schools in NI.

- **Belfast**: In 2003/4, the average progression rate across the target schools was 5.8% (with 7 schools having no pupils progressing that year) compared to an average of 36% of all school leavers in NI (see Table 9-1).

Table 9-1

Progression from 15 Belfast Target Schools to HE (2003/04)

School	% entering HEIs
Ashfield Girls' High School	11.5%
Ashfield Boys' High School	12.8%
Balmoral High School	0.0%
Belfast Boys' Model School	10.3%
Belfast Model School For Girls	6.8%
Castle High School	0.0%
Christian Brothers Secondary School	0.0%
Corpus Christi College	0.0%
Mount Gilbert Community College	0.0%
Orangefield High School	0.0%
St Gabriel's School	0.0%
St Gemma's High School	10.0%
St Joseph's College	11.1%
St Patrick's College	5.0%
St Rose's High School	7.2%
Average	5.8%

Table 9-1

Progression from 15 Belfast Target Schools to HE (2003/04)

School	% entering HEIs
NI Average	36%

Note: 10 Schools which are currently actively involved in Step Up are highlighted in bold – as noted in DEL press releases [43] & [44] which show that in 2008, pupils from 8 Belfast schools participated in the programme: Ashfield Boys' and Girls' High Schools, Belfast Girls' Model School, Christian Brothers' Secondary School, Corpus Christi College, Orangefield High School, St Joseph's College, and St Patrick's College. A further 2 schools were involved in 2009 – Belfast Boys Model School and St Rose's.

Sources: Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal (March 2006), DEL Press Releases Aug 2008, Aug 2009

9.2   Step-Up - Aims

Step-Up seeks to raise pupils' aspirations, expectations and academic performance, thereby enabling them to progress to HE. It provides new learning opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, who have low attainment levels and relatively low expectations, to improve their academic performance, self-esteem and motivation and gain entry to and complete programmes of study at university.

The specific aims of Step-Up are:

■ to raise pupil and school performance in science subjects;

■ to encourage participation in HE by young people who would not otherwise have considered it an option;

■ to develop students' subject-specific and transferable skills to facilitate the transition from school to HE;

■ to provide students with ongoing assistance and support to ensure successful completion of degree level programmes of study.

9.3   Step-Up - Target Groups

Step-Up targets schools in areas of social and economic disadvantage. It is designed to increase participation rates in HE, with a focus on young people from groups that are under-represented and who would not otherwise have considered HE as an option for them. In this case there is a particular focus on those from lower socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 5–7).

The programme currently operates in 16 secondary schools in areas of relative socio-economic deprivation in Derry/Londonderry (since 2000) and Belfast (since 2006). Robust criteria have been applied to the selection of schools and pupils. The Step-Up programme structure has a two-tier approach to targeting support on the basis of need – identifying schools and then pupils within these schools:

■ **Criteria for selecting schools**

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[43] DEL Press Release 15 August 2008 – Students Take a "Step-Up" to Higher Education
[44] DEL Press Release 25 August 2009 – Students Take a "Step-Up" to Higher Education

- Londonderry: schools were selected using indicators including the Townsend Deprivation Index, TSN and Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement. Educational indicators including GSCE results and HE participation were also examined.

- Belfast: schools were selected using the NI Census 2001, Noble indicators of Multiple Deprivation, FSM entitlement, GSCE and A Level (or equivalent attainment data, progression rates to HE. Equality of opportunity and geographical spread were additional factors considered in identifying the schools in the Greater Belfast area.

The schools selected to participate in Step Up are listed in Table 9-2.

Table 9-2

Step-Up Programme Targeted Schools in Londonderry and Belfast

Londonderry x 6 schools	Belfast x 10 schools	
▪ Lisneal College		
▪ St. Brigid's College	▪ Ashfield Boys' High School	▪ Corpus Christi College
▪ St. Cecilia's College	▪ Ashfield Girls' High School	▪ Orangefield High School
▪ St. Mary's College	▪ Belfast Boys' Model	▪ St. Joseph's College
▪ St. Joseph's Boys' School	▪ Belfast Model Schools for Girls	▪ St. Patrick's College
▪ St Peter's High School	▪ Christian Brothers' Secondary School	▪ St. Rose's High School

Note
–All 10 Step-Up Belfast schools also involved with DQ
-2 Step-Up Magee schools (St Cecilia's College, St Mary's College) also involved with DQ
Source: Schools list from Step-Up Press Release (August 2009)

■ **Effectiveness of Targeting: Schools**

The programme initially targeted pupils of 6 schools located in socio-economically deprived communities in Londonderry. Following the success of the original programme at the UU's Magee campus, the initiative was subsequently extended to UU's Jordanstown campus in September 2006 with pupils recruited from 10 targeted schools in the Belfast area.

■ **Criteria for selecting pupils**

The selection criteria for entry to the Step-Up programme are based on the following:

- little or no parental experience of higher education;
- limited family income;
- unskilled, semi-skilled or unemployed parent (s);
- living in a neighbourhood or other circumstances not conducive to study;
- living in an environment that has been seriously affected by political unrest

All pupils who wish to join the programme complete a Step-Up Application Form; this is followed by an interview with a panel comprising a Head of Science (from a school other than the applicant pupil), an industrial partner and a member of the Step-Up team. Acceptance on to the programme is dependent on performance at interview and information obtained from

schools prior to interview. This approach ensures that the scheme is genuinely targeted at widening access for students from under-represented groups.

■ **Effectiveness of Targeting: Pupils**

As part of the UU Widening Participation Audit (2007) analysis of the data on students who have participated or were currently participating in the programme (N= 673) was undertaken. This revealed **a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the intended target groups**:

- 85% have parents who are long-term unemployed;
- 94% live in rented accommodation;
- 30% come from single parent families;
- 98% of parents who are in employment are unskilled or semiskilled;
- 11 single teenage mothers have progressed through the programme;
- 3 parents have had experience of higher education; and
- 98% of young people on entry to the programme expressed no desire to participate in higher education.

More recent data quoted in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 Annual Reports (Magee) submitted to DEL indicate that there **continues to be a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the intended target groups**:

- 83% (who joined in 2007-08) and 84% (who joined in 2008-09) have parents who are long-term unemployed;
- 92% (who joined in 2007-08) and 91% (who joined in 2008-09) live in rented accommodation;
- 32% (who joined in 2007-08) and 31% (who joined in 2008-09) come from single parent families;
- 98% (of those who joined in 2007-08 and2008-09) of parents who are in employment are unskilled or semiskilled;
- Less than 1% of parents (of those who joined in 2007-08 and 2008-09) have had experience of higher education; and
- 95% (who joined in 2007-08) and 96% (who joined in 2008-09) of young people on entry to the programme expressed no desire to participate in higher education.

The most recent profile data for the Belfast Programme[45] **indicates that Step-Up is engaging with some of the most disadvantaged pupils in NI.** The profile of Belfast Step-Up Programme participants is:

- 78% of parents are long term unemployed;
- 96% of parents who are in employment are unskilled or semi-skilled;
- less than 1% of parents have had experience of higher or further education

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[45] Extension Proposal 2010/12 submitted to DEL

- on average pupils have five siblings and live in three bedroom rented accommodation;
- 97% of pupils at initial interview expressed no desire to participate in higher education; and
- 3% of the pupils who have participated in the programme are single parent mothers.

This analysis suggests that the targeting and recruitment process is successfully reaching those who are eligible to benefit from the opportunities that HE can provide.

9.4 Step-Up - Funding

There are two main sources of funding for the Step Up programme:

■ Belfast programme funding - from the Renewing Communities initiative until **2013** - a single letter of offer (for 1 April 2006 to 31 August 2013) provides £1,579,851 (equivalent to approx. £225k per annum); and

■ Magee programme funding - from the DEL Widening Participation strategy funding - annual letters of offer for the Magee programme provide around £170-£180k per annum.

In addition, industrial partners give support in both money and kind and Step-Up has attracted an additional £200,000 since 2001 from "a variety of sources".

Step-Up Magee

Letters of Offer issued by DEL to UU for the Step-Up Magee Programme provide total annual funding available. A breakdown of this funding is presented in Table 9-3.

Table 9-3

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to UU (Step-Up Magee)

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
Development Officer Salaries total	58,000	59,192	64,000	63,943	68,000	64,961
Consumables	12,000	17,200	13,000	15,206	13,000	14,372
Printing/ Stationary/ Post	4,000	6,055	4,000	4,482	4,500	5,930
Transport	10,000	9,533	9,000	10,210	9,000	13,746
Staff Travel/ Expenses	6,000	7,241	6,000	6,854	6,000	6,936
Hospitality/ Catering	18,000	22,293	18,000	24,273	18,000	15,628
Visiting Lecturers/ Academic Support	12,000	16,882	12,509	16,478	13,000	11,950
Equipment	500	0	500	802	547	4,240
Other/ General	1,155	629	1,000	-	1,000	2,695
Tutoring in Schools (staff costs)	18,600	18,610	20,074	20,074	20,074	20,074
Induction (staff costs)	4,000	3,959	3,959	5,938	3,959	3,959
Mentoring (postgrad costs)	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000
Summer School	17,130	17,130	17,130	17,130	17,130	17,130
Total Magee	170,385	187,724	178,172	194,391	183,210	190,622
DEL Contributions (from LoO)	170,385	170,385	178,172	178,172	183,210	183,210
Other Contributions		17,339		16,219		7,412

Note

-based on funding for Academic Years – September to August

-other contributions (2007/08) met by external sponsors / partner organisations and reflect costs associated with enhanced and extended engagement activities with Year 8-12 pupils and Engaging Young Minds Initiative

-other contributions (2008/09) met by industrial partners / private sponsors and the University reflect the introduction of enhanced and extended engagement activities with Year 8-12 pupils in the target schools

Sources:

Step-up Programme Derry – Annual Progress Report 1st September 2007 – 31st August 2008 (Jan 2008)
Magee: LoO 24th Jan 2007; LoO 23rd Oct 2007; LoO 10th Jul 2009; UU

Step-Up Belfast

A breakdown of funding per annum for Step-Up Belfast is presented in Table 9-4.

Table 9-4

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to UU (Belfast Step-Up)

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Total
Total Activity Costs	101,372	125,660	158,599	154,103	72,657	48,369	15,430	676,190
Project Coordination	86,896	84,636	84,636	85,636	84,636	32,353	32,353	491,147
Other Associated Costs	6,500	14,000	14,000	11,500	14,000	3,000	3,000	66,000
Purchase of Vehicles	242,000					27,500		214,500
Total Programme Costs	436,768	224296	257,235	251,239	171,293	56,222	50,783	1,447,837
TOTAL (incl. inflation adjustment @ 3% pa)	449,871	237,956	281,088	282,771	198,576	67,132	62,457	1,579,851

Note: the variability of "total activity" costs is due to the progression of different cohorts through the Step-Up programme e.g.: in 2006/07, Cohort 1 is undergoing Tutoring Year 1 and Summer School whilst Cohort 2 is involved in Engagement activity; in 2007/08, Cohort 1 moves on to Tutoring Year 2, Cohort 2 - Tutoring Year 1 and Summer School whilst Cohort 3 is involved in Engagement activity, etc (see Appendix 14 for more details.)
Sources: Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal (March 2006)

9.5 Programme Management - Step-Up

Step-Up is a collaborative partnership between UU, schools, local industry, the local hospitals and government agencies; the governance structures are constituted to reflect this partnership approach.

- **Central Management Team (CMT)** - comprises the Principal from each participating school, three representatives from industry/government organizations who currently contribute to the programme, academic representatives from UU and the Step-Up Director. It meets bi-annually to monitor progress and also to provide strategic advice on the programme. Recommendations from this committee are communicated to the Head of Science Committee through the Step-Up Director.

- **Heads of Science Committee** - consists of Heads of Science from each participating school, the chairperson of each Cluster (Biology, Physics, and Chemistry), the Step-Up Director and Step-Up staff. Committee minutes are copied following each monthly meeting to the CMT members, the PVC for Teaching and Learning and the Vice-Chancellor. These are accessible by all teachers from the Step-Up website.

■ **Biology, Chemistry and Physics Clusters -** include subject specialist teachers from each participating school. The recommendations of each Cluster Group are communicated through the Step-Up office to the Heads of Science Committee.

The University's Step-Up staff team comprises a Director, three Development Officers, one Administrator and one science technician. Many of these staff are on short term contracts. This does not include the voluntary contribution made by academic staff in the faculties. The Director reports to the Director for Access and Distributed Learning, who reports directly to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning.

9.6   Step-Up - Activities

Step-Up is a structured science-based programme of academic and vocational activities that are delivered by schools, UU, industry and government. The partner organizations contribute to the teaching of the twelve unit GCE Applied Science (formerly Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education) qualification, which is equivalent to two `A'-Levels.  Pupils are also required to undertake within their own schools, an additional `A'-Level or GCE Applied six unit award.   Pupils work individually and in groups and are extensively supported by schoolteachers, university staff, postgraduate students and industrial partner organisations to fulfil their potential.

The main elements within Step-Up are:

■ **(a) Engagement Activities:** A series of engagement activities for pupils and their parents are delivered at the University, in schools and in the local community to encourage pupils in Year 12 (age 14) to consider participation in the programme, beyond age 16. Since 2005 a new range of practical scientific activities have been specifically targeted at Year 8 to Year 12 pupils to encourage them to consider Step-Up.

The main focus of the Step-Up programme is on Years 13 and 14 with 340 pupils participating each year (140 pupils (70 in Year 1, 70 in Year 2) from Londonderry, 200 pupils (100 in Year 1, 100 in Year 2) from Belfast). The core elements of this part of the scheme are:

■ **(b) Tutoring Programme** – Participants join the programme at age 16. Tutoring at UU provides students with direct experience of University teaching and research methods and the application of science in industrial, Government and hospital settings. This is largely achieved through a programme of highly interactive, informal staff-student contact sessions (lectures, seminars, tutorials and practicals), some of which are taught at the students' school, some at the University and others in industrial, Government and hospital settings, over a two year period. Pupils are given access to University facilities such as laboratories, computers and the libraries.

The 'Tutoring Programme' is delivered by a wide range of staff from across the University (particularly Life and Health Sciences) and reflects nationally and internationally recognised expertise in teaching and learning and research. It commences at the beginning of September and concludes at the end of May each year. `Step-Up' pupils are engaged in the 'Tutoring Programme' for the complete duration of the GCE Applied Science qualification.

■ **(c) The Summer School –** This 8-day residential programme builds on the experiences of Year 1 of the 'Tutoring Programme'. It combines formal timetabled lectures, seminars, tutorials and practical classes which are delivered by academic staff and more informal

project based work which is co-ordinated by 'postgraduate mentors'. All academic work undertaken relates to the GCE Double Award Science qualification requirements.

Accreditation and Assessment: `Step-Up' students who successfully complete assessments associated with the Tutoring Programme and the Summer School receive accreditation for this work (20 and 40 Tariff Points respectively). An external examiner has been appointed to assure the quality and standard of the assessment and award. Additional credits that have been accumulated are taken into account alongside GCE Tariff points for entry to UU. The potential for transferability to other FE or HE institutions using the credits gained through this programme is currently being explored.

- **(d) University Induction –** This is delivered as a 3-day residential course, and is aimed at Step-Up students who have applied and been accepted to undertake a programme of study at UU. The programme was designed in response to research which indicated that almost all students encounter significant educational and social problems when attempting to make the transition from school to University life. It aims to help ease the transition from school to university of those "target" students who have applied and been accepted to undertake a programme of study at the university.

  The induction programme largely consists of a 'Personal Transferable Skills Course' which includes planning and report writing; time management; study skills; presentation skills; money management and activities leading to familiarization with the campus, staff and the surrounding area. The induction course is delivered by Step-Up staff and other university staff from the Department for Student Support who have particular expertise in the identified problem areas.

- **(e) Mentoring Programme -** All Step-Up students who embark on a programme of study at UU are assigned a 'Student Mentor', a current postgraduate student at the University. The role of the mentor is to provide support and guidance to "target students" during their university course. Mentors offer the Step-Up students guidance and support, as required, throughout his or her University course and must also have a minimum of one formally scheduled consultation session on an individual basis once per month. Mentors are required to maintain and submit after every meeting a progress log on each Step-Up student which alerts Step-Up staff to any academic or pastoral problems.

  Postgraduate students who wish to become 'student mentors' are interviewed by the `Step-Up' Director and two other members of the CMT. Mentors who are accepted to the programme are required to undertake training seminars.

  The Student Mentor is in addition to a personal 'Adviser of Studies', who is allocated to all students on registration at UU and the extensive support and counselling service provided to all students by the University's Student Support department.

- **(f) Other Activities:** Additionally, Year 8 – 12 pupils (almost 8,500 in 2007/08 and almost 10,000 in 2008/09) participated in a new range of practical scientific activities and lectures, which aimed to encourage them to consider Step-Up as a future educational option.

In 2008/09, the programme expanded to include a range of lectures and activities in STEM related areas for primary school pupils. The fifteen primary schools who participated in the initiative 'Engaging Young Minds' were 'feeder' schools for the original Step-Up schools in Londonderry and are themselves located in some of the most disadvantaged areas of NI. Over 3,500 pupils participated in the programme of activities in 208/09.

9.7 Step-Up – Impacts

UU provides annual reports on Step-Up Magee to DEL. A Draft Evaluation Report (Trotman, November 2009) has been prepared on the Step-Up Belfast programme.

Scale

Recent information (including the Annual Progress Report 2008/09 (Magee) and the Draft Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (2009)) provides the following on the scale of Step-Up:

■ Up to August 2009 (Magee programme):
- 491 pupils engaged in the Magee programme (Cohorts 1 – 8 i.e. completing Year 2 of the Step-Up Programme between 2002 and 2009) and progressed;
- Of these 491 pupils, 451 progressed to HE, 15 to FE, 10 to employment and 15 other destinations;
- A further 70 pupils engaged in the Magee programme(Cohort 9) and completed Year 1 Tutoring of the Step-Up Programme by August 2009;
- Of these 70 pupils (Cohort 9), 68 progressed to Year 2 of the programme.
■ Up to August 2009 (Belfast programme):
- 200 pupils engaged initially in the Belfast programme (assumes 100 from Cohorts 1 and 2 i.e. completing Year 2 of the Step-Up Programme in 2007/08 and 2008/09);
- Professor Colin Trotman's Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (Draft, 2009) notes: "*96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to higher education*";
- A further 100 pupils engaged in the Belfast programme (Cohort 3) and completed Year 1 Tutoring of the Step-Up Programme by August 2009.

Summarising this information, by August 2009, almost 700 students from secondary schools in the north-west and Belfast areas, have successfully completed the programme and progressed to HEIs across the UK.

Tracking of impacts

A recent external evaluation of Step-Up undertaken by Ms Lucy Backhurst, Newcastle University noted that: *"Mechanisms for tracking and monitoring student performance once into the University appear to be rigorous and comprehensive".*

Professor Colin Trotman's Draft Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (2009) notes that: "*contact with Step-Up undergraduates studying at other HEIs in NI, RoI and the UK has been maintained and enhanced. In fact the Step-Up team are able to show that within six months of graduation, 94% of*

Step-Up graduates are either in employment or remain in higher education studying at Doctoral or Masters levels."

The WP Audit (2007) notes that participating pupils' performance and involvement at pre-entry stage is monitored through participating schools; the Step-Up staff maintain close contact with all Step-Up students. They can also monitor performance (and final degree classification) of UU students through the Student Record System. It is more difficult to track progression into employment, but there is contact with the majority of students or their parents / family.

Impact

The Draft Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (Trotman, 2009) observes the importance of the initiative for disadvantaged pupils *'to not only raise aspirations towards a University education but to give participants the belief, the academic skills and the confidence to do so'*.

The Annual Reports for Magee for 2007/08 and 2008/09 (the Annual Report for 2006/07 was not available) provide details of the progression of cohorts through the Step Up programme and on to HE. This is tracked through each of the main stages of UU engagement with pupils / students: Engagement / Student Recruitment; Tutoring Programme; Summer School; Progression to Y2; University Induction and Mentoring (see Appendix 14).

The main (tracked) impacts of the Step-Up programme of relevance to this review are:

- Academic Achievement at A-Level;
- Progression to HE;
- Retention within HE; and
- Academic Achievement at Degree Level.

Information on each of these metrics is presented in Tables (9-5 to 9-9).

- **Academic Achievement at A level**

Table 9-5

Academic Achievement of Step-Up Students (Magee)

Cohort / Date	Academic Achievement % achieving Double Award Applied Science	Average Tariff Points	Scale
Various cohorts / status @ March 2006	99.7% achieved Double Award Applied Science Qualification (almost 70% A or B)	Average Tariff Points for Step-Up pupils improved from 259 in 2002/03 to 275 in 2004/05 (vs. 120 points in 2000/01) (in Derry target schools).	
Cohort 7 (A levels in 2007/08)	99.8% achieved Double Award Applied Science Qualification (75% A or B)	Average Tariff Points in science GCE qualifications across the target schools rose to 245 points in 2007/08 (vs. 120 points in 2000/01).	68 pupils completed the 2-year programme in Aug 2008
Cohort 8 (A levels in 2008/09)	99.7% achieved Double Award Applied Science Qualification (almost 75% A or B)	Average Tariff Points in science GCE qualifications across the target schools rose to 240 points in 2007/08 (vs. 120 points in 2000/01)	68 pupils completed the 2-year programme in Aug 2009
Sources: *Economic Appraisal of Step-Up Belfast (March 2006)* *Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1st Sep 2007 – 31st Aug 2008;* *Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1st Sep 2008 – 31st Aug 2009.*			

Table 9-6

Academic Achievement of Step-Up Students (Belfast)

Cohort / Date	Academic Achievement % achieving Double Award Applied Science
2008	97% pass rate, with 65% of students achieving A or B; 90% achieved A, B or C grades in their science A-Levels;
2009	98% pass rate, with 90% of students achieving A, B or C grades in their applied science A-Levels
Sources:	
Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (Draft, November 2009) and UU	

The Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast also notes that **Applied Science 'A' levels are now offered in all participating schools** - whereas prior to their collaboration with Step-Up only one school out of ten did so. From the ten fully participating schools only four offered any science A Levels, and the uptake was small in those that did so (three or four A Level Students per school year).

■ **Progression to HE**

Table 9-7

First Destination of Step-Up Students (Magee)

Cohort	First Destination at	University		FE	Employment	Other[46]	Total
		UU	Other Uni				
Cohort 1 (2002)	October 2002	29	18	2	3	2	54
Cohort 2 (2003)	October 2003	34	17	1	2	2	56
Cohort 3 (2004)	October 2004	37	13	1	1	0	52
Cohort 4 (2005)	October 2005	40	13	2	3	2	60
Cohort 5 (2006)	October 2006	43	19	1	2	1	66
Cohort 6 (2007)	October 2007	48	14	2	0	3	67
Cohort 7 (2008)	October 2008	51 (75%)	11 (16%)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)	3 (4%)	68
Cohort 8 (2009)	October 2009	53 (78%)	10 (15%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	68
All 2002/2007	2002-2007	231 (65%)	94 (27%)	9 (2%)	11 (3%)	10 (3%)	355
All 2002/2008	2002-2008	282 (65%)	106 (27%)	11 (2%)	11 (3%)	13 (3%)	423
All 2002/2009	**2002-2009**	**338 (69%)**	**113 (23%)**	**15 (3%)**	**10 (2%)**	**15 (3%)**	**491**
Sources:							
WP Audit 2007;							
Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1ˢᵗ Sep 2007 – 31ˢᵗ Aug 2008;							
Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1ˢᵗ Sep 2008 – 31ˢᵗ Aug 2009.							

To date 97% of the Step-Up Magee students for whom figures are available, have progressed directly to HE, FE or employment. Those entering HE have embarked on courses of study covering a range of science, social science, vocational, business and arts-based subjects.

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[46] Other indicates those who did not progress to university, Further Education or employment in the year that they obtained their AVCE qualification.

The Annual Monitoring Reports for Step-Up (Magee) 2007/08 and 2008/09 note that the vast majority of students enter STEM disciplines; most of the courses accessed are "high demand courses" which typically require high A level points / grades in the range 240-340 (CCC-AAB).

Professor Colin Trotman's Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (Draft, November 2009) notes that "*96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to higher education*".

■ **Retention within HE**

Table 9-8

Retention Rates for Step-Up Students who Progress to HE

Cohort	UU			Other University			Total		
	No. entering HE	% Enrolled/ Completed	% Drop-Out	No. entering HE	% Enrolled/ Completed	% Drop-Out	No. entering HE	% Enrolled/ Completed	% Drop-Out
Cohort 1 (2002)	29	93%	7%	18	78%	22%	47	87%	13%
Cohort 2 (2003)	34	94%	6%	17	82%	18%	51	90%	10%
Cohort 3 (2004)	37	97%	3%	13	95%	15%	50	94%	6%
Cohort 4 (2005)	40	95%	5%	13	77%	23%	53	91%	9%
Cohort 5 (2006)	43	93%	7%	19	74%	26%	62	87%	13%
Cohort 6 (2007)	43	95%	5%	19	75%	25%	62	89%	11%
Cohort 7 (2008)	47	95%	5%	16	75%	25%	63	90%	10%
All entering university 2002-06	188	95%	5%	80	79%	21%	263	90%	10%
All entering university 2002-07	**229**	**96%**	**4%**	**98**	**80%**	**20%**	**327**	**91%**	**9%**

Sources:

WP Audit 2007; Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1st Sep 2007 – 31st Aug 2008; Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1st Sep 2008 – 31st Aug 2009.

For cohorts 1 – 6 (2002 - 2007) the retention rate for Step-Up students who progressed to HE is 91%, and the retention rate for Step-Up students who progress to UU is 96%. The WP Audit extract notes: "*These figures compare favourably with UU retention figure of 83%".* The Annual Monitoring Report 2007/08 notes: "*These figures compare favourably with the UK average retention/ completion rate across all HEIs which is 87%."*

Information in the UU Business Case for the extension of Belfast Step-Up supports the data in Table 9-8. It notes (up to end of academic year 2008/09): 95% of students (from Step-Up Magee) who progressed to UU have successfully completed degree level programmes of study which compares favourably with a completion rate of 83% for undergraduate students across the UK HE sector. The retention rate for Belfast Step-Up students is equally impressive: 94% of entrants currently completing degree level programmes of study.

The retention rate for Step-Up students entering UU is impressive, particularly given that both widening access groups are known to be associated with a higher non-completion rate, and that UU has a relatively high non-completion rate for its students. The success is in large part considered to be due to the mentoring programme at UU, which provides the students with intensive, sustained, one-to-one support once into the University.

■ **Academic Achievement at Degree**

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Table 9-9

Degree Classification of Step-Up Magee Students

(Cohorts 1 – 4 – graduated in years 2005/06 to 2008/09)

	Total	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd	Other
University of Ulster	133	16	75	37	5	0
Other University	54	8	22	17	7	0
Total No.	187	24	97	54	12	0
Total %	100%	13%	52%	29%	6%	0%
Sources: Step-up Programme Derry Annual Progress Report 1st Sep 2008 – 31st Aug 2009.						

Across Cohorts 1-4 of the Step-Up Magee programme, there are 187 students who have progressed to University and successfully completed degree programmes. 65% of students from the Magee programme have obtained either First or Upper Second class degrees.

The Step-Up Belfast Programme commenced in 2006 and therefore has not yet been running long enough for students to have graduated from University.

Step-Up Programme – Other Impacts

The Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal outlines other non-monetary benefits:

■ **Contribution to Economic Growth:** Technology allows resources to be used more productively so that more output can be generated from a given set of inputs hence technological progress is the engine of long run growth — generating growth through the more productive use of inputs. Consequently, there is a requirement for a supply of science based graduates to sustain the quantity and quality of scientific research.

■ **Contribution to the Knowledge Based Economy:** In the knowledge-based economy, the science system contributes to the key functions of:

- *knowledge production* developing and providing new knowledge;

- *knowledge transmission* educating and developing human resources; and

- *knowledge transfer* disseminating knowledge and providing inputs to problem solving.

■ **Supply of Science Graduates:** The uptake of physical sciences by post-16 students in schools and colleges in NI is a cause of concern. Less than 2,000 pupils achieved passes in Mathematics and Science at 'A' Level and the numbers only increased marginally between 1996 and 2001. This trend has had significant impact at university level where since the late 1990's the proportion of NI graduating in Mathematical and Engineering subjects has witnessed no increase.

■ **Impact of Education and Qualifications on Earnings:** There is clear empirical evidence which shows that the amount of education acquired by workers has an important impact on labour market experience. Workers with HE qualifications tend to earn more than those without HE qualifications for two main reasons:

- *education increases productivity, thus increasing earnings; and*

- *increased education increases labour force participation, decreases the probability of unemployment, and decreases job turnover.*

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- *Impact of Education and Qualifications on Employment:* In NI between the period 1995/05, approximately 90% of graduates of working age were in employment. The proportion of non-graduates in employment in the same period was considerably lower, fluctuating between 60% and 66%. In addition, over 90% of graduates were employed in the top four occupational groups, compared to 37% of non-graduates. Given the relationship between higher qualification levels and higher employment rates, the lower qualification rate levels in NI's most deprived areas are likely to be a contributing factor to the overall lower employment rates in these areas.

- *Impact of Education and Qualifications on Non-Market Outcomes:* Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better health than those with lower levels. There is strong evidence that education is associated with lower chances of depression, obesity and lack of exercise — all major problems in NI's most deprived areas.

A promotional booklet about the Step-Up programme (August 2009) highlighted that the success of Step-Up resulted in invitations for staff to deliver presentations at a range of national and international conferences[47].

Step-Up Programme - Summary of Impacts

In summary, there is clear and tangible evidence of the positive impact of the Step-Up programme in a range of areas:

- **Academic Achievement at A-Level**; typically 99%+ of the Magee pupils and 97%+ of the Belfast pupils achieved Double Award Applied Science Qualification;

- **Progression to HE**: 97% of the Step-Up Magee students for whom figures are available, have progressed directly to HE, FE or employment. 96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to HE.

- **Retention within HE:** For Magee cohorts 1 – 6 (2002 - 2007) the retention rate for Step-Up students who progressed to HE is 91%, and the retention rate for Step-Up students who progress to UU is 96%. These compare favourably with retention figures for *UU overall and the UK average retention figure (83% for undergraduate students across the UK HE sector)".* The retention rate for Step-Up students entering UU is impressive, particularly given that both widening access groups are known to be associated with a higher non-completion rate, and that UU has a relatively high non-completion rate for its students. The success is in large part considered to be due to the mentoring programme at UU, which provides the students with intensive, sustained, one-to-one support once into the University.

- **Academic Achievement at Degree:** Across Cohorts 1-4 of the Step-Up Magee programme, there are 187 students who have progressed to University and successfully completed degree programmes. 65% of students from the Magee programme have obtained either First or Upper Second class degrees. The Step-Up Belfast Programme has not yet been running long enough for students to have graduated.

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[47] ERA ANNUAL Seminar (RoI); DACE regional Conference (University of Wales); European Access Network International Conference; Reaching Higher, Reaching Wider National Conference (Wales); Action on Access National Conference; North Carolina Community College Conference (USA); PSWI Cross border Conference (RoI); and FACE National Conference.

9.8   External Evaluations of Step-Up

This review is concerned with the period 2006/07 - 2008/09, and therefore has sought to focus on relevant reports and data relating to this period. Our review of the tangible impacts of Step-Up (summarised in this section) highlights the clear success of the Step-Up Programme. Further information on the "softer" impacts – based on the perceptions of those involved in the Step-Up Programme is included in Section 10; this is also broadly positive feedback.

Since its inception, Step-Up programme has been subject to several external evaluations:

- Assessment report on Step-up commissioned DEL by John Storan in 2004;
- University UK Independent assessments (2002 and 2007);
- Evaluation of Derry programme — 2003 Professor C Trotman;
- Evaluation of Belfast Programme 2009 Professor C Trotman; and
- Evaluation of psychological data Dr Shevlin & Dr Adamson (published 2005).
- External evaluation by Ms Lucy Backhurst, Head of Undergraduate Recruitment and Admissions, Newcastle University (summarised in the Report of the Widening Access Audit Group (UU, 2008).

Key findings from external evaluations **within the period of the review** are noted below (these are generally consistent with the findings of this review):

- **University UK 2007 Report** - this states that *"The project is currently in its fifth year of operation and continues to achieve outstanding levels of success in relation to:*

  - Improvement *in pupil's academic performance and psychological disposition;*
  - *Progression to higher education; and*
  - *Retention and success at university."*

  The Universities UK report also notes: *"that the targeting and recruitment process is successfully reaching those who are most deserving"* and that *"the success of the programme through ongoing and systematic internal and external evaluation has been conclusively demonstrated"*

- **Trotman Evaluation of Belfast Report (2009)** – data from Trotman's report has been cited in several places in Section 9 (this section) of this report. Trotman's report notes that *"Step-Up is an 'intelligent' and effective programme which is constructed and devised to not only raise aspirations towards a University education but to give participants the belief, the academic skills and the confidence to actually do so".*

  Trotman (2009) cites the 2003 Evaluation (Trotman) which stated that: *"The Step-Up to Science project is an excellent model of good practice in widening access to higher education for previously excluded and under-represented social groups."* His concluding remarks note that: *"Overall the Step-Up programme has become a stronger, more effective programme with higher levels of impact even than were to be seen in the 2003 evaluation".*

■ **External evaluation by Ms Lucy Backhurst**, Newcastle University. This reached a positive conclusion on the performance of Step-Up, but also made a number of observations and raised some issues which UU has addressed (see UU responses to each of the points raised – shaded text):

Step-Up and the University Strategic Context:

- Evaluation *finding: "Step-Up lacks strategic integration within the University. It is mentioned in the University's Corporate Plan, Access Agreement and Widening Participation Strategy, but largely as a stand-alone activity not explicitly linked to the University's key priorities and strategic direction."*

- UU Response: Step-Up is specifically linked to the corporate plan (core aim: to maintain sector leader position in WP) the Seven Year Review, the Access Agreement (as a core activity) and the WP strategy as a flagship activity.

- *Evaluation finding: "The programme is presented as a largely faculty-based initiative, relatively narrow in its range and scope and detached from the University's other widening participation/access activities. Given the model's success, and excellent potential for roll out as identified in the evaluation reports provided, it is perhaps a wasted opportunity on the part of the University that Step-Up has not been extended and integrated further. Bringing together the existing widening participation/access activities (the Advance Project, Tutoring in Schools, the identified community-based projects, the Scholarships Scheme etc) would create a more coherent overall framework for widening participation activity in the University."*

- UU Response: The programme has its origins in Science but it has since 2003 been a central university activity which draws upon expertise from across the University.

- *Evaluation finding: "The University may wish to consider the apparent lack of co-ordination of Step-Up with the work of the University's schools liaison/student recruitment team. This may be because information was not provided, but it is not clear how or whether Step-Up links to the University's schools liaison/student recruitment function. Collaboration in relationship building with schools in areas of deprivation may create efficiency savings in terms of staff time and resource, and help secure the project's long term future."*

- UU Response: Recruitment of students to UU is not an aim of the Step-Up programme. It is not the University's intention to tie students to this institution, although it does welcome students who wish to progress to it from the programme. The Step-Up programme links with the school liaison team in the University to ensure that pupils have access to the best careers advice available that is suitable to their needs.

- *Step-Up has an excellent retention record for students who enter the University through the scheme. Given that the University performs significantly below its benchmark in this area, it may wish to consider whether there are elements of this good practice that can be rolled out University-wide."*

Evaluation of Step-Up against Programme Aims

- Ms Backhurst reached a positive conclusion with regard to the performance of Step-Up: "*For pupils engaged in the programme, Step-Up is an excellent example of an effective widening access project. It is meeting its stated aims of raising pupil*

performance and encouraging successful participation in science at school (and beyond) for pupils who are in some way disadvantaged from a socio-economic perspective. It has good, clear, quality control mechanisms, and has had a profound effect on building strong partnerships between the University, schools, and participating companies/organisations in the region. The spin offs of the project, in terms of the sharing of good practice in the teaching of science, and the benefit to the communities in which the schools are based (e.g. charity walks, science lecture series and school competitions) are a credit to the University of Ulster and help to reinforce its reputation as a University committed to the widening participation agenda".

- The evaluation also raised some issues – extracts below (which UU has addressed – see UU responses to each of the points raised – shaded text)

  o *Evaluation finding: "a) It is impossible to undertake a comprehensive financial audit of the Step-Up programme on the basis of the information provided. Given the lack of clarity on the true costs of Step-Up, the University may wish to request a detailed breakdown of total annual income and expenditure in order to assess the true cost-effectiveness of the scheme."*

  o UU Response: Detailed financial accounts are provided through the Annual Report and DEL quarterly audits which are readily available for scrutiny. Furthermore, the cost effectiveness of the programme has been demonstrated through a full economic appraisal prior to the expansion to Belfast.

  o *Evaluation finding: "b) The programme has not been designed to recruit students to courses at the University of Ulster, rather to provide students from identified groups with the opportunity to access HE. According to figures provided, approximately 65% of participating students progress from the scheme to the University of Ulster. There are two issues relating to this point:*

    ▪ *the University invests considerable academic and administrative staff time and funding into this programme, and 35% (N=124) of students progress elsewhere. (This may not be an issue for the University since it is not one of the aims of the scheme, but is worthy of note)*

    ▪ *the students who do not progress to the University of Ulster are not able to use the credit/tariff points gained through involvement in the scheme for entry to other universities, thus potentially creating a barrier to HE"*

  o *c) On the basis of the Step-Up evaluation reports and press releases provided, the project appears to rely heavily on the success and high profile of the Director, on the good will of participating academic staff and on staff on short-term contracts. The University may wish to consider the considerable risk that this presents to the University in terms of the long term sustainability of the project.*

  o *d) In this light of the findings of this report, the University may wish to revisit the aims of the scheme to ensure that they support the institution's strategic objectives in relation both to the widening participation, and the widening access agendas."*

  o UU Response: Evaluation of Step-Up against programme Aims: Section 9.5.2. of the audit report (together with the explanatory footnotes) provided considerable positive evaluation of how Step-Up was achieving the programme aims.

9.9 Summary - Step-Up

Aims

The specific aims of Step-Up are:

- to raise pupil and school performance in science subjects;
- to encourage participation in HE by young people who would not otherwise have considered it an option;
- to develop students' subject-specific and transferable skills to facilitate the transition from school to HE;
- to provide students with ongoing assistance and support to ensure successful completion of degree level programmes of study.

Target Groups

Step-Up targets schools in areas of social and economic disadvantage, seeking to increase participation rates in HE. It focuses on young people from groups that are under-represented and who would not otherwise have considered HE as an option for them, with a particular focus on those from lower socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 5–7).

The programme currently operates in 16 secondary schools in areas of relative socio-economic deprivation in Derry/Londonderry (since 2000) and Belfast (since 2006). Robust criteria have been applied to the selection of both schools and pupils.

Funding

There are two main sources of funding for the Step Up programme:

- Belfast programme funding - from the Renewing Communities initiative until 2011 - a single letter of offer (April 2006 to August 2013) provides £1,579,851 (equivalent to approx. £225k per annum); and
- Magee programme funding - from the DEL Widening Participation strategy funding - annual letters of offer for the Magee programme provide around £170-£180k per annum.

In addition, industrial partners give support in both money and kind and Step-Up has attracted an additional £200,000 since 2001 from "a variety of sources".

Summary of Impacts

There is clear and tangible evidence of the positive impact of the Step-Up programme:

Table 9-10

Impact of Step-Up – Summary

Metric	Baseline	Performance
Increasing academic attainment at A	**Targeted Schools in Londonderry** In 2000, the average A-Level or equivalent UCAS points score for	Typically 99%+ of the Magee pupils and 97%+ of the Belfast pupils achieved Double Award Applied Science Qualification

Table 9-10

Impact of Step-Up – Summary

Metric	Baseline	Performance
Level	students across all target schools was less than eight (120 Tariff Points). The average UCAS points requirement for entry to courses in NI universities was eighteen points (240 Tariff Points); **Targeted schools in Belfast** Performance of school leavers from the target schools was significantly lower than the NI average for GCSE and A-Level qualifications. 18% of target school pupils achieve three or more A-Levels compared to 84% of all other school leavers.	
Increasing participation in HE	**Targeted schools in Londonderry** Less than 5% of the target schools' intake progressed to HE compared to a 36% average across all schools in NI. **Targeted schools in Belfast** In 2003/4, the average progression rate across the Belfast target schools was 5.8% (with 7 schools having no pupils progressing that year) compared to an average of 36% of all school leavers in NI	97% of Step-Up Magee students for whom figures are available, have progressed directly to HE, FE or employment. Professor Colin Trotman's Evaluation of Step-Up Belfast (Draft, November 2009) notes that "96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to higher education"
Increasing retention	n/a	For Magee cohorts 1 – 6 (2002 - 2007) the retention rate for Step-Up students who progressed to HE is 91%; the retention rate for Step-Up students progressing to UU is 96%. These compare favourably with retention figures for UU overall and the UK average (83% for undergraduate students across the UK HE sector). The retention rate for Step-Up students entering UU is impressive, particularly given that both widening access groups are known to be associated with a higher non-completion rate, and that UU has a relatively high non-completion rate for its students. The mentoring programme at UU, which provides the students with intensive, sustained, one-to-one support once into the University is considered to be a key factor in this

Table 9-10

Impact of Step-Up – Summary

Metric	Baseline	Performance
		result.
Academic attainment at degree	n/a	Across Cohorts 1-4 of the Step-Up Magee programme, there are 187 students who have progressed to University and successfully completed degree programmes. 65% of students from the Magee programme have obtained either First or Upper Second class degrees. The Step-Up Belfast Programme has not yet been running long enough for students to have graduated from University

10   CONSULTATION

10.1 Introduction

In this section, we present a summary of key findings from consultation undertaken with:

- Stakeholders (interviews);
- School representatives (Heads of Science) involved in Step-Up (focus groups);
- School representatives involved in Step-Up and Discovering Queens (telephone surveys);
- Students who have benefited from Widening Participation initiatives (focus groups).

10.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Feedback from consultation with a number of stakeholders on the WP initiatives is presented in this section – **this is based on their perceptions and may not reflect the current reality.** Details of consultees are included in Appendix 1 Table 2.

- **Targeting of Programme**
  - There is a focus on socio-economic backgrounds and this is welcomed; this is felt to have been valuable in addressing the issue of participation from students from this background;
  - There is felt to be a clear link to poverty and social inclusion – families with children in poverty; lone parents (no skills, benefits, low paid jobs) are those who are targeted and who need the support. This is an ongoing need.
  - Some consultees felt that there was a particular issue (for society) with regard to underachievement in terms of educational attainment amongst young protestant males; the view expressed was that relatively few from this group progress to FE, HE and this has repercussions in terms of employment options and indeed life time opportunities; this is felt to be a group that requires specific attention;
  - There is felt to be a need to address the needs of: mature students, part time students, and particularly access to HE for those with no formal qualifications (work based learning etc). Another group which should benefit from WP are those who missed out on formal education (this leads to barriers to work, lack of skills, etc) – this is evident in terms of socio-economic disadvantage.

- **Impact of Programme on increasing participation in HE and in increasing retention amongst targeted groups**
  - Performance is recognised as being good with regard to participation in HE (higher than other parts of the UK); the investment in WP has been valuable
  - The initiatives are felt to be a step in the right direction re promoting social inclusion
  - Initiatives have been helpful in addressing the needs of securing initial access but in order to convert that into a successful graduate, there is a need for support for the students throughout their university career and perhaps greater flexibility when it comes to they way we teach and work with students.

- Retention is felt by many consultees to be a key area requiring attention – this remains a significant problem with NI universities not doing as well as some in their peer groups across the rest of the UK
- Ongoing support is important – tackling low self esteem and lack of confidence.

■ **Lessons learnt** – the following points were raised:

- The importance of raising aspirations;
- The focus on socio-economic disadvantage has been valuable;
- There is a need for support both in terms of initial access and also throughout study and it is important that this continues;
- The importance of buy in from parents
- WP is one of the more successful and helpful initiatives in HE for a great many years.
- In NI context, it has been successful in what it set out to achieve.

■ **Areas for improvement**

- Targeting
    o More focused / targeting of support - perhaps looking at the type of people in society who do not benefit from HE – more specific than the SEC currently used e.g.: addressing the needs of other groups such as: mature students / adult learners, part time, and particularly access to HE for those with no formal qualifications – work based learning etc. Also Travellers, ethnic minorities (raise awareness)
    o Need to look at links with other policy areas (Poverty Strategy, NEETs, etc.) to ensure that the best result is achieved by taking into account any cross-cutting policy aims.
- Disability
    o Support for those with disability – should be mainstreamed/ embedded not an "add-on"
    o Broad based initiatives – need to have a deliberate focus on disabilities
    o Centralised approach for WP as for disability would be helpful (QUB)
    o Broader issue –as a society – lack of visibility of disability in the workplace – not given opportunity to participate in the same way. Under-represented; barriers;
    o People with disabilities more likely to be in poverty – need to equip people to enter labour market and society
    o Need to take into account needs of those with mental health problems e.g. Aspergers, etc.
    o Transition Officers in Boards – who look after the needs of young people with disabilities – need to ensure they know about / promote HE as an option
    o Taster Days – re: accessibility – need to talk to Special Schools
    o Some difficulties in accessing Disability officers in QUB
- If aspirations are raised, then need to deliver on these i.e. qualification / degree leading to employment that is available locally
- Work in partnership with industry
- Regional Strategy welcomed – need for support from QUB and UU to be integrated

- Early intervention is important; need to embed the idea of HE at an early stage (primary school)

- Issue of access – especially for those in areas of disadvantage

- More resources?

- Accountability / transparency

10.3 Schools

10.3.1   Heads of Science (Step-Up) – Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held with teachers involved in the Step-Up Programme – 3 from the Magee programme and 9 from the Belfast programme.   Key issues raised in these discussions are highlighted in this section.

- **Attitude / Behaviour in schools re: HE**

  - Prior to Step-Up – In these schools, very few (and in some cases none) pupils were going on to HE; for those who did go, there tended to be a high drop out rate;

  - Since Step-Up – the current situation is that there is competition for places on the Step-Up programme; pupils are completing the programme and going on to HE and there is a positive reinforcement as these pupils act as role models for siblings and others in the schools. There are some cases where siblings have taken part in Step-Up.

- **Impacts**

  The main impacts are considered to be:

  - Improves educational attainment in schools;

  - Instils confidence/ increases self-esteem of pupils;

  - Increases participation in HE;

  - Increases retention in HE;

  - Social impacts e.g. raises pupils' awareness of others in a similar position to them; there are also secondary benefits of e.g.: gender mix / community background mix (as many of the schools are single identity, single gender);

  - Broadens pupils' horizons i.e. broader options in terms of careers;

  - Knock on effects on e.g. siblings / others in the schools; those taking part in Step-Up are positive role models in their own communities;

  - Positive links with industry / schools; this may provide employment options;

  - Continuing Professional Development for teachers.

- **Without Step-Up**

  In the absence of Step-Up, the teachers felt that the main differences would be:

  - Fewer pupils progressing to HE;

  - Schools would not be able to offer double award science;

  - Schools would not be able to offer "A" level lab facilities;

- There would be a detrimental impact on staff numbers (as some employed to teach via Step-Up).

■ **Strengths**

The main strengths of the programme are considered to be:

- A collegiate approach;

- Engagement with parents;

- Shared resources / facilities;

- Access to university equipment / facilities (up-to-date, broader range);

- The scale of the programme is felt to be about right in terms of capacity (14/15 per school);

- The support network in UU means those who study there settle in faster than they might otherwise do;

- Success is evident in that other schools are keen to be involved.

■ **Improvements**

The main improvements noted were:

- Broadening the scope of Step-Up beyond Science;

- Expanding the Step-Up programme to other schools.

10.3.2   School Representatives (Step-Up, Discovering Queens)

■ **Introduction**

Telephone surveys were undertaken with teachers involved in the Step-Up Programme and the Discovering Queen's Programme: 6 (Post-Primary) involved in Step-Up (Magee and Belfast) and 10 (including 3 Primary, 7 Post-Primary) involved in the Discovering Queen's Programme. Key issues arising from these consultations are highlighted in this section. Detailed results are included in Appendix 15.

■ **Pupil's behaviours and attitudes to HE prior to involvement in DQ / Step-Up**

- Aspirations - most indicated that this was low for a variety of reasons including lack of interaction with HE, pupil background, no family history of HE, and in some cases due to low self esteem (arising from having failed or not done the transfer test and therefore not gained entry to a Grammar School).

- Participation in HE – this was generally low in most schools and linked to low aspirations. This tended to be for a number of reasons which ranged from low confidence levels to having to move schools in order to gain a post-16 education.

- Retention – of those who responded, most indicated that after leaving school the retention within HE was left to the determination of the individual, with no real support being offered to them.

■ **Main barriers to participating in Higher Education**

- There were a variety of barriers mentioned; the most common included: cost (debt off-putting), social / family history (lack of understanding of what is involved, lack of experience of what is involved, not feeling it was for them), lack of confidence / self-esteem.

- ■ **Overall rating of Discovering Queen's / Step-Up**
  - High levels of satisfaction were recorded for both Step-Up and DQ;
  - The programmes were felt to be useful in providing an introduction to HE at an appropriate level for their target audience;
  - The involvement of individual staff members was highlighted as an important factor.

- ■ **Targeting (inclusion of appropriate groups, other under-represented groups that should be included)**
  - Generally targeting of the programmes was felt to be appropriate; it was felt to be important to give those from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to participate in HE.
  - There was recognition from some of the DQ respondents that the way in which that programme runs means that groups of pupils will be sent to participate in DQ activities. Whilst the groups include the "targeted" pupils, this targeting would not necessarily be obvious to them; this does however, mean that some pupils may be benefiting from the initiative where this is not necessarily required.
  - The importance of working with Non-Selective schools was mentioned.
  - A note of caution was sounded by one respondent with regard to rejection from the Step-Up Programme and the potential adverse effect of having "over-sold" the programme.

- ■ **Impact of Discovering Queen's / Step-Up**
  - Raising aspirations amongst targeted groups – Both programmes were felt to have had a positive impact in terms of increasing confidence, self-esteem and belief in the ability to go to HE.
  - Increasing Participation amongst targeted groups – The majority of respondents felt that the programmes had had a tangible impact on young people proceeding to HE.
  - Increasing Retention amongst targeted groups – Whilst the respondents were less likely to have first-hand knowledge on this point, many felt that once a pupil had gone to HE, they would see it through, having worked hard to get there, but that this would largely depend on the individual concerned.

- ■ **If the Discovering Queen's Programme(s) / Step-Up had not been available would you have achieved the same impacts?**
  - Yes (0 x DQ, 1 x Step-Up)
  - Yes but on a smaller scale[48] (5 x DQ, 2 x Step-Up)
  - Yes but participating in FE rather than HE (0 x DQ, 1 x Step-Up)
  - No (5 x DQ, 2 x Step-Up).

  Half of the DQ respondents would not have been able to achieve the same impacts in the absence of DQ; the other half would have been able to – but on a smaller scale. Of those who could not have achieved the same impacts without DQ, the key issues were resources – time, finances, expertise, transport, etc.

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[48] By smaller scale, we mean fewer pupils

One third of the Step-Up respondents would not have been able to achieve the same impacts in the absence of Step-Up (the key issue was resources – time, finance and expertise); half of respondents would have been able to achieve the same impacts either on a smaller scale or by participating in FE rather than HE. One of the Step-Up respondents indicated that they could achieve the same impact without Step-Up.

- **How schools would have achieved impacts in the absence of Discovering Queen's / Step-Up?**
  - Without DQ or Step-Up, those who said they would have achieved the same impact – on a smaller scale or through FE rather than HE - felt that the school would offer some support but recognised that this would be limited compared with what DQ or Step-Up provided.

- **Continued need for Discovering Queen's / Step-Up**
  - All of the respondents were in favour of DQ and Step-Up continuing
  - There was recognition that they provided opportunities to pupils who might not otherwise avail of them and that they were targeting particular groups.
  - The programmes provide an opportunity for pupils to develop knowledge skills and aptitudes in various areas.
  - It was considered important that this kind of aspiration raising work begins early enough to make a difference e.g. planting the idea of HE in primary school pupils' minds; providing enough information at the right time to inform GCSE choices, etc.

- **Key Strengths**
  - Discovering Queen's – strengths include: "real life" experience, "hands-on" experience; early intervention (to have a real influence), variety of interventions, relevance to NI curriculum, available year round, targeting the right people;
  - Step-Up – strengths include: programme management / coordination; programme quality; post-graduate mentors; "real life" experience of HE; staff training.

- **Areas for improvement**
  - Discovering Queen's – some areas for improvement include: the need to be more focused / specific subjects – can be too generic; more "hands-on" activities (learning by doing), more STEM subjects, ensuring the academic staff pitch the information at an appropriate level for their audience and more schools (subject to funding);
  - Step-Up – some areas for improvement include: More resources / funding to expand the programme to cater for a larger audience, other subjects and younger age groups. There was also felt to be scope to make improvements with timetabling / scheduling.

10.4 Students who have benefited from WP Initiatives

10.4.1 Introduction

Focus groups were held with some students who had benefited from Widening Participation interventions in QUB (6 students who had taken part in Head Start (part of DQ)) and St

Mary's University College (10 students). Key issues arising from these consultations are highlighted in this section.

10.4.2   QUB - Focus group

■ **Introduction**

The focus group included 6 students (5 x 1st year, 1 x 3rd year); prior to enrolling at QUB, all had been attending sixth form in a high school. All the students were made aware of the Widening Participation project through letters they received when they had received conditional offers from Queen's. Through WP all the students have availed of the Head Start project that brings them in to the university in advance of fresher's week. Head Start activities included:

- An introduction to Uni Life
- Sample Lecturers
- Note Taking tutorials
- Team and Confidence building exercises – Rock Climbing

The Head Start project enabled those who had come to university by themselves to meet people in the same situation as them giving them the feeling they are not alone. The WP staff also offered the students someone to turn to who knew how university life works. The presence of the staff offered a stable contact for the students if things get too tough for them.

■ **Attitude to HE**
- Prior to coming to Queen's – there was a consensus that university was a place that people from grammar schools go, a perception that was in most cases reinforced by the schools attended
- Since coming to Queen's – recognition there is less of a difference between those from grammar and those from high schools; university is a social and educational experience; it is not only for the very "academic".

■ **Barriers**
- Parental influence - some parents didn't seem to care and others put too much pressure on their children to succeed;
- Cost –this was not an issue for any of the students present – it is however believed that in the future it will become an issue for some;
- Ethos in school – in some schools the focus was on getting pupils through their GCSEs and no further; there was not a long term approach beyond that;
- Lack of support (from some teachers) re: UCAS forms

■ **Impact of Support**
- Provides a stable platform to build relationships and confidence in themselves; recognise that everyone comes to university with apprehensions.

■ **Without WP Support**
- Without WP support many of them may have considered dropping out;
- All 6 would still have come to University.

■ **Best Aspects**

- Overcomes potential isolation / know someone is always there if you need them.

- Enabled the students to stand on their own two feet a lot quicker than they might have done otherwise.

■ **Areas for Improvement**

- More visibility in schools

- More need for schools to push these projects forward

- More visibility in Queens, so that everyone knows they have support

10.4.3 St Mary's - Focus group

■ **Introduction**

The focus group included 10 students (2 x 1st year, 1 x 2nd year, 5 x 3rd year, 2 x 4th year); prior to enrolling at St Mary's UC, 2 had been working, 3 had been working part-time and attended part-time FE Access course and 5 had been at secondary school.

■ **Experience of WP**

All of the students had experienced WP activity in St Mary's UC in a variety of ways:

- 2 attendees identified themselves as having a disability.

   o One attendee has a visual impairment. He contacted St Mary's, QUB and UU prior to applying to HE (from secondary school). St Mary's was the only HEI to offer support from that point, inviting him to attend for a day and see the facilities and support offered to disabled students. He based his decision to attend St Mary's on this. The others indicated that there would be support once he was accepted.

   o One attendee has MS. She is a mature student, with family caring responsibilities and had financial concerns about attending HE. When she was accepted to St Mary's, she had concerns about the distance to walk between classes. She was referred to the WP Unit and they helped to rearrange her timetable to ensure that her daily classes were located on the same floor to minimise the distance she would have to walk each day. She also receives ongoing support with exams, she gets extra time, rest breaks and has a scribe provided. Last year, when her MS was particularly bad, St Mary's helped her when she missed classes and deadlines. She feels that without this support she would have been unable to complete that year and would not have had the motivation to continue with her degree.

- 3 attendees work on outreach activities:

   o One works with local high schools in Belfast – visiting schools and talking to groups of students (mostly boys) about what HE is like. The students he works with have never considered university as an option as they either have misconceptions about it (it's only for very academic people, it's too expensive, it's a waste of time), they haven't been given enough information about it (from the school or careers service) or they have been actively discouraged from considering (by teachers, parents or peers). This student attended a high school in West Belfast and feels that the pupils interact better with someone from a similar background.

   o Two attendees work as student ambassadors/mentors. They work as mentors to new students who have started in St Mary's who have been in

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touch with the WP Unit and may need extra support in settling in and remaining in study. In their mentoring role they also attend high schools and FE colleges (mostly to access course students) to talk about HE life. As student ambassadors they work on the Taster Days which gives secondary/FE students the chance to attend the College for a day to experience what it would be like. They show people round the College, accompany them to lectures and introduce them to staff. They believe that the Taster Days are extremely effective, especially when parents attend with children or spouses/partners attend with mature students.

- The remaining attendees have experienced WP in several ways:

  o Several who recently left high school in Belfast and three who recently completed an Access Course, remembered someone coming from St Mary's and QUB to talk to them about HE. Two attended a Taster Day at St Mary's which convinced them to apply.

  o One attendee is the main carer for her siblings. She has received a wide range of support from the WP Unit. She doesn't believe that she would have been able to remain on her course without their support and understanding.

  o A number of other attendees also received support with family situations (which they didn't elaborate on) and similarly, feel that they would have been unable to complete their studies without it.

- ■ **Attitude to HE**

  - *Prior to coming to St Mary's attendees felt HE was:*

    o For people who had high A level grades

    o For middle-upper class people

    o An impersonal institution where people are just a number

  - *Since being in HE they have realised that:*

    o It is possible to get into HE with lower A levels than expected/through access courses etc

    o It is available to everyone and you won't be treated differently because of where you come from

    o St Mary's is like a small community where everyone knows each other, staff and students, and everyone is welcomed (attendees believe that this might be quite specific to St Mary's, a number of attendees have friends who have been/are at QUB and they find it very impersonal)

- ■ **Barriers to HE**

  - **Cost:** The majority of attendees expressed some concern about the cost of HE, but the benefits are assumed to outweigh these in the long run. The attendees who were mature students and had been working prior to HE were more likely to report cost as a barrier.

  - **Lack of information**: Attendees felt that, when at school, they received little information on what options were open to them. If they were told about HE at all, it was only about QUB and UU and they were told that high grades were needed to get in. Many didn't have HE presented as an option at any stage during their time at school.

  - **Social influences**: A number of attendees (mostly those who are from West Belfast) felt that influences from their lives – parents, friends, teachers, community – had impacted on their decision to attend HE. The majority of people in their communities

have no academic qualifications and attendees spoke of there being a sense that attending university is 'having ideas above your station' or that 'you'd think you were better than others'.

- **Lack of aspiration**: Many attendees feel that they had a lack of aspiration instilled in them as children, which they have overcome themselves with time and experience. They feel that they were treated like they 'weren't good enough' to go into HE, mostly by the schools they attended. That is why they were never presented with HE as an option. A number of attendees agree that this treatment went back as far as primary school. This belief has been confirmed to them since doing placements in primary schools as a part of their course. They see children in primary schools in middle class areas being primed for HE and it is discussed openly with them, whereas children in schools in working class areas are treated completely differently.

■ **Impact of Support / Without WP Support**

All agreed that they would have dropped out of their course had it not been for this support.

■ **Best Aspects**

All attendees were very positive about St Mary's and the support they have received prior to, and whilst attending.

■ **Areas for Improvement**

Some suggested improvements were:

- Encourage more West Belfast people to enrol. A number of attendees feel that this is very important; however, they recognise all the outreach work the WP Unit does with the local high schools.

- Encourage more parents to get involved as this is key to changing perceptions and getting more children to consider HE as a viable option

11 BENCHMARKING

11.1 Introduction

This section considers how government supported Widening Participation activities are implemented in three other regions – England, Scotland and ROI. Specifically, we look at the activities funded and their impacts on the intended target groups.

11.2 Higher Education Funding Council for England

11.2.1 Introduction

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was set up by the Government in 1992 as a non-departmental public body. Its role is to distribute public money to universities and colleges in England to provide higher education teaching, research and related activities

Widening participation is a long standing policy commitment within HEFCE which is reflected in one of its core strategic aims: "*to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it".* In its Strategic Plan 2006-11, HEFCE set out the following objectives regarding this aim:

■ To increase and widen participation in HE;
■ To stimulate and sustain new sources of demand for HE among under-represented communities and to influence supply accordingly;
■ To improve opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone who can benefit; and
■ To embed Widening Participation in the corporate policy and practice of HEIs.

These objectives are complemented by the following Key Performance Targets set for the Widening Participation and Fair Access strand of the Strategic Plan 2006-11:

■ To increase participation in HE in line with the funding and policies set out in the Secretary of State's annual grant letter.
■ To increase the proportion of students (full-time and part-time, both young and mature) from under-represented groups in HE.

HEFCE's Strategic Plan also identified the following key risks to achieving the strategic objectives under Widening Participation and fair access:

■ That the supply of places created to meet the participation target does not match the demand from students in terms of level, mode (full-time or part-time) or location;
■ That there is insufficient demand for HE places from 18-30 year-olds to meet the participation target;
■ That there is insufficient increase in representation from the under-represented socio-economic groups. This could be due to: higher fees deterring debt-averse students; poor information, advice and guidance; Widening Participation being marginalised in some universities and colleges; insufficient growth; and/or those universities and colleges most likely to widen participation struggling in the new market conditions; and

- That there is no increase in the rate of progression to HE for those with vocational qualifications. This could be due to: a failure of Lifelong Learning Networks to recruit students, or to agree or operate progression agreements that guarantee progression for learners on vocational programmes; a failure in other collaborations between HEIs and FECs; or a failure of HEIs and/or FECs to make vocational opportunities available over a lifetime.

11.2.2   *Activities to Widen Participation*

Widening participation activities are intended to address the large discrepancies in the take-up of HE opportunities between different social groups. Under-representation of different social groups in HE is closely connected with broader issues of equity and social inclusion, so HEFCE is concerned to ensure equality of opportunity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, disabled students, mature students, women and men, all racial groups, mature students and part-time learners. HEFCE pursues its Widening Participation objectives through three main strands of activity:

1.   Increasing demand for HE and the opportunities to access it, including through collaborative measures:

- Working with the sector and other stakeholders to stimulate demand for HE among those from under-represented groups, raising aspirations and increasing the numbers qualified for entry;
- Providing funding to Aimhigher, a national programme to widen participation in HE by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of people from under-represented groups (refer to Section 11.2.9 in which we describe the Aimhigher programme in more detail);
- Encouraging HEIs to develop further their links with target schools and colleges to create structural, sustainable relationships that operate at the levels of governance, the curriculum and student support;
- Working with professional bodies, learned societies and others to encourage demand for subjects, such as science and mathematics, which are strategically important to the economy and society but may be vulnerable because of a mismatch between supply and demand; particularly seeking to increase demand from groups who are under-represented in these subjects; and
- Supporting, together with the other UK funding bodies, the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme, which offers to the HE sector a central source of expertise and advice on admissions processes and will take a leading role in the development and dissemination of best practice in this area.

2.   Offering new opportunities for progression on vocational courses and for lifelong learning:

- Making learning opportunities more accessible and more attractive to the people least likely to participate in HE, particularly by supporting initiatives that encourage more flexible, innovative, and student-centered provision;

- Working more closely with groups concerned with skills needs, such as Regional Skills Partnerships and Sector Skills Councils, who share HEFCE's concerns about growth and diversity;
- Working with the sector and with partnerships such as Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks[49] to foster close links between universities, colleges and schools to ensure that young people have coherent and clear pathways to HE;
- Working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Skills Funding Agency to make the routes into and through HE clearer and more coherent for learners on vocational programmes;
- Working to strengthen HE in FECs, both to improve local access to HE and to provide opportunities for higher-level learning throughout life; and
- Providing more opportunities for HE throughout people's lives through working with the Skills Funding Agency, professional bodies, Sector Skills Councils and others to encourage more adults to take part in lifelong learning, including in the workplace.

3.   Working with HEIs to embed Widening Participation in their corporate policy and practice.

- From June 2009, HEIs (and directly HEFCE-funded FECs) are required to submit Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSAs). The assessments provide an opportunity for HEIs and colleges to bring together all they do in Widening Participation in an overall statement. This allows institutions to demonstrate their commitment to Widening Participation in the context of their individual mission, culture and practice. As part of the assessments, institutions are required to append their Access Agreements. These agreements are a requirement of the Office for Fair Access for universities and colleges that charge fees above the standard level, setting out how universities and colleges promote and safeguard fair access. OFFA has a statutory duty to ensure that access agreement meet legislative requirements. HEFCE work with OFFA to ensure that WPSAs demonstrate the wider context within which the access agreement operates.

Disabled students are an important part of the Widening Participation agenda. HEFCE provides a dedicated funding stream for universities and colleges to recognise the additional costs involved in recruiting and supporting disabled students. In addition, HEFCE has exempted students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance from the policy to phase out funding for students studying for a qualification that is equivalent to, or lower than, a qualification that they have already achieved.

11.2.3   Funding for Widening Participation

HEFCE allocated £143 million directly to institutions (and directly funded higher education colleges in England for Widening Participation in 2010-11. Funding for Widening Participation is broken down into the following two elements:

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[49] Lifelong Learning Networks bring FECs and HEIs together and are a key driver for improving progression opportunities, aiming to put learners on vocational programmes on the same footing as learners following more traditional academic pathways. All English regions now have at least one Lifelong Learning Network. The Networks are working closely with Sector Skills Councils and employers, and with local Learning and Skills Councils and Regional Skills Partnerships.

Table 11-1

HEFCE Funding to Widening Participation, allocations for 2010-11

Funding element	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Funding for widening access (A)	£61.6m	£68.6m	£130.2m
Funding for students with disabilities (B)	-	-	£13.2m
Overall total	**£61.6m**	**£68.6m**	**£143.4m**
Source: HEFCE website			

HEFCE provide Widening Participation funding to individual HEIs as part of their block grant. Each institution determines how to spend their funding allocation.

11.2.3.1 (A) Widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

This allocation is intended to meet some of the additional costs incurred by institutions for outreach activity to raise aspirations and attainment among potential students from under-represented groups (i.e. young people from lower socio-economic groups living in poor neighbourhoods or people from areas which are less occupationally advantaged). The funding method for widening access to these groups is allocated for undergraduates according to weightings based on:

- young HE participation by ward for full-time undergraduates under 21 on entry; or
- the proportion of 16-74 year olds with a HE qualification by ward for part-time and mature undergraduates.

Wards are ranked by either the participation rates of under 21s or the proportion of 16-74 year-olds with a HE qualification into five participation quintiles. The quintiles are numbered 1 (lowest young HE participation rates/ proportion of 16-74 year-olds with a HE qualification) to 5 (highest young HE participation rates/ proportion of 16-74 year-olds with a HE qualification). Each new entrant is weighted according to the quintile of their postcode, quintiles with a lower number are given a higher weighting.

The majority of the 132 HEIs in England receive a proportion of the funding (HEIs that predominantly focus on postgraduate education will not receive any as the funding is only based on undergraduate intake). The HEI's funding allocation is based on their intake of students from these wards and their weighting, i.e. disadvantage is measured as students who live in the 40% most deprived wards (both quintile 1 and 2 receive funding but at different weights). Each HEI determines how to spend their allocation and the funded activities vary from one institution to another. Many HEIs use the funding to cover the costs of structures and supports in the institution to administer Widening Participation activities. Such structures commonly take the form of a dedicated member(s) of staff to work on Widening Participation and retention (this role could be based in a number of different departments with an institution such as Student Services, Marketing, Administration etc). Some institutions also provide activities and events that are aimed at parents and teachers and, increasingly, schemes that are aimed at younger children, from primary age upwards. Many of these activities are focused on providing information and experiences which allow people to make informed

choices and decisions regarding their future progression opportunities to HE. Commonly funded activities include:

- summer schools;
- master classes;
- student mentoring and ambassador schemes;
- school and college visits to universities;
- university visits to schools and colleges;
- taster days in universities;
- study skills;
- information and guidance sessions;
- the provision of bursaries and scholarships; and
- outreach work with adults through workforce development activities, e.g. offering CPD and part-time courses.

11.2.3.2 (B) Widening access and improving provision for disabled students

The allocation reflects the proportion of students that each HEI recruits who are in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This applies to undergraduate and post-graduate students. To calculate this allocation, HEFCE takes into account the number of students at each institution in receipt of the disabled students' allowance (DSA). The allocation is used to fund the additional cost of supporting students with disabilities.

11.2.4 Activities to Improve Retention

Ensuring student success is also a fundamental aspect of HEFCE's aims. There is a link between a student's likelihood of completing their course and their prior educational attainment levels and age. Students from a lower socio-economic background are more likely to have a lower educational attainment level and therefore, statistically more likely to leave their studies early. However, in acknowledgement that funding for improving retention is used to support the learning of all students and that improving retention is often achieved through enhancing the student experience the improving retention element of the WP allocation was transferred to a new strategic allocation in 2009-10.

11.2.5 Funding for Improving Retention

Funding for improving retention is now part of the 'teaching enhancement and student success' allocation (introduced in 2009-10). This allocation brings together funding previously associated with the allocation for improving retention and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. Allocations for 2010-11 total £269 million.

Table 11-2

HEFCE Funding to Improving Retention (under the 'Teaching and Student Access' allocation) 2010-11

Funding element	Full-time	Part-time	Total

Funding for improving retention	£174.3m	£54.2m	£228.5m
Research-informed teaching	-	-	£10.1m
Institutional learning & teaching strategies	-	-	£30.5m
Overall total	**£174.3m**	**£54.2m**	**£269.1m**
Source: HEFCE website			

Funding for the improving retention strand of 'teaching enhancement and student success' is allocated to each HEI based on a weighting of undergraduate new entrants according to prior educational attainment and age. New entrants are assigned to one of six risk categories (based on a number of categories related to their likelihood to leave education early) which are then weighted. Younger students (under 21) with a low prior educational attainment level are the highest risk.

The majority of the 132 HEIs in England receive a proportion of the improving retention funding (again, HEIs that predominantly focus on postgraduate education will not receive any as the funding is only based on undergraduates). Each HEI determines how to spend their allocation. It is often used to fund the Institution's internal provision of support to those students who are most at risk of dropping out. Many HEIs have developed internal monitoring systems that follow students at risk of non-completion. This process can flag early warning signs enabling the institution to intervene at an early stage before the student leaves their course.

11.2.6 Impacts

As Widening Participation funding is allocated as a part of HEI's block grant, it can be difficult to separate out the impacts of the Widening Participation activities from institutes' other activities to improve equality of access. The National Audit Office report, 'Widening Participation in Higher Education' (June 2008) and the National Council for Educational Excellence's recommendations (October 2008) have both highlighted that there is a current gap in knowledge about what impact institutional Widening Participation funds are having, across all institutions.

Two Key Performance Targets and associated measures are set for the Widening Participation and fair access strand of the Strategic Plan 2006-11:

■ To increase participation in HE in line with the funding and policies set out in the Secretary of State's annual grant letter. The HE participation is measured by the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR); and
■ To increase the proportion of students (full-time and part-time, both young and mature) from under-represented groups in HE. This is measured by Table series T1 and T2 of the performance indicators produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

The table below shows the HEIPR for English domiciled first time participants in HE Courses at UK HEIs from 2006-07 to 2008-09.

Table 11-3

HEIPR for English domiciled first time participants in HE (2006-07 to 2008-09)

Academic year	HEIPR (male and female)

2006-07	42%
2007-08	43%
2009-10	45%
Source: BIS (2010): Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic years 2006-07 to 2008-09 (Provisional)	

The rate of first time participation in HE has increase by one percentage point each academic year from 2006-07 to 2009-10. The target of 'moving towards 50% participation by 2010' was achieved.

The following table shows the proportion of new entrants (full-time and part-time, both young and mature) from under-represented groups in HE as measured by the Higher Education Statistics Agency Performance Indicators (as measured by those from low participation neighbourhoods and prior HE experience for mature students).

Table 11-4

Participation of young and mature new entrants from underrepresented groups (2006-07 to 2008-09) – England

	2006-07	2007-08	2009-10
Young full-time undergraduate entrants from low participation neighbourhoods	9.4%	10.3%	10.6%
Mature full-time undergraduate entrants with no previous HE & from low participation neighbourhood	11.4%	11.6%	11.8%
Young part-time undergraduate entrants from low participation neighbourhoods	13.0%	12.4%	13.4%
Mature part-time undergraduate entrants with no previous HE & from low participation neighbourhood	6.7%	6.8%	6.8%
Source: HESA: Widening participation of under-represented groups (tables T1, T2) 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2009-10			

HESA data shows that the proportion of new entrants for young and mature underrepresented groups has increased by a small margin over the period from 2006-07 to 2009-10. The proportion of young full-time undergraduate entrants from low participation neighbourhoods has seen the largest increase by 1.2 percentage points.

A 2010 HEFCE report (Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England) reports on the proportion of young people who enter higher education at age 18 or 19, the 'young participation rate'. The analysis used an area-based approach, drawing on the full range of HE student datasets and child benefit data, to provide data on the HE participation rates of those in the most disadvantaged communities over the last 15 years. The report found that there have been increases in the proportion of young people from the most disadvantaged areas entering HE since the mid-1990s with the most significant increases occurring since 2004-05. The report shows the following data for young participants (those who enter higher education at age 18 or 19):

■ Young participation has increased from 30% in 1994-95 to 36% by 2009-10, making young people today over 20% more likely to go on to higher education than in the mid-1990s;

■ The proportion of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas who enter higher education has increased by around 30% over the five years to 2009-10, and by 50% over

the 15 years to 2009-10. The proportion has increased from 13% to 19% from 1994-95 to 2009-10.

- However, for young people living in the most disadvantaged 20% of areas, HE participation rates remain much lower than the national average. The proportion of young people from the least disadvantaged areas has increased from 55% to 57% from 1994-95 to 2009-10.

11.2.7 *Access Agreements*

As of 2006-07, HEIs are required to submit annual Access Agreements to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)[50]. Access Agreements are a legislative requirement which set out each HEI's tuition fee limit, their plans for bursaries and other financial support, and, in some cases, their outreach work for under-represented groups[51]. All publicly funded providers of HE in England that wish to charge tuition fees above the basic level have to submit an Access Agreement to OFFA for approval. OFFA monitors their progress in meeting their Access Agreement commitments on an annual basis.

OFFA provides support to HEIs in producing their Access Agreements. The aim of this is to build capacity within institutions so that they are able to evaluate their own work and produce evidence to show their effectiveness, and also to mainstream Widening Participation activities into HEIs' work. HEFCE believe that this will become increasingly important as education funding is increasingly constrained and HEIs need to provide evidence of their value for money.

In addition to Access Agreements, HEFCE introduced Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSA) in 2009-10. There was a need to address information gaps created by institutions only reporting on access measures and expenditure under Access Agreements. WPSAs were designed to bring together information on institutions' widening participation, fair access and admissions policies to provide a fuller picture of widening participation activity and expenditure. In requesting an assessment rather than a strategy, HEFCE are also inviting institutions to critically and strategically review their progress to date to determine future priorities and ensure that Widening Participation could be prioritised effectively. WPSAs provide an opportunity for institutions to set out all that they are doing in Widening Participation and how Widening Participation is embedded within their culture, policy and practice.

WPSAs are intended to include the HEIs' Access Agreements so that the two documents can cross-refer to each other and a range of other strategic and policy priorities across institutions. This will enable OFFA and HEFCE to work together more closely in understanding the full extent of institutions' Widening Participation activity and commitment.

OFFA published a report in April 2010 (What more can be done to widen access to highly selective universities?) focused on what more can be done to improve access to selective

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[50] OFFA is an independent, non departmental public body. Its role is to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for lower income and other under-represented groups following the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2006-07.

[51] In 2008-09 Access agreements provided over £312m in bursaries and scholarships to students from low income backgrounds and other under-represented groups and £38m in additional outreach expenditure.

institutions as widening participation to the sector as a whole has not been replicated in the most selective institutions. The report states that while there have been substantial increases in participation among the least advantaged 40% of young people across higher education overall compared to the mid-1990s, the participation rate among the same group of young people at the top third of selective universities has remained almost flat over the same period.

The report states that the single most important factor determining the probability of a student obtaining a place on one of the most academically demanding degree courses is the strength of the student's A level (or equivalent) results. As there is a clear correlation between advantage and educational attainment, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are not only less likely to progress in post-16 education, but those who do are less likely to achieve high grades at A levels than students from advantaged backgrounds. It also goes on to describe the importance of selective universities working with schools and colleges to identify the most able disadvantaged pupils and provide information, advice and guidance and other outreach and support sufficient to raise aspiration and attainment so that they are more likely to apply to a highly selective university.

The report states that there is limited evaluation and evidence around widening participation activities, particularly activities designed to raise aspirations generally. This is partly due to the inherent difficulty in disaggregating particular programmes from the multiplicity of factors that influence decisions about whether and where to attend university, as well as difficulties arising from the long-term nature of some outreach work and the fact that many outreach programmes are relatively new. Many institutions report that they have difficulty evaluating the impact of their schemes as they are unable easily to track students who ultimately don't apply to their own institution, but may apply elsewhere.

The report considers the activities undertaken by HEIs to widen participation and makes the following recommendations:

1. summer schools targeted at the "most able least likely" are now adopted by all highly selective institutions;

2. HEFCE examine the benefits of encouraging the highest achievers from Aimhigher target groups to attend summer schools and comparable events organised and delivered by highly selective universities;

3. selective institutions increase the coverage and volume of successful extended outreach programmes, including the most intensive activities targeted at their most able students. These programmes should be co-ordinated so as to avoid duplicating the efforts of other institutions and organisations and should target students from at least early in year 9 – before students choose what to study for their GCSEs;

4. selective universities should review the pattern of their expenditure on bursaries, scholarships and additional outreach, to improve the way they target students and ensure money is spent on effective initiatives;

5. information on how well universities have met their own WP targets in respect of both applications *and actual entrants* to their particular institution should be put in the public domain;

6. HEFCE and OFFA continue to promote good practice in evaluating and monitoring widening participation;

7. selective universities evaluate and take further steps to ensure that the information on their bursary packages is easily accessible, clear, well understood, and available early enough to influence potential applicant's decisions about where to seek to go to university;

8. DCSF should consider further whether one of the measures by which all schools, including 11–16 schools, are publicly evaluated should be a progression measure relating to the performance of (former) pupils at 18+; and

9. selective universities, preferably in groups, directly employ appropriate staffing to supplement, on a peripatetic basis, the academic and financial advice and guidance available within the school and college sector, particularly at the ages of 14 and 16.

11.2.8   *Lessons arising from previous evaluations*

HEFCE published a review of their Widening Participation activities in 2006. The review presented the following conclusions:

- Widening Participation is a long-term commitment because the under-representation it addresses is deeply rooted in more general socio-economic disadvantage. The level of funding is important but the way a commitment is sustained over the long term is probably more important still;
- The commitment of institutions to Widening Participation, and the embedding of Widening Participation in the culture, mission and management of institutions is a high priority objective. The review underlined the progress made over the previous five years in winning the consent and then the support of HEIs to Widening Participation; and
- There is a weakness in the evidence base for the impact of Widening Participation. Research projects could be used to explore some aspects of this and the relationship between discrete interventions at institution-level and outcomes at the level of the sector and society as a whole.

In addition, HEFCE report that the WPSAs that all HEIs delivered in June 2009, demonstrated the high level of commitment to Widening Participation that exists across the sector and provided an indication of the scale of the investment institutions had made to this area of activity over and above the funding provided through Widening Participation specific funding streams. A review of the documents is to be published by Action on Access.

11.2.9   *'Aimhigher' Programme*

Aimhigher is a national England-wide programme which aims to widen participation in HE by raising the aspirations and developing the abilities of young people from under-represented communities. Aimhigher is jointly funded by HEFCE, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department of Health and the Skills Funding Agency.

11.2.9.1 Rationale for the programme, its aim(s) and objectives

The role of Aimhigher is to:

- Raise aspirations and motivation to enter HE among young people from under-represented groups;
- Raise attainment of potential students from under-represented groups so that they gain the academic or vocational qualifications that will enable them to enter HE;
- Strengthen progression routes into HE via vocational courses; and
- Offer information, advice and guidance to potential students and their teachers and families.

11.2.9.2 Target Groups

The Aimhigher programme targets its activities and interventions at learners from the following priority groups:

- lower socio-economic groups (i.e. groups 4-8 in the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, NS-SEC);
- disadvantaged socio-economic groups who live in areas of relative deprivation where participation in HE is low;
- 'looked after' children in the care system; and
- disabled learners or learners with a specific learning difference.

Aimhigher plays a key role in bringing together practitioners from across education sectors to widen participation. As such, Aimhigher partnerships work with the following groups:

- Local Authorities
- Teachers and tutors in schools, academies and colleges;
- Aimhigher co-ordinators in schools, colleges and universities;
- Connexions and careers advisers in schools, academies and colleges;
- employers; and
- other training provider

Aimhigher also works with learners' parents and carers.

11.2.9.3 Delivery method

Aimhigher encompasses a wide range of activities to engage and motivate learners who have the potential to enter HE but may be under-achieving, undecided or lacking in confidence. The programme particularly focuses on young people from lower socio-economic groups and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in areas of relative deprivation where participation in HE is low.

Most Aimhigher activities are developed and delivered at an area level, which allows them to be tailored to the needs of specific communities within regions – there are a total of 42 area partnerships throughout England (these are made up of representatives from local schools, colleges, HEIs, local authorities and other key stakeholders within each area). Each of the 42 areas has a lead HEI, which is responsible for ensuring full accountability for funding. Each lead HEI recruits an Aimhigher Co-ordinator, who acts as the principal organiser of Aimhigher

activity in the area. Although there are no regional Aimhigher partnerships in England, some activities are delivered collaboratively between area partnerships.

The following activities represent the core programme offering and take place in all areas of the country:

- Campus visits;
- Mentoring;
- Aimhigher Associates
- Master classes, including subject enrichment or revision sessions;
- Student ambassadors;
- Information, advice and guidance;
- Summer schools and HE-related residential experiences; and
- School or college based interventions.

11.2.9.4 Programme Spend

The Aimhigher programme is jointly funded by the HEFCE and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. A total of £252.8million has been allocated to the Aimhigher programme for 2008-2011. This is split between the 42 area partnerships and is allocated to each lead HEI. Funding is distributed according to a formula that takes into account the number of young people living in areas with low young HE participation rates or low attainment at GCSEs as well as an ordered migration from previous funding levels under different programmes. This funding is additional to the WP premium funding.

11.2.10   Impacts

In 2008, HEFCE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake evaluative research into the contribution that Aimhigher is making to learner attainment and progression. An interim report was published in 2009 which stated that, whilst the extent and quality of data has greatly improved, data collection and collation is not consistent enough to enable nationally comparative data analysis of the Aimhigher programme at this stage. HEFCE has launched a data survey to establish how much data is held by partnerships and how it is held. This will enable a consistent collation and collection method to be considered. Additionally, HEFCE has developed a linking methodology which brings together the National Pupil Database (NPD), the Individual Learning Record (ILR) and UCAS records which allows a longitudinal view to be taken of the progression of Aimhigher students. This method has been successfully applied to an analysis of the impact of Aimhigher Summer Schools where consistent data has been collected.

Funding for summer schools represents about 6 per cent of the total funding for Aimhigher. Between 2003-04 and 2008-09 over 51,000 young people participated on a summer school, representing about 1 in 80 members of the young population. Those most likely to participate on summer schools are young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example those who attend secondary schools with the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils (as measured by free school meal claims) are 5 times more likely to participate on a summer school than those who attend schools with the lowest proportions of disadvantaged pupils. Twice as many girls have participated on summer schools than boys. The distribution of

participants on the Aimhigher Associates scheme is similar to that of the summer school programme, with higher proportions coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, although the ratio of girls to boys is very close to unity.

Attending a summer school is associated with elevated rates of progression into higher education, with summer school participants being on average twice as likely to apply, and be accepted, as non-participants. Although on average summer school participants achieve higher levels of attainment than non-participants, the increased likelihood of progression to HE persists even when this, and various measures of disadvantage, are taken into account.

HEFCE also commissioned NFER to undertake a further, qualitative review of the impact of Aimhigher. The aim of the research was to assess the contribution that Aimhigher is making to improvements in learner attainment and progression. Specifically, the research brief was to explore:

- The effect of key activities on learner motivation and attainment
- The extent to which Aimhigher activities have been incorporated into school, college and academy schedules
- The effect of the programme as a whole on learner outcomes
- The benefits of the partnership approach in securing the aims of the Healthcare strand
- Aimhigher staff and learner perceptions on the contribution that Aimhigher makes to positive learner outcomes.

The report has three key findings:

- The quantitative evidence provided by partnerships suggested that some target groups of Aimhigher participants had improved outcomes in terms of raised aspirations, raised attainment and improved progression. Due to the relatively small scale of local Aimhigher evaluations and the difficulty of establishing causal links between activities and learner outcomes, however, quantitative reports provided by partnerships showed an association between learner participation and improved outcomes rather than conclusive evidence of impact;
- The supporting qualitative evidence showed high levels of learner enjoyment and reflected an increased learner interest in entering higher education. Studies that focused on the contribution of Learning Mentors concluded that they had a positive impact on mentees' attainment and progression; and
- The evidence provided by colleges, schools and academies showed that involvement with Aimhigher was associated with higher than predicted attainment at GCSE and greater confidence amongst learners that they were able to achieve. One-to-one relationships with Learning Mentors and Aimhigher Associates were seen to be critical in encouraging and supporting learners.

11.3 Scottish Funding Council

11.3.1 Introduction

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Scottish Government and was established in 2005. The Scottish Funding Council invests public funds (more than £1.7 billion in 2009-10) in Scotland's colleges and universities for teaching and learning, research and other activities in support of Scottish government priorities.

SFC set out its main aims and objectives in its Corporate Plan 2009-12. This document highlights seven broad outcomes that SFC aims to achieve in partnership with colleges, universities and other strategic stakeholders.

Under Outcome 2 'access, inclusion and progression', SFC seeks to achieve a continuum of learning provision into, within and between schools, colleges and universities which:

■ Has multiple entry and exit points, and which provides access to and progression through learning opportunities in ways, times and places that meet individuals' needs, including the particular needs of people seeking work in the economic downturn;

■ Allows individuals over time to develop their skills and capacities for learning without the need for unnecessary repeated study;

■ Is underpinned by a system of financial support for students that targets support where it is most needed, so that, as far as practicable, opportunities to learn are determined solely by a person's capacities and ambition; and

■ Continues to address uneven patterns of participation in education and promotes equality and diversity.

SFC does not set specific targets relating to Widening Participation in its corporate plan. Instead it measures its performance against the Scottish National Outcomes Framework. The relevant National Indicator is to:

■ Increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scottish publicly funded schools) in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment or training).

SFC address this by supporting improved access into, and progress through, post-school education and high quality teaching in colleges and universities.

11.3.2 Activities

SFC's actions for supporting the broad outcomes related to Widening Participation are as follows:

■ To support the Scottish Government's More Choices, More Chances Strategy – aimed at reducing the number of young people not in, or at risk of becoming disengaged from, education, training or employment. Particular attention will be given to current and former care leavers;

■ To work with colleges, universities and Skills Development Scotland to improve data-sharing on young people who withdraw from learning early;

- To work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that appropriate programmes of study are provided to students with severe and complex needs;
- To work with the Wider Access Regional Forums in Scotland to ensure a co-ordinated and effective national programme that provides greater equality of access to learning for those who are under-represented;
- To work with local authorities to develop existing schools-colleges programmes– ensuring that these are properly accredited and link with programmes available in post-compulsory education;
- Using the SFC Horizon Fund for Universities, the SFC will incentivise the development of articulation – which will allow students to move seamlessly from colleges into universities – particularly, though not exclusively, around regional hubs;
- To support initiatives in colleges and universities aimed at improving the retention of students and their progression to further learning opportunities;
- To work with Skills Development Scotland to ensure appropriate access to skills training, opportunities for re-skilling and continuing professional development for people adversely affected by the economic downturn in all sections of society;
- To encourage the development of opportunities for part-time study and work with other organisations to address barriers to undertaking such study;
- To continue to support the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and support and assist colleges and universities to develop courses that have flexible entry and exit points; and
- To continue to promote internationally the transferability and recognition of Scottish qualifications, student mobility and further and higher education more generally, by engaging in the Bologna and the Bruges-Copenhagen processes.

11.3.3 SFC's Widening Participation Strategy

Underpinning the 'access, inclusion and progression' outcomes in SFC's Corporate Plan is their strategy for Widening Participation, *'Learning For All'*. This was first published in 2005 by the Widening Participation Review Group of the previous Scottish Further Education Funding Council and Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. The strategy set out priorities for widening access in both FE and HE for the following five years and beyond, to provide a framework for stakeholders to use to develop and implement widening access action plans.

The strategy called for a new integrated national campaign, with co-operation from all relevant stakeholders. It highlighted the need to monitor changing patterns of FE and HE participation over time, in order to react quickly with appropriate policy interventions.

11.3.4 Funding for Widening Participation

From 2010, SFC will allocate strategic funding for all equality, access and inclusion programmes for the 19 HEIs via the Horizon Fund for Universities (HFU)[52], which means all

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[52] SFC created the HFU to support outcomes in the seven priority areas set out in its Corporate Plan 2009-12: employability and skills intervention; access and progression; knowledge exchange; specialism and diversity; collaboration; world-class research; and effective institutions.

existing grant lines are under review and are likely to change from 2011-12. The following table shows the funding allocated to Widening Participation activities in 2010-11.

Table 11-5

Funding to Widening Participation allocations for 2010-11

Funding element	Total
Widening Access and Retention Premium (A)	£10,379,000
Disabled Students Premium (B)	£2,599,000
Part-time Incentive Premium (C)	£8,459,000
Source: SFC (2010): Horizon Fund for Universities	

11.3.4.1 (A) Widening Access and Retention Premium for HEIs

SFC introduced the Widening Access and Retention Premium (WARP) in 2007 to help HEIs to improve the retention rates of students from deprived backgrounds in Scotland. The purpose of the WARP is to support HEIs in improving the experience for learners with potential from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that these learners are more likely to complete their courses successfully.

SFC uses the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to measure deprivation. This divides Scotland into 6,505 data zones by postcodes which are then ranked by deprivation. These are then grouped into quintiles, the most-deprived 20% make up the target group for SFC's widening access activities. The WARP is allocated based on the median percentile point of an institutions' student population on the SIMD, thereby targeting resources more closely to those with the biggest retention challenges.

Institutions receiving at least £3000k for academic year 2007-08 and/or for whom the WARP exceeded 1% of the Council's total grant for teaching, would be required to provide SFC with retention strategies to include the use of this funding and its intended purpose. SFC provide support to HEIs to help them develop their collection and use of retention data to provide a better focus on outcomes. Specifically, they are asked to provide evidence on:

- the extra activity supported by WARP since 2007; and
- the impact of this additional activity and funding on retention rates among target groups.

The original allocation of the WARP was designed to give higher levels of premium to institutions with the highest proportion of students from deprived areas, but all 19 HEIs received an allocation of some level. The allocation method has resulted in small allocations to institutions with proportionately low levels of recruitment of students from deprived backgrounds and with low drop-out rates.

Because the aim of the HFU is to prioritise funding where it will have the most impact, the WARP was removed from two HEIs that have low participation from students from the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods, high retention rates and which received small proportions of premium and have never been required to separately report on the grant. The HEIs affected are the Universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews (these HEIs lost approximately £170k and £40k respectively). In 2010-11, the 17 remaining HEIs continue to receive the WARP. Each

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HEI determines how to spend their allocation and the activities supported vary. General activities that are commonly funded include outreach work linked to better student induction, open days and internal infrastructure enhancements to better support target students. From 2011-12, the Council plans to re-focus this funding, ceasing the premium, to create specific Horizon Funding agreements with those institutions facing the biggest challenge.

11.3.4.2   (B) Disabled students premium

The purpose of the disabled students premium is to assist universities with the additional costs that they incur in providing additional materials and services for disabled students. All 19 HEIs receive a proportion of the disabled students premium. The amount of funding allocated to each HEI is dependent on the number of students enrolled that are in receipt of the Disability Student Allowance.

11.3.4.3   (C) Part-time Incentive Premium

Introduced in 1994-95, the purpose of the part-time incentive premium is to encourage more part-time provision and increased part-time student enrolments. All HEIs (excluding the Open University in Scotland) receive a proportion of the premium. The amount allocated to each HEI is calculated as 10% of the gross units of resource[53] for teaching for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate part-time students (this increased in 1998-99 from a previous amount of 5%). SFC does not currently collect information on how HEIs spend their allocation of the Premium.

The proportion of activity that is part-time in the HEI sector has not changed significantly since 2001-02; it has remained at about 10% of the sector total activity.[54]

11.3.5   Impacts

It is the responsibility of the SFC's Access and Inclusion Committee to advise the Council on access and inclusion matters and the implementation of the Learning for All strategy, including monitoring progress on the key themes from the strategy. A 'basket of measures' was established to facilitate the monitoring of performance. There have been three strategy update reports on these measures. These examine the progress made in widening access to FE and HE. The most recent update (March 2010) reported the following patterns in HE participation:

■ People who live in deprived areas continue to be more likely to participate in colleges than those from more affluent areas, who are more likely to participate in the university sector. Students from the most deprived quintile made up only 11% of the student population in HEIS in 2007-09. For 2008-09, this figure remained unchanged;

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[53] Gross unit of resource: this is the amount of money each HEI receives for each full-time student. This varies depending on a) what they're studying and b) whether it's at undergraduate or postgraduate level. The Part-time Incentive Premium is an additional 10% on top of the usual amount paid for a full time student in that subject at that level.

[54] SFC (2009): Horizon Fund for higher education institutions for academic year 2009-10

- Mature students from the most deprived areas continue to be less likely to enter universities than mature students from less deprived areas. The percentage of students aged over 21 from the 40% most deprived has increased from 26.1 to 31.4% between 2000-01 and 2008-09. The largest increase occurs in the most deprived quintile (3.2%). For the same time period, the percentage of the 21 and under group from the most deprived quintile increased by 0.9%;

- The proportion of students who disclosed a disability has increased slightly at universities, however the proportion of students where information is refused/unknown/undefined continues to rise. In 2008-09, 7.1% of students in universities reported having a disability. This was largely unchanged from the figure for 2007-08 which was 6.8%.

- In 2008-09, the percentage of Scottish-domiciled non-white students in HEIs was at least 4.7%. This percentage increased on an annual basis over the previous four years and has risen by 1% since 2004-05. This figure is likely to be under-representative as the percentage of 'not known' continues to be higher than the percentage for Scottish-domiciled non-white.

- The gap between pupils from schools in the most-deprived quintile and the remainder of publicly funded schools continues to widen for progression into HE. The gap has increased from 11 percentage points in 2003-04 (from 29 to 18%) to 19 in 2008-09 (from 34 to 15%) – the highest gap in the five year period; and

- Students from deprived areas, with lower prior attainment or mature entrants are the most likely groups not to continue their studies. SFC investigated the main factors that affect retention. This analysis suggested that, after adjusting for a range of control factors, the two strongest predictors of drop out are deprivation (measured using SIMD) and prior attainment (measured by UCAS tariff scores). However, there has been an overall decrease in non-continuation rates between 2002-03 and 2006-07, with a drop of 1.9% from 21.4%to 19.5% for students from the most deprived quintile.

11.3.6   *Lessons arising from previous evaluations*

All SFC programmes and funding associated with retention, articulation, schools/colleges programmes and communities programmes are currently being reviewed. This review process began in mid-2008 and is expected to be completed by the beginning of the next academic year 2010-11.

11.4 Higher Education Authority, Republic of Ireland

11.4.1   *Introduction*

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and policy development body for higher education and research in Ireland. It has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third-level education sector. In addition, it is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and a number of designated HEIs

The HEA is committed to achieving greater educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - such as people facing social and economic barriers, people with a disability and adult/mature students.

11.4.2   National Office for Equity of Access to HE

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education ('National Access Office') was established in the HEA in 2003 to facilitate educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in HE. The National Office has the following principal functions:

- Develop and implement a national action plan to achieve equity of access to higher education;
- Monitor and report on progress in implementing the plan and achieving set targets and outcomes;
- Manage access funding programmes;
- Provide advice on national policy; and
- Promote the social and economic rationale for access to higher education to government, the social partners and the wider public.

The under represented groups in HE prioritised by the National Office are:

- Those who face socio-economic barriers to participating in higher education;
- Mature students without a higher education qualification;
- Members of Ireland's Ethnic Minority communities and the Traveller Community; and
- Students with a disability.

11.4.3   National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-13

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-13 provides a framework for coordinated action to achieve the objective of equality of access to and participation in higher education. In this plan, the concept of 'access' is understood to encompass not only entry to HE, but also retention and successful completion. The objectives of the Plan are:

- The priority accorded to promoting equality in higher education will be reflected in the strategic planning and development of the HEA and of HEIs;
- The lifelong learning agenda will be progressed through the development of a broader range of entry routes, a significant expansion of part-time/flexible courses and measures to address the student support implications of lifelong learning;
- The priority accorded to promoting equality in higher education will be reflected in the allocation of public funds to HEIs;
- Students will be assisted to access supports and those supports will better address the financial barriers to access and successful participation in higher education; and
- The higher-education participation rates of people with disabilities will be increased through greater opportunities and supports.

The Plan sets the following targets:

- The evidence base and relevant data collection systems will be enhanced;
- HEIS will develop and implement institution-wide access plans and processes for evaluation;

- A national participation rate of 72% of the relevant age cohort will be achieved by 2020 (baseline: 55% in 2004);
- All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54% by 2020 (baseline: non-manual group at 27% and 'Semi-skilled and unskilled manual' group at 33% in 2004);
- Mature students will comprise at least 20% of total full-time entrants by 2013 (baseline: 13% in 2006);
- Mature students will comprise 27% of all (full-time and part-time) entrants by 2013 (18% in 2006);
- Flexible/part-time provision will increase to 17% by 2013 (7% in 2006);
- Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30% of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24% in 2006);
- Ireland will reach EU average levels for lifelong learning by 2010 and will move towards the top quartile of EU countries by 2013; and
- The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 2013.

11.4.4 Activities and Funding Supported by HEA

The HEA allocates two key funds for the purpose of widening access: the Fund for Students with Disabilities and the Student Assistance Fund. The HEA also monitors the impact of core funding for access allocated to Ireland's seven universities and a number of colleges of education. Details of funding levels and activities are included in this section.

11.4.4.1 Fund for Students with Disabilities

The Fund for Students with Disabilities is funded by the Irish Government and part-funded by the European Social Fund under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013. In 2009-10 this fund allocated €12.3 million to students with a disability in further and higher education. This assisted approximately 5,000 students.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities allocates funding to further and higher education colleges for the provision of services and supports to full-time students with disabilities. The Fund aims to ensure that students can participate fully in their academic programmes and are not disadvantaged by reason of a disability. The following are examples of the types of supports available:

- Personal/Educational Assistants;
- Study skills, and, if appropriate, extra tuition;
- Access to assistive technology and training; and
- Sign-Language Interpretation for Deaf students.

Eligible students can receive assistance from the Fund at all levels of HE. Claims to the Fund are made on behalf of an eligible student by their institution following an assessment of need. Eligible students are not means-tested, however students with disabilities enrolled in part-time courses, access or foundation courses in HEIs or short courses are not eligible for consideration under the Fund.

11.4.4.2   *Student Assistance Fund*

The Student Assistance Fund is funded by the Irish Government and part-funded by the European Social Fund under the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013. Each year, the HEA allocates the Fund to 35 higher education institutions in receipt of core grant funding.   In 2009-10, approximately €5m was allocated to the participating institutions, and which was used to support over 8,000 full-time students. From 2010-11, the amount allocated to each HEI is informed by the number of full-time enrolments and the number of new entrants from target socio-economic groups. Prior to 2010-11, allocation was solely on the basis of the number of full-time enrolments.

The Student Assistance Fund provides financial assistance for full-time HE students who are experiencing financial difficulties whilst attending college. Students can apply for Student Assistance to help them with either temporary or ongoing financial difficulties. The Student Assistance Fund provides a further source of funding for higher education students in addition to the Maintenance Grant and other sources of funding.

This fund is not exclusively targeted at under-represented socio-economic groups in HE. Students facing temporary financial difficulties can also be supported by the Fund. Each HEI has its own application process and the fund is open to all students who meet the institution's selection criteria. Institutions are encouraged to supplement the Fund with money from other sources such as fee or philanthropic income.

11.4.4.3   *Funding for Access Services*

From 1996-2005, the HEA supported the development of access programmes in HEIs through special targeting funding. Since 1996, the seven universities and four colleges of education have drawn on this funding to develop the necessary infrastructure and programmes of action which support wider access for people with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveler and refugee communities. The HEA monitors the impact of the Access Programmes through the collection of data, institutional access plans and institutional progress reports.

A new Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) was introduced by the HEA in 2006 and provides baseline funding to support equity of access as part of the core grant to the eleven participating HEIs. These funds are intended to support and further develop the infrastructure underpinning increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups. The National Access Office monitors the access expenditure under this model.

In 2009-10, €8m was allocated to the eleven publically-funded HEIs for access programmes. The amount allocated to each institution is based on historical intake from under-represented groups. From 2011, the HEA is changing the allocation formula to be based on annual intake of students from target socio-economic backgrounds. This funding is commonly spent on activities such as:

■   Dedicated access / disability support staff;

- Pre-entry outreach work with primary and post-primary students to raise aspirations and provide support in accessing HE; and
- Post-entry support to students from under-represented groups most at risk of not continuing their studies.

Baseline funding for access in the fourteen institutes of technology comprises mainly of funding to support a full-time Access Officer post. For the period 2009-2011, additional funding of €2.4m from Ireland's Dormant (Bank) Accounts Fund has been approved for the development of access services in the institutes. This funding programme is managed by the HEA on behalf of the Department of Education and Science.

A new core funding model for the institutes is currently being developed by the HEA. Core funding for access, linked to the numbers of new entrants in the institutes from target socio-economic groups, will be a feature of the revised model.

To support the work on funding models for the universities and the institutes, an external audit of Equal Access data, which underpins the core access allocations, was carried out in May-June 2010. The audit report (published on www.hea.ie) contains a number of conclusions and recommendations, the principal one being that that the Equal Access data is robust and can be used to make funding allocations.

11.4.4.4 *Strategic Innovation Fund*

The HEA also provides institutional funding to support access through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). The Fund is allocated to HEIs for projects to enhance collaboration in the sector; improve teaching and learning; support institutional reform; promote access and lifelong learning; and support the development of fourth level education.

SIF funding is allocated to HEIs through a competitive process. Calls for proposals are issued that set out national priorities and how applicants are expected to contribute to them. HEIs submit applications outlining how they intend to spend funding. Many HEIs form collaborative groups, mostly regional. An independent international panel was established to assess applications.

Under SIF Cycle 1 (from 2006-08) €42 million was approved to support development under the above themes, Improving Access and Lifelong Learning projects were approved for a total of €10.208 million. SIF cycle 2 approved €97 million (from 2008-10), €11.8 million of which was allocated to the area of access for under-represented groups. Twenty-two projects that are either fully or partially focused on access have been funded to date through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). An interim report for the HEA on the Fund concluded that the access agenda has advanced as a result of the investment. This conclusion has been underlined by the progress reports received by HEIs. Good examples of practice include a disability project led by Athlone Institute of Technology, an admissions initiative led by the Irish Universities Association, and a widening participation collaboration between the University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology.

Due to budgetary constraints, the SIF programme has undergone a process of rationalisation and SIF Cycle 3 will be smaller than anticipated – the exact amount is yet to be announced.

11.4.5   Funding Streams to Support Widening Participation - Summary

Table 11-6 summarises the various funding streams to support Widening Participation in ROI.

Table 11-6

Summary of Widening Participation Funding Streams – RoI

Funding stream	Level of Funding	Target Groups	Typical activities supported
Fund for Students with Disabilities	2009-10: €12.3 million	Students with disabilities	Assistive technology; Study skills/independent learning; Personal support.
Student Assistance Fund	2009-10: approximately €5m	Students experiencing financial hardship	Financial support
Core funding for access (universities and colleges)	2009-10: €8m	Under-represented groups, i.e. a students with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities	Funding HEI support staff; Pre-entry outreach work with primary and post-primary students Post-entry support to students most at risk of not continuing their studies
Dormant Accounts Fund for Development of Services in Institutes of Technology	2009-2011: €2.4m	Under-represented groups, i.e. a students with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities	Pre-entry outreach work with primary and post-primary students Post-entry support to students most at risk of not continuing their studies
Strategic Innovation Fund	2006-10: €22m approved for Improving Access and Lifelong Learning	Under-represented groups, i.e. a students with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities	Funds activities carried out by individual/consortia of HEIs. This includes pre- and post-entry support, admissions schemes and institutional infrastructure support.
Source: HEA			

11.4.6 Information Resources

A key recommendation of a 2005 review of funding to achieve equity of access for students was to establish a web-based 'one-stop shop' to provide clear, concise information on financial support for further and higher education. The HEA developed www.studentfinance.ie which was launched in January 2008. The site has become established as a primary information source on financial matters for students, their families and guidance personnel. The site won a national e-Government award in 2009 and in September 2010 welcomed the one millionth visit. A new portal to an online student grant application facility was launched on the site in September 2010.

During 2008-2010 a collaborative initiative between the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the HEA and a working group of higher education access officers and second level guidance counsellors produced a new curriculum unit for Transition Year/senior cycle school students. The unit - *Exploring Options in Further and Higher Education* is now available to all schools. It is expected that it will benefit in particular students who do not have family experience of further or higher education, students with disabilities and students from minority backgrounds who need help navigating the Irish education system. The unit and accompanying materials are published on www.hea.ie.

11.4.7 Research, Dialogue and New Initiatives

A range of important research reports/articles and related dialogue have also been supported over the past two years. These include publication of two reports by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on the cost of participating in college and on the low participation in higher education by students from a 'non-manual' socio-economic background. A report on access courses in HE, commissioned by participating HEIs was published in April 2009. This report in turn contributed to work by a HEA Taskforce on a new policy on access courses[55]. In September 2010, the first national strategy for intercultural education was launched by the Department of Education and Skills. The strategy spans the entire education system and offers an opportunity for new dialogue and collaboration to promote interculturalism in education. A number of studies have also been completed as part of projects supported by the Strategic Innovation Fund. These include a 2009 report evaluating the impact of a widening participation in University College Dublin and a study in Letterkenny Institute of Technology (Donegal) on pro-active screening and supports for students with learning disabilities.

Ireland has been a participant in an OECD study *Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment.* The study, which is due to be completed before the end of 2010, will provide significant new knowledge and insight on effective policies and practice. Irish contributors to the study include students and disability officers, AHEAD and other agencies representing people with disabilities, the Department of Education and Skills and the HEA.

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[55] These are 'bridging' courses delivered by further or higher education institutions which are designed to prepare students for progression into undergraduate studies.

11.4.8 Impacts

Comprehensive information on the socio-economic and cultural background of entrants to HE was gathered by the HEA for the first time in 2007. This information, named Equal Access Data, is now collected by HEIs as part of the annual registration of new students. The purpose of gathering the data is to monitor the progress of HEIs in achieving wider participation and to inform the development of targets for equality of access to HE. The main outcomes and trends for 2008 are as follows (78% of entrants responded to the questions at registration):

- **20% (4,890) of respondents were from a target socio-economic group (i.e. non-manual, Semi-skilled and unskilled manual groups).**
  The current national access strategy has set targets for increased participation by students from three socio-economic groups: students from non-manual worker backgrounds and those from semi- and unskilled manual worker backgrounds. In 2008, the proportion of entrants from the semi- and unskilled group was 6.6% and 4.1% respectively; this was unchanged from the proportions in 2007. However, there was a slight decrease in entry rates among those from non-manual backgrounds (from 10.8% in 2007 to 9.5% in 2008) and this group remains significantly under-represented compared to numbers in the wider national population. As part of the mid-term review (see below), the HEA will be using *Equal Access* data to produce up-to-date participation rates for under-represented socio-economic groups. The target is for all socio-economic groups to have participation rates of at least 54% by 2020.

- **Almost 5% (1,777) of entrants indicated that they had a disability.**
  The largest group among these were students with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) at 53% and the smallest number were students with sensory disabilities (those who are blind, deaf or have severe vision or hearing impairment) at 9%. Nearly half (46%) of entrants who indicated they had a disability also indicated they required additional educational supports. Such supports are provided through the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The National Access Plan has set a target to double the numbers of people with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in HE by 2013 (based on the 2,100 students in 2006-07 in receipt of supports under the Fund for Students with Disabilities). A recent analysis of 2009-10 beneficiaries of the Fund for Students with Disabilities shows that the HE sector is already very close to the 2013 disability target.

- **Mature student entry increased to 13% (4,782) from 11% (3,763) in 2007;**
  The highest rate of entry by mature students (15% of entrants) was to institutes of technology. The target is for mature students to comprise at least 20% of total full-time entrants by 2013.

- **8% (1,973) of respondents were from an ethnic or cultural minority**
  There was a slight increase in 2008 in the proportion of respondents from ethnic or cultural minority groups: 8% compared 7% the previous year. No national targets are set for BME entrance rates.

11.4.9 Learning from What Works

HEA conducted an evaluation of RoI access programmes in HE in 2006. The evaluation proposed a framework for successful access programmes based on four criteria: policy, targeting, partnership and practice. It made the following recommendations as the minimum criteria for an effective access programme:

Policy and Practice

1. A clear statement of the institution's access policy and how it relates to the corporate level strategy;

2. Transparent information about the resources that are allocated to the access programme (including finance, personnel, accommodation);

3. A plan to provide systematic staff training on diversity and inclusion;

4. A clear and specific set of targets for the admission and graduation of students from the under-represented groups that are identified by the National Office and a system of monitoring and measuring achievement of the targets; and

5. A focused programme designed to achieve the targets set. It should include:

   - pre-entry activities for students from all under-represented groups with special emphasis on working with teachers in targeted primary and junior cycle second-level schools and with community-based partnership groups;

   - individual and group support for new entrants in their first year, including personal, social, financial and academic assistance where necessary; and

   - individual and group support as needed for students throughout their course, including advice on careers and post-graduate study.

Partnership

1. A clear statement of how the institution's access programme links with relevant partners in the community and how it relates to the corporate level community mission;

2. A plan to involve staff of the institution actively in partnership with the community and other education sectors;

3. A full agenda for action agreed between the institution and its partners in local communities, aimed at promoting clear routes of progression to higher education for targeted groups of learners; and

4. A commitment to engage students and their families, specialised expert bodies, community agencies and representative groups in planning and monitoring access programme activities.

Targeting

1. A clear and explicit plan to address the needs of all target groups at appropriate critical stages, based on research, needs analysis and consultation

2. A set of clear and specific access targets and timescales for admission and graduation of students from all target groups

3. A rigorous and systematic approach to data collection and analysis to monitor achievement of the targets set.

Over the period 2009-2010, publicly-funded HEIs have been submitting access plans to the HEA. During 2010-11 the HEA will engage in dialogue with institutions on the initiatives and targets set out in the plans. The HEA had requested that access plans would be an integral

part of overall institutional strategies, in some instances this is the case and in others it remains a separate statement. One reason for this is that some institutions are mid-way through implementation of their strategic plan and it was not possible to integrate the access plan immediately. However it is intended that all access plans will become an integral part of institutions' strategies and the HEA will continue to work with institutions on this objective.

The HEA has commenced a mid-term review of the National Plan to Achieve Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013. *Equal Access* and other data will be used to assess progress in HE on each of the targets set out in the National Access Plan. The mid-term review will draw on feedback from a range of key stakeholders through commentary, institutional progress reports, strategy statements, current policies, recent research publications and proposals for improved communication and partnership in the future. In addition, the review draws from a survey of recent progress and new initiatives on equality of access in the European Union, the US, Australia and New Zealand.

11.4.10 Summary of main achievements 2008-2010

The following is a summary of the main achievements to-date under each of the objectives of the National Access Plan 2008-2013:

Table 11-7

Summary of Main Achievements – National Access Plan 2008-13 Objectives

Objective	Main Achievements
1. Institution-wide approaches to access	• Access plans in place and being implemented in HEIs • Professional development opportunities in place for core staff working on equality of access • A range of useful access-related research reports published
2. Enhancing access through lifelong learning	• 4,000+ new students participating in labour market activation courses • Paper on open and flexible learning published • New policy on access courses approved • www.bluebrick.ie, a new website on part-time options in the institutes of technology launched • New section for students on www.hea.ie • New curriculum unit on options in further and higher education for Transition Year students
3. Investment in widening participation in higher education	• Arrangements put in place to introduce core access funding for all higher education institutions from 2011 • Progress on equality through 22 access-related projects supported through the Strategic Innovation Fund • Progress on equality through 56 projects supported in the institutes of technology by Dormant Accounts • Ongoing conferences, seminars, media coverage on access-related issues.
4. Modernisation of student supports	• Expansion of www.studentfinance.ie to include a new online facility for grants. Over one million visits to site by September 2010 • Three years of Equal Access data collected, with ongoing improvements in the process and response rates, including completion of a positive external audit • Equal Access data are used (in part) to make allocations of the Student Assistance Fund • First national intercultural education strategy launched

5. Widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities	• Good practice guidelines and Charter for inclusive teaching and learning launched and being disseminated • An improved allocation model for the Fund for Students with Disabilities introduced • OECD study Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment, in which Ireland was a partner, is completed.
Source: HEA	

11.5 Summary of Benchmarking

Table 11-8 summarises key aspects of widening participation approaches in NI and the comparator countries (England, Scotland and RoI) – all of which have programmes and policies in place with regard to widening participation. In England and Scotland, these are funded by the Funding Council responsible for HE, in NI by DEL and in RoI by the HEA. There are similarities and differences across the funding approaches:

■ **Funding Streams**: All of the UK countries have a separate funding stream for students with disabilities; NI has 1 other funding stream (widening participation). In England, there are 2 other funding streams (widening access, improving retention); in Scotland there are 2 other funding streams (widening access and retention, part-time incentive). In RoI, the HEA allocates 2 keys funds for widening access: the Fund for Students with Disabilities and the Student Assistance Fund (although this is not exclusively targeted at under-represented socio-economic groups in HE). There are 3 other funding streams in RoI: core funding for access - to support and develop the infrastructure underpinning increasing participation amongst under-represented groups; the Strategic Innovation Fund which is allocated on a competitive basis generally to collaborative groups of HEIs for projects which include promoting access; and the Dormant Accounts Fund for Development of Services in Institutes of Technology (including pre-entry outreach work and work to minimise retention).

■ The programmes have broadly similar **aims** in terms of **increasing participation in HE with a focus on under-represented groups.**

■ **Targeted groups** are similar with an explicit focus on socio-economic disadvantage and also on disability. In England and Scotland, other groups are also highlighted and in both of these countries, part-time students are targeted. The target groups are:
- NI – people from disadvantaged backgrounds; people with disabilities;
- England – young people from lower SEC groups; people from areas which are less occupationally advantaged; disabled students; students at risk of leaving education early; part-time students;
- Scotland – people from disadvantaged areas; students with disabilities; part-time students;
- RoI - Under-represented groups, i.e. students with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities.

- **Level of funding per HEI per annum[56]:** NI has the lowest level of funding per HEI per annum (£1.138m) compared with England (£3.123m, almost 3 times higher than NI) and Scotland (£1.128m, on a par with NI);
- **Level of funding per student per annum[56]:** NI has the lowest level of funding per student per annum (£60) compared with England (£278, over 4.5 times higher) and Scotland (£127, over 2 times higher);
- **Scope of activities: the nature of the activities which the premia are used to support** is generally left to the discretion of the HEI. Some funding may contribute to the costs of infrastructure and administration to support WP; examples of other activities supported include outreach (summer schools, master classes, open days, work with schools (visits to / from), information and guidance, bursaries / scholarships;
- **Impact on participation (socio-economic)**
  - (NS-SEC 4-7): NI generally compares very favourably with England and Scotland e.g.: 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 41.7% of young full-time first degree entrants were from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.4% in England, 28.2% in Scotland, 32.3% in UK overall).
  - For those entering HE in RoI in 2008, 20% were from a target socio-economic group (i.e. non-manual, Semi-skilled and unskilled manual groups). The target is for all socio-economic groups to have participation rates of at least 54% by 2020.
- **Impact on participation (disability)**
  - NI generally compares less favourably with England and the UK overall but fares better than Scotland e.g.: 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 3.7% of undergraduates were in receipt of DSA (4.8% in England, 3.4% in Scotland, 4.7% in UK overall).
  - For those entering HE in RoI in 2008, almost 5% of entrants indicated that they had a disability. A recent analysis of 2009-10 beneficiaries of the Fund for Students with Disabilities shows that the HE sector is already very close to the 2013 disability target (to double the numbers of people with disabilities from the 2006-07 baseline).
- **Impact on retention:** NI generally compares less favourably with the rest of the UK with the highest levels of non-continuation – e.g.: 10.2% in 20078-08 (compared with 8.4% in England, 9.9% in Scotland and 8.6% in UK overall);
- **Assessing the impact of WP funding:** in common with the situation in NI, it is evident from recent evaluation activity in both England and Scotland, that there are difficulties in quantifying impacts that may be attributed to WP funding. A HEFCE review of Widening Participation activities (2006) highlighted the importance of a sustained long-term commitment to the ethos of WP, as well as the financial resources to support this. It highlighted progress made in embedding WP within the culture, mission and management of institutions and the investment made by HEIs over and above the core WP funding. However the report noted a weakness in the evidence base for the impact of Widening Participation (e.g. relationship between discrete interventions at institution-level and outcomes at the level of the sector and society as a whole.).

[56] Note: in order to make this crude comparison, we have considered the total level of funding awarded by the funding councils to institutions; it does not take into account any funding contributed by the institutions themselves. As there are some differences in the approaches to funding in each of the countries considered, this means that for NI, we have combined WP and WA premia with project funding; in both England and Scotland, we have combined 3 funding streams.

Table 11-8

Summary of Widening Participation Interventions

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Republic of Ireland
Programme / Policy	DEL Widening Participation	HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-11	SFC Widening Participation Strategy - Learning For All (2005)	The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-13
Aims / objectives	DEL premium funding is intended to support the embedding of widening participation in the institutions and serves to underpin student success. The premium funding recognises the additional costs associated with recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with supporting students with disabilities. • Widening Participation (WP) Premium - paid to HEIs in recognition of the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. • Widening Access (WA) Premium – paid to HEIs to recognize additional costs re: students with disabilities.	To achieve a target of 50% of 18 - 30 year-olds participating in HE by 2010. To increase the proportion of students (full-time and part-time, both young and mature) from under-represented groups in HE	To increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scottish publicly funded schools) in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment or training).	• A national participation rate of 72% of the relevant age cohort will be achieved by 2020 (baseline: 55% in 2004); • All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54% by 2020 (baseline: non-manual group at 27%; 'Semi-skilled and unskilled manual' group at 33% in 2004); • Mature students will comprise at least 20% of total full-time entrants by 2013 (baseline: 13% in 2006); • Mature students will comprise 27% of all (full-time & part-time) entrants by 2013 (18% in 2006); • Flexible/part-time provision will increase to 17% by 2013 (7% in 2006); • Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30% of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24% in 2006); • Ireland will reach EU average levels for lifelong learning by 2010 and will move towards the top quartile of EU countries by 2013; • The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 2013.
Targeted Groups	Each HEI has a targeting framework / specific groups that it targets. These fall into the broad categories:	HEFCE's funding streams targeted at: • Young people (under 21) from lower socio-economic groups;	SFC's funding streams targeted at: • Learners from the 20% most disadvantaged areas (based on the	• Fund for Students with Disabilities - Students with disabilities • Student Assistance Fund - Students

Table 11-8

Summary of Widening Participation Interventions

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Republic of Ireland
	• People from disadvantaged backgrounds • People with disabilities	• People from areas which are less occupationally advantaged (based on proportion of population of area with HE qualification); • Disabled students; • Students at risk of leaving education early; and • Part-time students. In addition, the Aimhigher Programme is targeted at: • lower socio-economic groups (i.e. groups 4-8 in the NS-SEC); • disadvantaged socio-economic groups who live in areas of relative deprivation when participation in HE is low; • 'looked after' children in the care system; and • disabled learners or learners with a specific learning difficulty.	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation); • Students with disabilities; and • Part-time students	experiencing financial hardship The other funding streams: • {Core funding for access (universities and colleges) • {Dormant Accounts Fund for Development of Services in Institutes of Technology • {Strategic Innovation Fund are all targeted at: Under-represented groups, i.e. students with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities.
Funding available / sources of funding	• Widening Participation Premium Funding: total of £1.439m in 2008/09 • Widening Access Premium: total of £349k in 2008/09 • Discovering Queen's: £230k pa • Step-Up Magee: £170-180k pa • Step-Up Belfast: £1,579,851 (April 2006- August 2013) equivalent to approx £225k pa Excluding the relatively small amounts of funding allocated to Stranmillis UC and St Mary's UC, the **total funding (WP**	HEFCE funding streams in 2010-11: • Funding for widening access: £130.2m; • Funding for students with disabilities: £13.0m; and • Funding for improving retention: £269.1m **The total funding in 2010-11 is £412.3m** In addition to the above HEFCE funding, Aimhigher has funding of £252.8m (for 2008-2011, jointly funded by HEFCE, the Department for Business, Innovation and	SFC funding streams in 2010-11: • Widening Access and Retention Premium: £10.379m; • Disabled Students Premium: £2.599m; and • Part-time Incentive Premium: £8.459m **The total funding in 2010-11 is: £21.437m**	• Fund for Students with Disabilities - 2009-10: €12.3 million • Student Assistance Fund - 2009-10: approximately €5m • Core funding for access (universities and colleges) - 2009-10: €8m • Dormant Accounts Fund for Development of Services in Institutes of Technology - 2009-2011: €2.4m • Strategic Innovation Fund 2006-10: €22m approved for Improving Access and Lifelong Learning

Table 11-8

Summary of Widening Participation Interventions

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Republic of Ireland
	premium, WA Premium, Step Up and DQ) over the 3 years 2006/07 – 2008/09 is £6,826,615	Skills, Department of Health and the Skills Funding Agency)		
No. of HEIs	Based on 2 HEIs– QUB, UU	132	19	Varies by funding stream
£ per HEI per annum	£1,138m pa	£3.123m pa	£1.128m pa	n/a
No. of students in HE [57]	38,208	1,480,875	169,326	n/a
£ per student per annum	£50 per student pa	£278 per student pa	£127 per student pa	n/a
Scope of activities	The premium funding supports a range of initiatives and activities within the universities – as described in their WP strategies; this differs from the very specific project funding offered through e.g.: the Step-Up (UU) and Discovering Queens (DQ) projects which provide more focused support for specific groups of pupils	Each HEI determines how to spend its allocation; funded activities vary from one institution to another. Many HEIs use the funding to cover the costs of structures and supports in the institution to administer Widening Participation activities (i.e. dedicated staff). Commonly funded activities include: - summer schools; - master classes; - student mentoring and ambassador schemes; - school and college visits to universities; - university visits to schools and colleges; - taster days in universities; - study skills; - information and guidance sessions; - the provision of bursaries and	Each HEI determines how to spend its allocation and the activities supported vary. General activities that are commonly funded include: - outreach work with schools; - open days; and - internal infrastructure on HEIs to support Widening Participation activities	**Fund for Students with Disabilities** Types of supports available: - Personal/Educational Assistants; - Study skills, and, if appropriate, extra tuition; - Access to assistive technology and training; and - Sign-Language Interpretation for Deaf students. **Student Assistance Fund** - Provides financial assistance for full-time HE students who are experiencing financial difficulties whilst attending college. **Core Funding for Access** Commonly spent on activities such as: - Dedicated access / disability support staff; - Pre-entry outreach work with primary and post-primary students to raise aspirations

[57] HESA: Total number of full-time equivalent students enrolled at UK HEIs by country of institution 2008/09

Table 11-8

Summary of Widening Participation Interventions

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Republic of Ireland
		scholarships; and • outreach work with adults through workforce development activities, e.g. offering CPD and part-time courses.		and provide support in accessing HE; and • Post-entry support to students from under-represented groups most at risk of not continuing their studies. Baseline funding for access in the 14 institutes of technology comprises mainly of funding to support a full-time Access Officer post. **Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF).** • Allocated to HEIs for projects to enhance collaboration in the sector; improve teaching and learning; support institutional reform; promote access and lifelong learning; and support the development of fourth level education.
Impact on participation	HESA PI (2008/09) • 41.7% of young full time first degree entrants from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.3% in UK) • 3.7% of full time first degree undergraduates in receipt of DSA (4.7% in UK overall).	HESA PI (2008/09) • 32.4% of young full time first degree entrants from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.3% in UK) • 4.8% of full time first degree undergraduates in receipt of DSA (4.7% in UK overall).	HESA PI (2008/09) • 28.2% of young full time first degree entrants from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.3% in UK) • 3.6% of full time first degree undergraduates in receipt of DSA (4.7% in UK overall).	**Entering HE in RoI in 2008:** • 20% from a target socio-economic group (i.e. non-manual, Semi-skilled and unskilled manual groups). Target is for all socio-economic groups to have participation rates of at least 54% by 2020. • almost 5% of entrants indicated that they had a disability. Recent analysis of 2009-10 beneficiaries of the Fund shows that the HE sector is already very close to the 2013 disability target (to double the numbers of people with disabilities from the 2006-07 baseline)
Impact on retention	HESA PI (2007/08) 10.2% of all full time first degree entrants no longer in HE following year of entry	HESA PI (2007/08) 8.4% of all full time first degree entrants no longer in HE following year of entry	HESA PI (2007/08) 9.9% of all full time first degree entrants no longer in HE following year of entry	n/a

12 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Conclusions

In this section, we present conclusions against each of the main areas within the Terms of Reference (these are used as sub-headings in this section) drawing on the evidence from desk research, consultation and benchmarking.

12.1.1 Targeting of project funding to encourage / support the participation in HE of the targeted under-represented groups

Is the project funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the participation in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

Project funding supports Step-Up in UU and Discovering Queen's in QUB – both focus on outreach work, but they do this in different ways.

◼ **Step-Up Project**

Step-Up is a science-based programme of academic and vocational activities that are delivered by schools, the University of Ulster, industry and government. The highly structured programme provides an opportunity for disadvantaged pupils, who have low attainment levels and relatively low expectations, to improve their academic performance, self-esteem and motivation and gain entry to and complete programmes of study at university.

Step-Up is targeted at schools in areas of social and economic disadvantage and is designed to increase participation rates in higher education from lower socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 5–7). The programme currently operates in 16 secondary schools in areas of relative socio-economic deprivation in Derry/Londonderry (since 2000) and Belfast (since 2006).

Criteria for this programme are based on targeting first schools and then individuals within schools.

Schools in Belfast and Londonderry were identified on the basis of social and economic disadvantage using e.g.: the Townsend / Noble Deprivation Indices, Free School Meal entitlement, GCSE and A level attainment data, and HE progression figures. Equality of opportunity and geographical spread were additional factors considered in identifying the schools in the Greater Belfast area.

The pupil selection criteria for entry to the Step-Up programme are based on the following:

- little or no parental experience of higher education;
- limited family income;
- unskilled, semi-skilled or unemployed parent(s);
- living in a neighbourhood or other circumstances not conducive to study;
- living in an environment that has been seriously affected by political unrest.

As part of the UU Widening Participation Audit (2007) analysis of the data on students who have participated or were currently participating in the programme (N= 673) was undertaken. This revealed a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the

intended target groups. More recent data quoted in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 Annual Reports (Magee) submitted to DEL indicate that there continues to be a good fit between the profile of the Step-Up programme participants and the intended target groups: The most recent profile data for the Belfast Programme indicates that Step-Up is engaging with some of the most disadvantaged pupils in NI.

■ **Discovering Queen's**

Discovering Queens (DQ) aims to introduce HE to potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds through a range of activities primarily focused on outreach – with primary schools, secondary schools and FE Colleges. Events include lectures, welcome events, taster days, master classes, etc. and targeted various age groups – including school age and mature students. It aims to stimulate demand for higher education from under-represented groups, to raise aspirations and improve attainment and progression rates and effectively tackle the marginalisation and exclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For DQ, the criteria to access this type of intervention are set out in a Targeting Framework. Target groups include:

xi.   *Students from lower socio-economic groups;*

xii.   *Students from low participation backgrounds;*

xiii.   *Underperforming cohorts at pre-entry and on-course levels;*

xiv.   *First in Family;*

xv.   *Students with disabilities;*

xvi.   *Students with a range of 'A' level equivalent qualifications;*

xvii. *Part-time students;*

xviii. *Care leavers;*

xix.   *Adult returners to study; and*

xx.   *Work-based learners.*

Currently 35 post-primary schools and 6 Colleges are registered as DQ Schools plus a further 19 Primary Schools. (Note: 10 of the Belfast schools and 2 of the Londonderry schools are also involved in UU's Step-Up project).

■ **Conclusion – Targeting of Project Funding**

Step-Up has a clear focus on specific target groups / individuals that it seeks to support. There is a tracking system in place so that Step-Up participants can be monitored throughout their engagement with UU. Based on available evidence (profile of participants supported), we can conclude that the targeting and recruitment process for Step-Up is successfully reaching those who are eligible to benefit from the opportunities that HE can provide. (Note: each year there are 340 pupils participating in Years 13 and 14 in Step-Up schools (140 pupils (70 Year 1, 70 Year 2) from Londonderry, 200 pupils (100 Year 1, 100 Year 2) from Belfast).)

DQ has a clear framework in place for providing support. However, owing to the nature of supports it provides (i.e. catering for school / class level activity rather than focused on individuals) and the scale of engagement (over 3,600 pupils in 2008/09), there is less clarity about identifying / tracking / monitoring specific individuals who engage with DQ. Clearly some of those it reaches are in the target groups but others may not be. Tracking of individuals in DQ does not take place in the same way as for Step-Up and given the scale of DQ, this would be a considerable undertaking. Based on available evidence, we can conclude that the DQ is targeting relevant groups; however in the absence of detailed monitoring information (profile of beneficiaries), we cannot conclude on the effectiveness of the targeting.

It is evident that UU's Step Up and DQ are targeting some of the same schools, but with different types of activities (e.g. DQ is focused on awareness-raising / outreach whereas Step-Up is clearly focused on educational attainment leading to progression to HE). However there is a need to ensure that the total range of supports are being co-ordinated to ensure that they are targeted effectively and efficiently and that there are no overlaps or gaps in provision.

12.1.2 Impact of project funding on increasing the participation in HE of the target groups

What impact has the project funding had on increasing the participation in higher education of the target groups?

■ **Trends in Participation (NS-SEC 4-7)**[58]

The NI population has a higher concentration of the lower SEC groups (SEC 4-7, also SEC 5-7) than elsewhere in the UK. This is also reflected in the student population.

NI domiciled students from lower SEC groups are more likely to enrol at NI HEIs; those from higher SEC groups at GB HEIs. More than a quarter of students at NI HEIs are from SEC 5-7.

Whilst NI performs relatively well compared to its UK counterparts as regards participation from targeted groups (SEC 4–7), the level (proportion of enrolments of full-time first year undergraduates) has changed relatively little over the period 2002-03 and 2007-08; the same is true for SEC 5-7.

There is, however, evidence of some variation between NI HEIs - with higher proportions (from SEC 4-7) in UU and St Mary's and lower proportions in QUB and Stranmillis (also true for SEC 5-7). Considering the proportions from SEC 4-7, QUB, UU and St Mary's are ahead of their UK benchmarks; Stranmillis is below its benchmark.

■ **Step-Up**

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[58] Note: Due to a change in question by UCAS the 2008/09 figures for the percentage of entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 and 5 to 7 cannot be compared with previous years

There is clear evidence of the positive impact of Step-Up on increasing participation in HE (as well as on a range of other metrics) and there are relevant baselines against which these can be compared: This is facilitated by a clear process for tracking students who engage in this intervention.

- Baseline: Targeted schools in Londonderry: Less than 5% of the target schools' intake progressed to HE compared to a 36% average across all schools in NI.

- Baseline: Targeted schools in Belfast: In 2003/4, the average progression rate across the Belfast target schools was 5.8% (with 7 schools having no pupils progressing that year) compared to an average of 36% of all school leavers in NI.

- Impacts: 97% of Step-Up Magee students for whom figures are available, have progressed directly to HE, FE or employment; and 96% of the Belfast cohort for 2007 and 2008 progressed to HE.

■   **Discovering Queen's**

For DQ, whilst there is considerable evidence of activity and engagement (outputs) and a focus on specific target groups, the information available on impacts (in terms of increased participation in HE) focuses at a school level rather than for individuals who have benefited from DQ. However, this demonstrates that a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally. The progression from summer school into HE is 75% (50% of summer school participants enter QUB).

In the absence of a system which tracks all those who engage with DQ, it is less clear (a) whether participation rates in HE have changed for the individuals with whom DQ engages and (b) how much of a contribution to increasing participation in HE (if this is evident) may be attributable to DQ.

■   **Conclusion – Increasing Participation in HE in Targeted Groups**

In considering trends in participation, it is important to consider the broader context i.e. that the NI population has a higher proportion of lower SEC groups (i.e. 5-7), that the level of participation has remained relatively high for some considerable time and that all of this has been achieved for lower funding compared with benchmarks.

There are also issues of culture, approaches and different target groups for UU and QUB to take into account: UU typically has a higher participation level for SEC 4-7 demonstrating its ability to attract more students from these groups. In contrast, QUB has increased the minimum tariff entry points (and hence level of academic achievement) required to secure a place – this is at odds with the broader policy of Widening Participation.

Turning specifically to project funding and its impact on participation, for the specific group of pupils that receives targeted support from Step-Up, we can conclude that there is a definite positive impact in terms of increasing participation in HE. On the other hand, in the absence of a system to track and monitor individuals who engage with DQ, we do not have the evidence available to conclude on whether DQ contributes to increasing participation in HE for these individuals. However, at a school level, a higher proportion of school leavers from DQ schools progressed to HE every year between 2004-05 and 2007-08, compared with those from secondary schools in NI generally.

12.1.3   Targeting of widening participation premium funding to encourage / support the retention in HE of the targeted under-represented groups

Is the widening participation premium funding being appropriately targeted to encourage / support the retention in higher education of the targeted under-represented groups?

■ **WP Premium Funding / Support for Retention**

Each of the HEIs has defined target groups on which they target WP support –as identified in their WP strategies. The HEIs also point to WP being embedded within the universities support structures. Whilst this is welcome in the sense that WP becomes an integral part of how things are done, rather than an "add-on", it does cause some difficulty in terms of accountability and tracking of interventions (funded by DEL) and the impacts that are attributable to these. DEL funding is combined with a wide range of other sources of funding and it is difficult to disaggregate what specifically the DEL funding is being used for and the added value that it is delivering. This issue is not unique to NI – as is evident in the benchmarking which highlighted similar issues in recent evaluations in England and Scotland.

■ **Conclusion – Targeting of WP Premium to Encourage / Support Retention in HE of targeted under-represented groups**

The HEIs have activities in place in terms of addressing the issue of retention – and a key part of this is ensuring that students are "university ready" prior to enrolment. Through project funding, both Step Up and DQ play an important role in this regard.

In the absence of a system to track and monitor individuals who are specifically targeted and supported (through DEL premium funding) to encourage retention, we do not have the evidence to state that WP Premium is being appropriately targeted. However, feedback from those in receipt of interventions and / or close to them (e.g. students, teachers) indicate that the support is well regarded and valued by students in ensuring they are able to continue their studies.

12.1.4   Effectiveness of widening participation premium in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups

Has the widening participation premium been effective in contributing to the retention of students from the targeted under-represented groups?

Although HEIs perform favourably compared to the rest of the UK in terms of participation, they do not perform as well with regard to retention and in fact this is an area in which performance (from 2002/03 to 2008/09) has not improved.

■ **Trends in Retention**
   The level of non-continuation following year of entry is higher in NI than elsewhere in the UK

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- The level of non-continuation for full-time first degree students in NI HEIs has been highest (or second highest) compared to other UK HEI's (by country) since 2003/04 apart from 2006/07;

- Between 2002/03 and 2007/08, the level of non-continuation (first year) has increased from 9.4% to 10.2% in NI (although it has been higher and lower between these dates);

- In 2007/08 NI has a relatively high proportion (10.2%) no longer in HE (England lowest – 8.4% and UK overall 8.6%);

Considering the NI institutions, there is some variation in non-continuation following year of entry for full-time first degree entrants as demonstrated by data for 2007/08:

- UU (13.2%) had the highest level of non-continuation and Stranmillis (4.2%) the lowest. QUB (7.1%) and St Mary's (7.7%) lie between these two.

- QUB, UU, St Mary's are performing worse than their UK benchmarks[59] (UU significantly so). Stranmillis was performing better than its UK benchmark but not significantly.

Considering retention overall, it is clear that this is an area in which NI lags behind the rest of the UK. However, it is important to take into account other factors which have a bearing on this issue – including the profile of NI students. A consequence of the successes in terms of increasing participation from under-represented groups (and in particular lower SEC groups) is potentially causing an adverse effect in terms of retention. Research has shown that students from higher social classes are more likely to "survive" their first year.

The HEIs have activities in place in terms of addressing the issue of retention – and a key part of this is ensuring that students are "university ready" prior to enrolment. Both Step Up and DQ play a role in this regard.

As there is insufficient evidence available to conclude on whether WP Premium funding contributes to encouraging / supporting retention in HE in the groups that it targets, this also means that we do not have sufficient evidence to conclude on the effectiveness of WP premium funding in contributing to retention. However, given the overall HESA performance indicators (PIs), it is clear that this is an area in which more work is required owing to under-performance – but also in terms of understanding the broader issues arising from increased participation from SEC 4-7 and the implications this has for retention and strategies which would mitigate against this.

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[59] The benchmark is a sector average adjusted to take account of the subject and entry profile of the institution's students. If an institution's indicator is very different from its benchmark we can say that there is some factor other than subject, entry qualification or age leading to this difference. Significantly better / worse than the benchmark means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is greater than 3 and greater than 3 times the standard deviation

12.1.5 Value for money (including relative to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes in NI and further afield)

Do the outcomes achieved represent value for money relative to each other and to other comparable government sponsored education/training programmes here in Northern Ireland and further afield?

In order to address this question, we considered: Level of funding allocated; Comparisons with England and Scotland; HESA PIs and the Counterfactual Case.

Level of Funding Allocated

Table 12-1

WP Funding Allocation from DEL to QUB, UU, St Mary's and Stranmillis

	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%	Budget (£)	%
Widening Participation Premium	1,254,750	77%	1,398,420	78%	1,439,961	81%
Widening Access Premium	374,158	23%	391,507	22%	342,233	19%
Total	1,628,908	100%	1,789,927	100%	1,782,194	100%

Source:
St Mary's 2006/07 data from St Mary's UC Director of Finance and Administration, Extracts from DEL Letters of Offer to QUB, UU, St Mary's and Stranmilllis

In addition, DEL provides funding for:

■ Step-Up (Magee Campus) – approx £170-180k pa;

■ Step-Up (Jordanstown) – approx £225k pa; and

■ Discovering Queen's – approx £230k pa.

This gives an annual total spend of £2.28m.

Comparisons with England and Scotland

Based on the Widening Participation and Widening Access premia funding that DEL provides to QUB and UU (in addition to DQ and Step Up funding):

■ NI has the one of the **lowest levels of funding per HEI per annum** (£1.138m) compared with England (£3.123m, almost 3 times higher than NI) and Scotland (£1.128m, on a par with NI).

■ NI has the **lowest level of funding per student per annum** (£60) compared with England (£278, over 4.5 times higher) and Scotland (£127, over 2 times higher)

Performance Metrics

Considering the HESA PIs:

■ **Impact on participation (NS-SEC 4-7):** NI generally compares very favourably with England and Scotland e.g.**:** 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 41.7% of young full-time first degree entrants were from NS-SEC 4-7 (32.4% England, 28.2% Scotland and 32.3% UK overall)

■ **Impact on participation (DSA):** NI generally compares less favourably with England and the UK overall but fares better than Scotland e.g.: 2008-09 data shows that in NI, 3.7% of undergraduates were in receipt of DSA (4.8% England, 3.4% Scotland, 4.7% UK overall);

- Considering data from 2002/03 through to 2008/09, it is clear that NI has not performed as well as elsewhere in the UK;

- However, there has been a substantial improvement in NI: the proportion of undergraduates in receipt of DSA has increased from 1.7% to 3.2% between 2002/03 and 2008/09;

■ **Impact on retention:** NI generally compares less favourably with the rest of the UK with the highest levels of non-continuation – e.g.: 10.2% in 20078-08 (compared with 8.4% in England, 9.9% in Scotland and 8.6% in UK overall).

- Considering data from 2002/03 through to 2008/09, it is clear that NI has not performed as well as elsewhere in the UK – with a similar level as Scotland;

- Between 2002/03 and 2008/09, the level of non-continuation (first year) has increased from 9.4% to 10.2% in NI (although it has been higher and lower between these dates).

Counterfactual Case (Step-Up and DQ)

Research and statistics from both UU and QUB help to define what would happen in the absence of the WP interventions; these are summarised as follows:

■ **Statistics cited in the (UU) Step-Up Belfast Economic Appraisal (2006)**
Prior to the introduction of the Step-Up programme in the target schools (Derry and Belfast), the level of academic performance was significantly lower than the NI average and progression to HE was negligible.

■ **QUB research into academic confidence 2008/09**
A questionnaire was used to assess academic confidence before and after a QUB support and results showed a significant increase in confidence. This study shows that Head Start (HS) succeeds in raising the confidence levels of its participants in the long-term.

Conclusion - VFM

DEL provides funding of around £2.5m per annum to support WP. The level of funding in NI is lower than in both England and Scotland (based on funding per HEI per annum and funding per student per annum).

In terms of the HESA PIs, at NI level, there had been little change in participation in relation to NS-SEC 4-7, an improvement in participation in relation to DSA and deterioration with regards to retention (over the period 2002/03 and 2008/09.

The counterfactual case for the Step-Up programme (cited above from the Economic Appraisal for the Belfast programme) demonstrates the impact of that programme on academic attainment, progression to HE and retention. The counterfactual information for the DQ programme provides evidence of a tangible impact in terms of improving academic confidence (for those already participating in HE).

However, at an overall programme level, there is a lack of information in terms of isolating DEL funding (apart from Step-Up and DQ) to discrete interventions; there is also a lack of information on the impact (with regard to participation and retention) of interventions on specific groups or individuals (apart from Step-Up). Therefore it is difficult to (a) define impacts for specific interventions and (b) attribute any of these impacts to DEL funding.

Owing to the lack of specific information on the attributing impacts to DEL funding (apart from Step-Up), it is difficult to conclude on Value for Money. Given that NI HEIs receive the lowest levels of funding (relative to England and Scotland), the performance with regard to participation PIs is encouraging (particularly with regard to DSA which has improved; although the indicator for participation (NS-SEC 4-7 is virtually unchanged at an NI level which suggests the "status quo" is being maintained). However, the performance with regard to retention is clearly an area in which improvement is required.

We can however conclude that the Step-Up programme is Value for Money in respect of the following:

■ the levels of funding involved: Step-Up (Magee) – approx £170-180k pa and Step-Up (Jordanstown) – approx £225k pa;

■ the scale of the programme (70 pupils per annum recruited to Magee programme, 100 pupils per annum recruited to the Belfast programme);

■ the impacts achieved with regard to:

- **participation in HE**: 2002/09 cohorts in Magee – 92% went to UU or another HEI; 3% went to FE; 2007 and 2008 cohort in Belfast – 96% progressed to HE (relative to a baseline of less than 6%)

- **retention**: all entering university 2002/07 (Magee) – 91% of those who enrolled, completed i.e. non-continuation rate of 9% (compared with levels of non-continuation which have varied between 12.6% and 15.2% in UU overall between 2002/03 and 2007/08).

- It is also impressive in terms of **academic attainment** (typically at least 97% achieve Double Award Applied Science Qualification and **higher level qualifications** obtained (Cohorts 1-4 (Magee) – 65% achieved a First or Upper Second).

12.1.6 Overall Effectiveness and Areas for Improvement

Overall effectiveness of existing Widening participation programmes and the identification of areas for improvement

Conclusion - Effectiveness of WP Programmes

The HEIs are clearly committed to the WP agenda – this is evident in terms of additional funding (on top of DEL allocation) being allocated to support work in this area, and in the

embedding of the WP agenda within the HEIs' culture. There is evidence of considerable activity and engagement with school pupils and HEI students under the WP agenda; qualitative feedback is generally positive.

Performance with regard to participation PIs is encouraging (particularly with regard to DSA which has improved; although the indicator for participation (NS-SEC 4-7) is virtually unchanged at an NI level which suggests stability (at a higher level than elsewhere in the UK) but no additional impact. However, the performance with regard to retention is clearly an area in which improvement is required. HESA statistics provide a favourable comparison between NI HEIs and those in the UK with regard to participation but less so with regard to retention. Qualitative feedback from stakeholders (focus groups and interviews) also reinforced this latter issue.

Feedback from consultees (including stakeholders, school representatives and student focus groups) provides positive feedback (generally qualitative) on the nature of interventions and supports offered by the HEIs.

However at an overall programme level, the lack of information in terms of isolating DEL funding (apart from Step-Up and DQ) to discrete interventions and on the impact (with regard to participation and retention) of interventions on specific groups or individuals (apart from Step-Up) means that it is difficult to attribute impacts to DEL funding. This issue is not unique to NI; it is also reflected in England and Scotland. For example, a HEFCE review of Widening Participation activities (2006) noted a weakness in the evidence base for the impact of Widening Participation (e.g. relationship between discrete interventions at institution-level and outcomes at the level of the sector and society as a whole).

HESA PIs demonstrate relatively stable levels of participation (greater than UK comparators for NS-SEC 4-7), improving levels of participation (for DSA) but poor performance with regards to retention (relative to UK comparators and no signs of improvement over time). Available systems and information do not provide sufficient information to conclude on the extent to which DEL WP premium funding has influenced these PIs either for targeted groups or at an overall level. The Step Up project is the one exception to this – this project has provided evidence of making a positive contribution to participation and retention levels.

Conclusion - Areas for Improvement

Taking into account feedback from stakeholders together with the review of evidence available, we have identified a number of areas for improvement:

- There is a need to ensure that any funding allocated to WP projects is clearly accounted for and tracked to ensure delivery of WP objectives and targets;

- The targeted approach adopted by the Step-Up programme should be expanded to include initiatives in more schools and/or more subjects (i.e. focused programme catering for specific pupils and with clear tracking / monitoring in place);

- There is a need to ensure that the WP frameworks are sufficiently focused to address the needs of specific under-represented groups e.g.: NS-SEC 4-7 is too broad; there is a need to be more specific about groups targeted for support. Some suggestions include: mature students, ethnic groups, part-time, etc. This requires clear understanding of (a)

who these groups are; (b) what their needs are and (c) ensuring appropriate supports are provided to these specific groups to address their needs;

- Retention targets should be set and delivered on. This would require investigation of the difficulties being faced and providing appropriate supports to overcome / address these.

- The need to address raising aspirations not only amongst pupils / students but those in a position of influence e.g. teachers, parents (recognising that some work already takes place in this area);

- The need to address / raising aspirations from early stage – hence engagement with primary schools (recognising that some work already takes place in this area);

- There is recognition of a need for more 'joined up' approaches (e.g. through Regional Strategy) and this is welcomed by many stakeholders.

12.2 Recommendations

12.2.1 Continued Support for Widening Participation

There is a clear rationale and policy context for supporting the Widening Participation agenda. There is also evidence available that at an overall level in NI HEIs compare favourably with GB counterparts in terms of increasing participation. However NI HEIs compare less favourably in terms of retention.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that DEL continues to focus on encouraging increased representation of under represented groups in HE. Support for increasing participation should be maintained, however, efforts with regard to improving retention should be given more focus and a greater priority.

12.2.2 Targeting Support for Widening Participation

Each of the HEIs has a definition of groups which it seeks to target with WP interventions. For some of the interventions that are tailored to individuals, these are tightly defined and with tracking of impacts, it is clear that support is reaching areas where it is needed. In the case of supports which are "embedded" and there is less tracking / monitoring of who benefits and what impacts it has, there is a need to revise the approach in order to ensure that there is VFM for public purse and that support goes where it is most needed. Some examples include – a tighter focus on NS-SEC groups e.g.: 5-7 rather than 4-7; and within socio-economically deprived groups a targeted approach to deal with particular groups e.g. Protestant working class males, children from ethnic minorities, children in care, etc recognising that lower educational attainment and progression to HE reduces life-time opportunities.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that funding is targeted more tightly at specific groups specified by DEL to ensure that support reaches those who are most in need.

12.2.3   Premium vs. Project Funding

The review of funding has demonstrated that it is difficult to track / attribute impacts to specific funding streams (from WP Premium funding) and this is a common issue across all of the benchmark examples considered.

For project funding, and Step-Up in particular, there is a much clearer evidence base in terms of the link between DEL funding and the performance of the project in raising educational attainment, increasing progression to HE and increasing retention within HE.

In order to assess the effectiveness and impact of funding, it is important to establish appropriate tracking and monitoring systems which can take into account the impact on specific individuals rather than generic groups which cannot easily be tracked.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the balance of funding shifts away from premium towards more project funding with greater accountability and tracking of impacts and that appropriate systems are put in place to track these impacts.

12.2.4   SMART Objectives

A lot of tracking and reporting of WP initiatives focuses on the details of activities undertaken; there is less information on outcomes achieved. This is a common problem - also evident in benchmark examples. Part of this may arise from a lack of SMART objectives and targets specified for the initiatives and therefore a lack of clarity on reporting and key metrics on which to focus. This means that it is not clear / easy to identify the value added that can be attributed to the WP premium funding; there is also scope for duplication of funding to arise.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that all of the funding streams and letters of offer incorporate SMART objectives and targets and that appropriate metrics are specified, against which each HEI must report.

12.2.5   Maximising Impact of Funding / Minimising Duplication

There is some overlap in some of the schools that both QUB and UU are targeting. Whilst this may be due in part to differing interventions being offered to different groups, there is a need to ensure that multiple supports are not all being focused on a relatively small number of schools / pupils, to the detriment of others who are receiving little or none. In order to ensure that DEL's WP resources are optimised, there is a need for a co-ordinating / central role to match interventions to target groups / areas.

This will need to take into account a range of approaches to fulfil DEL's WP objectives. This may range from broader focused interventions which provide aspiration-raising activity (e.g. albeit with a tighter focus in terms of NS-SEC 4-7, low performing schools in terms of progression to HE, etc.) complemented by more narrowly focused interventions (with stricter target groups taking into account the need to focus on specific sub-groups identified as being most in need of support (see 12.1.6 – Areas for Improvement) which would recruit / select individuals who would receive intensive support to encourage them to participate in HE. The Aim Higher approach may provide a useful model on which to base this proposed approach.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that interventions are managed to ensure that HEIs engagement with schools is not overlapping / duplicating. This would entail a

mapping of interventions (to understand purpose / target group), a coordinating function for HEIs / Working Group and a tighter definition of target groups).

12.2.6   *Widening Participation Through Raising Attainment*

In terms of attainment, the impact of Step-Up in particular is very positive (it also has positive impacts on increasing participation and retention). Whilst this is to be welcomed, the purpose of DEL funding is about increasing participation rates and retention rates; the responsibility for raising attainment in schools lies with DE. Interventions supported by DEL should focus on those areas for which DEL has responsibility (i.e. increasing participation in HE and increasing retention) and that where there are other responsible government departments involved in an issue relating to WP, then that department should also have a role to play i.e. DE's role with regard to educational attainment.

We recognise that DEL's goal of increasing participation in HE may be achieved by a variety of interventions: it is clear that early intervention is essential as is prolonged rather than ad hoc engagement. Whilst this means there is a role for DEL funding to play in interventions in schools, it is important that DEL does not take over DE's areas of responsibility with regard to educational attainment. Interventions in schools initiated from different policy leads should be complementary rather than overlapping / duplicating.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that DEL initiate a process to examine joint / shared working with DE to help achieve both departments' goals (improved academic attainment in schools (DE) leading to increased participation (DEL)).