

WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2022/23 – 2024/25

1.1 Please provide a high-level outline of your institution's Widening Participation policy in Higher Education and how this fits in with the institution's strategic direction.

St Mary's University College is committed to widening access and participation in higher education. The fundamental principle underpinning this Widening Access and Participation Plan is that it should, first and foremost, reflect our distinctive mission as a Catholic College, committed to social justice. Creating inclusive opportunities for the development of the whole person through access to higher education is central to our mission and informs our selection, recruitment, and retention of students.

St Mary's '...believes in the power of education to transform lives, overcome disadvantage and contribute positively to humanity.'

(page 5, Strategy 21: Agenda for Sustainability - An Institutional Plan for St Mary's University College 2020-23)

Widening access and participation is embedded within the College's overall corporate management plan. It informs policies and actions and is evident in the admissions criteria, quality assured teaching and learning, student support services, financial advice and guidance, careers and employability provision, marketing and recruitment, estates management and equality adherence.

St Mary's is committed to an Agenda for Sustainability based around eight strategic priorities. In the area described as Academic Profile and Positioning, the College aims to continue to excel in Widening Access and Participation and has a target of reaching a 20% participation rate of students from the lowest quintile/MDM.

St Mary's commitment is clear:

" We aim to widen access to higher education and to enable participation from a broad spectrum of society. " (Page 3, Strategy 21: Agenda for Sustainability - An Institutional Plan for St Mary's University College 2020-23)

The strategic aim of St Mary's for widening access is to ensure high levels of participation on College courses from two target groups in particular, students from the lowest socio-economic brackets, and students with a disability. Financial and other assistance will be provided to students from lower income families using additional funds generated from variable fees.

The College will ensure provision of a range of outreach programmes focussing on raising aspiration and attainment in under-represented groups. Activities and commitments that promote access and participation are focused on raising aspiration & attainment as well as encouraging, recruiting, and supporting students from under-represented groups as they progress towards, and through, higher education.

The College has a high level of success in recruiting students from lower socio-economic groups.

In conjunction with QUB, Stranmillis and Ulster, it has been decided to further this commitment by raising awareness among student teachers at all four institutions. This will

be in the form of a joint Student Teacher WAP Event, which can be either online or in-person post-Covid. During their time at the College, students are made aware of the Widening Access & Participation plan of St Mary's and are given opportunities to become involved in the various aspiration raising and attainment raising activities with school pupils, school staff, adult returners, disabled students, care leavers and others. A proportion of St Mary's students work as ambassadors on St Mary's Achieving More projects. The aim of this new joint-venture is to instil in all student teachers across all four HEI's in Northern Ireland, a knowledge, understanding and respect of the need for widening access in their future classrooms and schools. We want student teachers to be champions of Widening Access and to be aware of all the opportunities and help available at the four HEI's. The first of these events took place in February 2021.

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

Due to its distinctive pastoral care ethos, St Mary's University College has always had a very good success record in terms of the recruitment, retention, and progression of Widening Participation students.

The College attracts students from all corners of Northern Ireland. There are very few enrolments from the Republic of Ireland or beyond. There is clear evidence of recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds with approximately 16% of the undergraduate population for 2019/20 from Quintile 1 of the Multiple Deprivation Measure indices. Retention in relation to this group of students is particularly difficult. The College offers strong pastoral support with systems in place to address retention issues, either for the individual or for each student cohort. There was an 90% progression rate in 2019/20 in this regard.

The number of students on the disability support register has required dedicated resources in terms of providing advice, guidance, and support. 111 students (13%) declared a disability for 2019/20 with 71 students (8.4%) claiming Disability Support Allowance (DSA). The number of students receiving DSA has increased significantly over the past few years and we and we expect this high level to continue.

The number of adult learners entering the College amounts to 5.8% of new undergraduates aged 21 or over. Whilst recruitment of adults is below what the College would desire, students in this category are inducted fully into the College and supported academically and financially. Therefore, adult learners at St Mary's usually stay on course and progress well.

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

The College aims to:

- contribute to the overall raising of aspiration, attainment and participation in higher education
- provide prospective applicants with the information they require about life as a student at the College e.g. courses, costs, financial and personal support
- attract students from backgrounds that are currently underrepresented at the College
- engage positively and meaningfully with schools and colleges and ensure that applications are fairly assessed and that there is equality of access opportunity
- facilitate the transition of students into tertiary level education
- provide each student with the appropriate guidance and support that will enable them to reach the highest levels of achievement
- promote a diverse and inclusive environment.
- inform St Mary's undergraduates about the importance of and our commitment to widening access & participation in HE.

Key Target Groups

St Mary's will focus on the following underrepresented groups:

- Students from lower income families
- Students with Disabilities
- Students from Quintile 1
- Adult Learners
- Young Males from lower income families
- Care leavers.

Approach to Targeting

The College has a focused approach in terms of targeting and is, for example, holding specific events to raise aspirations such as an Open Evening/Online events for Mature Students and Taster sessions for WAP students. This will continue over the next 3 years. The College continues to target students from lower income families across all six counties in Northern Ireland including some border counties and fosters strong links with schools serving students from areas of high deprivation across the various sectors. College staff engage with numerous schools and students during the year and a full list is provided in the appendices.

The College, in co-operation with its partners, will continue to focus on aspiration raising and attainment raising projects for both primary and post-primary schools through its Young News Reader project (previously called the Critical Literacy project), the Summer Transition School, and the Easter School. This is to help ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do not attain lower grades than their more advantaged peers.

The College will continue to work with Springhill Community House & Conway Education Centre to provide Adult Revision classes for GCSE Science for mature students who wish to make a return to education. It is hoped that this special focus on adult returners may increase the number of mature students who go on to consider and gain a higher education

whether at St Mary's or at another HEI.

In terms of disabled students, the College Undergraduate Prospectus, various information leaflets, College Disability Support Booklet and information on the website provide clear details of all the help pre-entry and the retention and progression support offered to students with a disability.

For the last 5 years, the College has begun reaching out to a new group - care experienced young people. This has led to the development of a special Care Leaver's Bursary award and several Care leavers gaining entry on degree courses.

1.3 (a) TARGETS

You will note that the tables numbered (i) to (vi) below have been prepopulated with your institution's average enrolment for the last 3 years. You are now required to insert numerical targets for each of the groups identified across the **3 years 2022/23 – 2024/25**. These groups are regarded as being under-represented in Access to Success.

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2017- 2020)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
151	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	154	154	154

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2017- 2020)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
87	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	88	90	92

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2017- 2020)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
64			64	65

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2017- 2020)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
31			32	33

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2017- 2020)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
23			24	25

As HESA data is largely incomplete for the following area, the figure that you provided in a previous WAPP for 2016/17 has been inserted as a base line.

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

BASE YEAR 2016/17	Targets/Outcome			
		2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
1	Number	1	1	1

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

- (i)

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
9.4%	Number	84	84	84
	Percentage	9.9%	9.9%	9.9%

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

Activity	Estimated Spend 2022/23 (£)	Estimated Spend 2023/24 (£)	Estimated Spend 2024/25 (£)
Bursaries	151,620	156,000	157,000
Scholarships	3,000	3,000	3,000
Other financial Support			
Outreach	81,062	83,000	85,000
Retention	90,975	92,000	94,000
Research Activity			
Staffing/ Administration	13,042	14,000	15,000
TOTAL	339,699	348,000	354,000

- 1.4** List below the key programmes/projects financed from additional student fees that will contribute towards your institution's performance.
(Please refer to the appropriate section of the guidance notes before completing.)

PROJECT 1 The STAR Project (St Mary's Targeting and Aspiration Raising) involves the following activities:

Developing School Links for WP Groups, Dissemination of Information for WP Groups, College Open Day for WP students, Mature Students Evening, Taster Event, B.A. Liberal Arts Event for WP Students, 'Tick the Box' event for Care Leavers.

The project addresses the following target groups: students from lower income families; students from Quintile 1; students with a disability; adult learners; young males from lower income families and care experienced young people.

Participants were identified as follows: pupils from non-grammar, post-primary schools with a low number of applications to St Mary's, students with a disability, adult learners, care experienced young people, and young males. Evaluation will include consideration of the following outcomes: degree of positive feedback from school principals, career teachers and students; offering of at least 20 activities/events per year; maintenance of numbers of applications from non-selective post-primary schools; maintenance of numbers of applications from young males and the maintenance of the current level of applications from adult learners.

School Links for WP Groups: As part of the school links and outreach work, the St Mary's Outreach Team will directly engage with 20 selected schools/colleges across Northern Ireland to raise aspirations towards HE. College staff will offer information on HE and course choice, application support and/or interview skills training. Support available for students with disabilities or additional educational needs will also be highlighted. In addition, St Mary's staff will attend specifically selected Careers Fairs to reach more WP students. These events can be conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams or another platform, as necessary.

Dissemination of Information for WP Groups: In order to positively promote aspiration to HE, the College has invested in a new central hub (Webpage) on the website which will host all undergraduate application information such as: an Entry Guidelines Brochure, the College Undergraduate Prospectus, Degree Programme Talks, a BA Liberal Arts Information Leaflet, a Campus Video tour, Subject Study, Applications and Admissions Advice including a Financial Advice Leaflet. These are available both in electronic form (through the College website) and hard copies of the Entry Guidelines and various leaflets are distributed at Open Days, Taster Events, Careers Fairs, or during School Visits. These documents provide a variety of information including course outlines, course requirements, application procedures, opportunities associated with the different programmes, financial advice, and information on student support. The information is directed at applicants with specific needs, students with a disability, mature (adult) learners, and care leavers.

College Open Day for WP students: This annual event normally takes place in September. Its purpose is to give post-primary school students (Years 13 & 14), and FE College students from underrepresented groups, the opportunity to visit the College and gain wide-ranging information on all aspects of Higher Education. All secondary and grammar schools in Northern Ireland are invited and in recent times schools attending

have included: St Mary's, Glen Road, CBS Glen Road, All Saints, St Louise's Comprehensive College, Coláiste Feirste, Wallace High School, Lagan College, Holy Cross College Strabane, Sacred Heart College Omagh, St Kevin's College, Lisnaskea, Holy Trinity College Cookstown, Belfast High School, Belfast Royal Academy, and Down High School.

Mature Students Evening: This event normally takes place in November and can happen remotely via Microsoft Teams or via a different platform as required. Mature students from all the SRC's & College staff are invited to find out more about undergraduate courses, entry requirements and indeed all aspects of life at St Mary's.

Taster Session: Schools and WAP pupils are targeted for this event which, although available all year round, takes place mainly during the last week of October (Halloween Break for the schools). There is a particular emphasis on young males and on students from lower income families.

B.A. Liberal Arts Event for WP Students: This event specifically targets students from lower income families across Northern Ireland. These students, because of their disadvantaged background, are not expected to obtain high grades in their A' Level examinations, young males, care leavers and students with a disability. This event, which can be accessed online, provides potential applicants extensive information about the degree programme including an opportunity to meet and talk to course lectures/tutors/current students to discuss the courses and various requirements. Information is also available on work placement opportunities, application support, possible career paths following graduation, financial information, and student support.

Raising Awareness of Student Teachers: This new initiative is in partnership with QUB, Stranmillis University College and Ulster University. It is scheduled to take place annually and can be a pre-recorded or physical event. The idea behind it, is that final year student teachers will be made aware of the Widening Access & Participation plans of the four HEI's and be given an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the various aspiration raising and attainment raising activities carried out with school pupils, school staff, adult returners, disabled students, care leavers and others. The aim is to instil in student teachers a knowledge, understanding and respect of the need for widening participation in their future classrooms and schools.

PROJECT 2 St Mary's Achieving More Project

This project focusses on attainment-raising for three particular groups – (a) primary school pupils from lower income families who have been identified as slow progress readers or who may have difficulty in dealing with the transition from primary to post-primary school; (b) post-primary students from less advantaged backgrounds who are not performing well in Maths and English; and (c) Adult returners who are taking GCSE Science examinations and practical assessments. There are currently four programmes in the project – the Summer Transition School designed to smooth the transition from primary to post-primary school; the Easter School which aims to help the selected students achieve better results in GCSE Maths and English, the Young News Readers Project, which is an initiative to help children and young people to improve their essential literacy skills and to raise outcomes for pupils in their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, and finally, the Adult Returners GCSE Science class. The project will address the following target groups; pupils/students from lower income families, pupils/students from Quintile 1, students with a disability; young males from lower income families, care experienced young people, and adult returners.

Participants will be identified as follows:

Summer Transition School - primary school pupils from lower income families who have been identified as having possible difficulties in dealing with the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Easter School - pupils with a predicted GCSE grade in English and/or Maths below grade 'C' from non-grammar, post-primary schools with a record of few applications to St Mary's.

Young News Readers Project – school pupils aged between 8-12 years who require extra literacy support.

Adult Returners Science Class – Adults who are sitting GCSE examinations in Single Award Science Biology, Chemistry & Physics and who need laboratory support.

Evaluation will include consideration of the following outcomes: degree of positive feedback from school principals and career teachers, degree of positive student/adult engagement, extent of demand for places on the programme, number of students obtaining grade 'C' or above in GCSE Maths and English (target greater than 65%), number of students obtaining grade 'C' or above GCE English, number of adult returners obtaining grade 'C' or above in GCSE Science,

Summer Transition School: St Mary's, in co-operation with WPBP and supported by the Department of Education, also run an annual Summer School Programme during August each year. This is for pupils in the West Belfast area, who are transferring from Primary to Post-Primary School. It focuses on developing the STEM subjects of Science, Technology and Mathematics and English. The Summer School is designed to smooth the transition from primary to post-primary school and encourages learning by making it a fun experience. The programme is delivered by fully qualified local teachers along with support staff, through both the medium of Irish and English, and is normally held in St Mary's University College, although it can also be an online event. If the project takes place on campus, it allows the participants to experience a 'live' higher education environment as it is possible to offer campus tours, classroom experiences and engagement with College staff. Over 150 students participate in the four-day programme. Through both the Easter School and the Summer Learning experience, St Mary's and its partner, the WPBP, demonstrate their commitment to raising educational attainment in all sectors of education in the local area.

Easter School: The College GCSE Examinations Workshops are held in co-operation with the West Belfast Partnership Board (WPBP) and involve approximately 250 pupils from 12 North and West Belfast post-primary schools. They are normally held on the St Mary's campus during the Easter holidays although this can also be achieved virtually. GCSE Mathematics and English Language are core subject requirement for entry into many under-graduate programmes. Many students, while capable at other subjects, find mathematics and written English challenging. The College, in co-operation with our local partners (WPBP), works with post-primary schools in low participation areas to help improve the success rate of low-income students in GCSE Mathematics and English Language. The programme is offered in both English and Irish and combines practical workshops with formal tuition. The College will monitor the success of this project in terms of numbers of pupils attending and the proportion of pupils who obtain a grade

'C' or above in GCSE Mathematics (65% in 2019) and GCSE English Language (86% in 2019).

Young News Readers: Critical Literacy Project: The Young News Readers project is a collaboration between St Mary's University College, The Irish News and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). The project provides a literacy-based programme that draws on Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model to teach essential critical literacy skills that include, code breaking, meaning making, text using, and text analysing. The teaching resource, which is written by Donna Hazzard, Principal Lecturer and Literacy Team leader at St Mary's, is for teachers of pupils in Key Stages Two and Three. Thousands of pupils in schools across Northern Ireland have successfully participated. This included a significant number of primary and post-primary schools in areas of high social deprivation. The resource is underpinned by three foundational principles.

Firstly, the Literacy Changes Lives reports (2008; 2014) explore the link between Literacy and economic instability. The reports highlight the relationship that poor literacy has with a range of health inequalities, employment outcomes and criminal offending. They conclude that poor literacy has a profound social and economic impact on the most vulnerable individuals in our communities and is a barrier to social justice.

Secondly, the demands of living in a media-saturated world mean that the need for high level literacy skills is ever increasing. We live in unprecedented times. Never before have we had so much information (and disinformation) available to us. Children and young people need to develop critical capabilities to help them to navigate this complex terrain. Luke (2009) refers to these skills as "the new basic" in literacy.

Thirdly, research by the National Literacy Trust (2015) found that parents reading newspapers with their children led to significant progression in reading skills and improvements in wider attitudes towards the news and towards reading. Many of the resource tasks have been planned so that they can be completed at home with parental support and involvement. With these principles in mind the aims of the Creating Young News Readers project are to:

1. Raise outcomes for children and young people in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
2. Develop children and young people as critical thinkers, who question information, conclusions and viewpoints; who strive to be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant; and who seek to be logical and fair.
3. Promote family Literacy by powerfully reinforcing the good Literacy work done in school.

Adult Returners GCSE Science Class: The College continues to develop its partnership with the Springhill Community House & Conway Education Centre to help disadvantaged students with GCSE examinations. This College works to provide a classroom and laboratory support for a group of Adult Returners who wish to achieve a GCSE qualification in Science and make a return to education. The classes run in the College every Monday evening from 6.30pm until 8.30pm and include practical assessment in

Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

PROJECT 3 Working to Succeed Programme

St Mary's has a dedicated Student Support Team consisting of a full-time member of staff who is the Co-ordinator of Student Guidance and Support and a full-time Student Support Officer. Together they have responsibility for assisting students in a range of ways. The Working to Succeed project is a retention and support programme for WP groups. It aims to offer support to these students to assist them to successfully complete their studies and thus increase the retention rate amongst such students. The project involves the following activities:

- WP Induction/Stepping Stones Programme
- Attendance and Progression Monitoring & Follow-up programmes
- Tuition in College Writing Centre
- Access to a Study Skills Tutor
- Access to Academic Mental Health Tutor

The project will address the following **target groups**: students from lower income families, students from Quintile 1, students with a disability, adult learners and young males from lower income families. Participants will be identified as follows: students in receipt of College Bursaries, mature (over 21 on entry) students, young males from lower income families.

Evaluation will include consideration of the following outcomes: Year to Year Progression Rates of with targets of over 90% for WP identified groups.

WP Induction/Stepping Stones Programme:

This is offered to all Year 1 students in receipt of WP support and includes an induction meeting to discuss individual needs and to ensure the student has access to all available support and information from the very beginning of their College programme. It includes financial and budget advice as well as information on specialist provision, exam support, mentoring schemes. The programme is available both on campus or online.

This programme has been carefully designed to assist first year students (and particularly WAP students) in making the transition from school to university. It is scheduled to run for the first four weeks of term and include the following sessions:

- a) Time and Place: understanding a university timetable/designing a work schedule/finding my way around college/using the IT resources.
- b) Study: Reading a course outline/using the Library/taking notes/study strategies and skills.
- c) Settling In: Establishing good relationships/College Code of Practice/developing good study habits/combating plagiarism/accessing support services.
- d) Looking Forward: Setting goals/planning for assessment/engaging with the Personal Development Process/ College as the next step to a career.
- e) Individual Meetings with personal tutor to discuss individual needs or concerns.

Attendance and Progression Monitoring & Follow-up programmes: The College's Student Services Team, in co-operation with individual Programme Tutors, will actively monitor the attendance of all students in receipt of WP support and in co-operation with academic staff and the Co-ordinator of Student Guidance and Support and the Student Support Officer will ensure that there is appropriate follow-up in all cases of absence or under-achievement. Each student is assigned a tutor who assists and advises the student in the development of knowledge, understanding and skills. Students are provided with a clear explanation of the structure of courses and how they will be taught and assessed. Student counsellors are available to help in matters of a personal or pastoral nature. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

College Writing Centre: St Mary's operates a first-class writing centre which has been designated as a national Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Priority is given to students from low-income backgrounds and/or those without a family history of higher education since such students may struggle with the demands of academic writing. These students receive assistance from other students— "peer tutors" —who help the students to develop as university-level writers. The Writing Centre additionally offers seminars in written communications and provides writing classes to students on the Liberal Arts Degree programme. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

Study Skills Tutor: This includes one-to-one mentoring to assist struggling WP students to catch up with missed work, with reading and understanding questions, effective note-taking, and useful study strategies. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

Academic Mental Health Tutor: This service offers help to WP students in terms of recognising and putting in place strategies and mechanisms to cope with stress and pressure during the academic year and particularly in the run up to examinations. Time management skills are often addressed. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

PROJECT 4 St Mary's Disability Support Programme

This project is a retention and support programme for students with disabilities. It offers support to these students to assist them to successfully complete their studies and thus increasing the retention rate amongst such students. The project involves the following activities:

- Work of the Co-ordinator of Student Guidance and Support and the Student Support Officer
- Provision of a Disability Support Booklet
- Orientation Visits & Meetings:
- Attendance Monitoring
- Specialist Provision
- Exam Support
- Dyslexia Coaching

- Campus Assistant

Participants will be identified as follows: students in receipt of DSA and those identified as having a disability/ additional support needs (as coded within the HESA return).

Evaluation will include consideration of the following outcomes: Year to Year Progression Rates with a target drop-out rate of less than 10% and/or 5 students.

Work of the Student Support Officer: St Mary's has a dedicated Student Support Officer who has special responsibility for assisting students with disabilities. This assistance includes guidance in applying for government funding and other support, provision of assistive equipment, help with academic writing and the making of all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

Disability Support Booklet: This is a College specific booklet offering support details and guidance for students with a disability. It is available in hard copy from Student Services/Students Union or on-line.

Orientation Visits & Meetings: These are offered to students with a disability to offer them a chance to become familiar with the College Campus and to meet with the Support Officer to discuss individual needs and to offer information and support in applying for DSA and FSD. This service is normally available in person but can also be accessed remotely as required.

Attendance Monitoring: The College's Student Support Officer in co-operation with individual Programme Tutors will actively monitor the attendance of all disabled students in receipt of DSA and WAP support. An attendance trawl is conducted weekly during the year to identify WP students who are frequent non-attenders. In cooperation with academic staff, the student support officer will ensure that there is appropriate follow-up in all cases of absence or under-achievement. They will meet with the students to review current support and, if necessary, increase the support offered to ensure equal access and participation.

Specialist Provision and Support: The College currently provides specialist technology, equipment and, where necessary, support personnel to students with additional support needs including; assistive technology, assistive technology support and training, access to PCs with assistive technology installed, specialist equipment e.g. Dictaphone, laptop, furniture, academic or personal assistants, proof readers, personal note takers during lectures, specialist tuition for students with dyslexia, academic tuition for students with disabilities, mental health mentor, general study tutors, library support, flexible coursework deadlines, travelling expenses and financial assistance for consumables such as photocopying

Exam Support: Students with additional support needs can apply for any or all the following: alternative exam venue, extra time allowance for exams, rest breaks, use of a scribe or a reader, and technological aids.

Dyslexia Coaching: This is offered on a one-to-one basis to all WP students who have a dyslexia diagnosis and who are waiting for DSA funded support to become available. The College uses only QUB support providers.

Campus Assistant: This is offered based on need and as a result of a Risk Assessment. It includes help getting around the campus as well as assistance on field trips. The College uses only QUB support providers.

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

KA4: St Mary's positively promotes HE in their outreach work to schools and colleges and includes the agreed single brand identity for WP on all public materials.

KA5: Through our School Links and Outreach, Young News Reader Literacy Project, Summer Transition School and Easter School, the College seeks to raise aspirations of young people and help raise attainment levels in both Literacy and Numeracy.

KA6: St Marys accepts BMC Foundation degree in Health & Leisure Studies students into Year 2 of the BA Liberal Arts programme.

KA8: The College's Student Services Team, Academic Registry and Programme Tutors actively monitor the attendance/progression of students in receipt of WP support.

KA9: The College's dedicated Student Support Services team offer guidance to students applying for government funding & support. Students can also avail of assistive equipment, help with academic writing and the making of all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access and progression in HE.

KA11: The College's dedicated Widening Access & Participation Officer works with DfE, DE, other HEIs, the College SMT and Academic Registry to prepare and submit a WAP Plan on an annual basis.

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

St Mary's will provide clear and accessible information to prospective and existing students about the fees they are liable to pay and the financial support they can expect to receive. Currently students are provided with this information in the College Student Handbook available on the College intranet. Hard copies are available on request. In addition, the College will provide the same information in the College Undergraduate Prospectus and will also make it available on the College website. A leaflet on financial matters for prospective students is distributed during open days and visits to schools by College admissions staff. All this information is also available online or alternatively, through the Students Union Office, and the Student Services Office.

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

Monitoring of the Access Agreement and WAP Plan will be the responsibility of the Widening Access & Participation Co-ordinator and the Academic Registry Team who will submit the WAP Plan to the Board of Governors in June for their consideration and approval. The College Senior Management Team will have overall responsibility. As part of the annual monitoring cycle, the Strategic Management Team will receive bi-annual reports on the implementation of the College Access Agreement from the Widening Access & Participation Co-ordinator. The implementation of the measures set out in the agreement will be monitored and progress against milestones will be measured.

1.8 Please provide an additional evaluation on how you think your institution is performing or provide us with relevant documents in line with section 1.8 of the guidance document.

Level 1 Evaluation – Reactions

What participants thought and felt about the programme

Project	Approach to Evaluation
1.STAR Project 2.Achieving More Project 3.Working to Succeed Project 4.Disability Support Project	Whether the event is online (held remotely) or if participants visit the College, our approach to evaluation is threefold: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felt reaction, (excited buzz on the day, smiling faces, numbers attending and engagement on the day in person or online, number of complaints). 2. Verbal evidence which includes casual conversations/chat activity with both school pupils, mature students, teachers, and parents/ guardians. 3. Written evidence (completed evaluation sheets).

Project 1 STAR Project

Summary: All our outreach aspiration activities have been received positively by all who have been involved. Participants report that they found the talks and presentations given on Open Days, information afternoons or evenings, and at Careers Fairs or in individual schools as well as the Taster Sessions, engaging and relevant. Participants also report that the booklets and leaflets distributed as well as the information hub:

<https://www.smucb.ac.uk/admissions/yourjourney.asp> on the website is both informative and up-to-date.

Project 2 Achieving More Project

Activities including the Easter School, Summer Transition School, Young News Reader, and the Adult Returners GCSE Science class were well received by all participants. Both verbal and written evidence suggest that these activities were relevant, worthwhile, and enjoyable.

Project 3 Working to Succeed Project

Retention and support for WP students is something the College, and in particular, the Student Services team takes very seriously. The student body are aware of the pastoral ethos and culture of St Mary's. Many students have verbally expressed their satisfaction for the help they have received during the year. In particular, there was considerable positive reaction and verbal praise for the 'Stepping Stones' Programme, during the first few weeks of term. This programme helps to embed, at a very early stage, the pastoral ethos of the College into the minds of new students. It also helps to identify needs of WP students much earlier. For particular students, we were able to put in place tailored support mechanisms to ensure that such students knew who to turn to if they developed a problem, so that they didn't get into difficulty and, subsequently, drop out. Another measure is the consistently high Student Satisfaction rating that the College achieves in the National Student Survey (includes all Year 4 Students), which revealed an overall student satisfaction rate of 84%.

Project 4 Disability Support Project

Positive reactions were received from disabled students who were assisted in terms of claiming DSA or obtaining on-going learning support and/or granted additional consideration during examinations. The anonymous nature of this support encourages students to come forward and not to be afraid or embarrassed to receive support. The positive verbal feedback received, as well as the growing number of students seeking out the service, is a good indication that this project is relevant and worthwhile.

Level 2 Evaluation - Learning

The resulting increase in knowledge or capability

Project	Approach to Evaluation
1.STAR Project 2.Achieving More Project 3.Working to Succeed Project 4.Disability Support Project	Where practical, evaluation of participants' knowledge and understanding following specific programmes or activities will be carried out through questionnaires/ survey and face-to-face student interviews.

Project 1 STAR Project

Open Days, information afternoons or evenings, school-based talks and presentations, and taster sessions are all designed to get information out to young people about the benefits of Higher Education, available courses or routes to be considered, as well as support offered to help achieve the dream of going to university. Again, all indications are that participants' knowledge and understanding concerning courses on offer and assistance available to them is greatly increased following attendance at one of our events, and their confidence and skills in terms of the application and interview process. In addition to the information provided in hard copy form, all prospective students are also directed to the College website to further increase their knowledge. The effectiveness of our in-house and external outreach is currently measured in a variety of ways from verbal and written comments on evaluations forms and in terms of an applicants' knowledge shown on their application form or at interview. Another measure is to record the number of people visiting the College website or contacting the College to make specific enquiries following an event.

Project 2 Achieving More Project

In terms of attainment raising, increases in learning is measured by testing participants before and after a project, for example, the Young News Reader literacy project. In the case of the Easter School, and the Adult Returners GCSE Science Class, we can compare the participants predicted grade before participation in the project, and the participant's actual grade achieved in the GCSE examination to ascertain whether there was an increase in learning and capability.

Project 3 Working to Succeed Project

Feedback from student interviews and focus groups enabled the College to assess a student's understanding of the degree programme registered on as well as knowledge of available practical and financial support for WP students. The Stepping Stones programme was particularly useful in dealing with queries and ensuring that individuals and groups of students were prepared for Higher Education and had the knowledge, confidence and skills to access available support.

Project 4 Disability Support Project

The efforts of the Student Support team along with other staff members has meant that students who have a specific support needs have a clearer understanding of the funded and non-funded support arrangements available. This is measured by the increasing number of students applying for Disability Support Allowance.

Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer

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

Project	Approach to Evaluation
1.STAR Project 2.Achieving More Project 3.Working to Succeed Project 4.Disability Support Project	Outcomes of each programme to be analysed in relation to qualitative and quantitative data to establish uptake, improvement, and value.

Project 1 STAR Project

Indications are that the College continues to perform well in attracting students from target groups, particularly those from disadvantaged areas measured through Multiple Deprivation Measures. There has been an increase in the range of schools with significant numbers of applicants coming from schools in the secondary (High) school sector.

Project 2 Achieving More Project

In terms of transfer, the Young News Reader project, the Easter School, the Adult Returners Science class, and the Summer Transition School are all good examples. All indications are that following their experience on these programmes, pupils/students increase in confidence and are able to put to good use what they have learned whether this is literacy skills, maths and/or science skills, or their ability to make a smooth transfer from primary to secondary education or access further/higher education.

Project 3 Working to Succeed Project

Thankfully the College has very low levels of withdrawals during the academic year. The College monitors attendance continuously and identifies students at risk of withdrawing. Uptake in terms of support measures is increasing showing a greater awareness and need from the student body. Figures showing the retention of students from target groups would indicate that this project is successful.

Project 4 Disability Support Project

The increase in uptake of support for students with disability and the lack of drop out is a good indication of the success of this programme.

Level 4 Evaluation- Results

Results- the effects resulting from performance

Project	Approach to Evaluation
1.STAR Project 2.Achieving More Project 3.Working to Succeed Project 4.Disability Support Project	Use of application data and enrolment information, GCSE grades and use of post and pretesting of participants. Analysis of year on year progression rates for each target group.

Project 1 STAR Project

In terms of aspiration raising, it is difficult to measure the true success rate as many students may be inspired to pursue higher education because of College outreach activities but may choose to attend another institution. However, the College continues to attract students from all corners of Northern Ireland and there is clear evidence of recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with over 16% of the undergraduate population for 2019/20 coming from Quintile 1 of the Multiple Deprivation Measure indices. This is a fair indication that the College is being successful in terms of widening access and raising aspirations.

Project 2 Achieving More Project

In terms of attainment raising, results can be verified for example, by examining the participants predicted grade before the Easter School and afterwards the participant's actual grade achieved in the GCSE examination. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, examinations were cancelled in Summer 2020 and Summer 2021. However, in the 2019 series of examinations: 86% of Easter School participants achieved grades A-C in GCSE English and 65% of Easter School participants achieved grades A-C in GCSE Mathematics. These were all students designated as 'at risk of achieving a Grade D or lower in the examination'. Without a grade 'C' in both GCSE English and Maths or equivalent, participants could not pursue a third level qualification. Only time will tell what percentage of these students go on to study at a HEI.

Project 3 Working to Succeed Project

Following the introduction of Multiple Deprivation Measures, retention, progression, and success in degree completion will be analysed as and when data becomes available. This will be used to identify trends and performance against benchmarks. The College is serious in its efforts to run effective initiatives for the induction of WP students. An assessment will be made of the performance of specific groups in relation to this.

Project 4 Disability Support Project

The number of disabled students enrolled on courses at St Mary's and granted DSA has increased. This is mainly due to the efforts of a small, but very dedicated Student Services team. Official returns present an increase from 4 % in 2014/15 to 6 % in 2015/16, to 7% in 2017/18 to 8% in 2018/19. 2019/20 figures show an increase again to 8.4 %.