

WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2025/26 – 2027/28

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

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

Queen's Strategy 2030 sets out our ambitious plan for the next ten years to '*Shape A Better World*' through life-changing education and research. We aim to achieve the vision by focusing on 4 key priorities:

- Education and Skills
- Research and Innovation
- Global Reputation and Partnerships
- Social and Civic Responsibility, and Economic Prosperity

As part of our strategic priority focusing on Education and Skills, we aim to provide students with a sense of purpose and the skills and competencies necessary to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others. Our aim is to ensure that students have the skills to work globally, but the opportunity to build a career locally, meeting the needs of the economy in key sector areas and supporting the growth of the knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland. We are committed to delivering a transformative student experience in partnership with our students with wellbeing, inclusivity and cultural diversity at the fore. We also aim to ensure that Queen's is accessible to students from all backgrounds and that every learner is supported in the development of their full potential. Partnership arrangements with Further Education Colleges and Schools, along with revised admissions criteria, will broaden the opportunities to study here and expand the diversity of our students.

We recognise that Universities are uniquely placed to shape the world in which we live, by helping to solve the challenges faced by individuals and communities at a local, regional and global level. We also have a pivotal role to play in underpinning the economic, social and cultural growth of their region. Our institutional commitment to Social and Civic Responsibility, and Economic Prosperity requires an accessible, agile and responsive approach in addressing the needs and priorities of our region. Queen's are committed to driving social change and aim to address key social challenges in Northern Ireland, such as poverty, inequality, conflict resolution and climate change through our research and teaching, and through our role as a major civic institution in the region. Furthermore, we demonstrate our commitment to tackling social inequality through:

- our widening participation outreach opportunities,
- our comprehensive offering of lifelong learning opportunities,
- integrating Widening Participation in the culture and working practices of the University,
- offering an education portfolio which provides a range of routes to learning, and supports student progression and success,
- partnership with Queen's Students' Union to promote inclusivity and diversity,
- partnership working with key stakeholders to make a real difference to the lives of those most disadvantaged in Northern Ireland (NI).

Our Widening Participation Framework reflects a student life cycle approach as we recognise the importance of both Pre-Entry Outreach and Flexible Access to Higher

Education, supporting transition, student retention, student success and future employability.

Examples of our Pre-Entry Outreach and Flexible Access to Higher Education are illustrated below, with further details reported in section 1.4.

- Queen's continue to offer 300+ places annually as part of the Pathway Opportunity Programme.
- Queen's Academy programmes delivered in partnership with identified schools and FE colleges, offering a progressive programme of engagement and support to targeted pupils.
- Development of attainment raising interventions with Upper Primary Pupils through the Reading Together Programme, and Student Union Homework Club initiative, GCSE support through a Maths Attainment Programme and subject specific A Level/ BTEC tutoring embedded within the Senior Academy Programme.
- Aspiration building through the Professor Fluffy and Junior Academy Programmes.
- Information, advice and guidance available to pupils, schools, and parents on widening participation opportunities to Higher Education.
- Ongoing development of alternative routes to higher education through Access and Open Learning Programmes in collaboration FE Colleges.
- Contribution to the development of initiatives in partnership with FE to progress current apprenticeships to HE as relevant.
- Scholarships and bursaries available for Widening Participation entrants including a specific bursary for Care Experienced Students.
- Queen's Students and Widening Participation programme participants used as ambassadors and role models to raise ambition of young people from under-represented groups.
- Evidence informed practice employed to maximise impact of Widening Participation interventions.

Queen's commitment to Supporting Transition, Retention, and Attainment of our students is evident through the following examples:

- The Learning Development Service offers support to all students via Transition Skills for University. This is a set of digital academic skills resources on Canvas that are fully accessible, interactive, and intended to support students' transition to university study. The content is updated bi-annually and integrated into undergraduate programmes, as well as being available to students for self-directed learning.
- Enhance the support package for students entering the University from Widening Participation cohorts. This includes the ongoing development of resources and activities to support student transition and belonging; including Transition Skills to University and Getting Started at Queen's resources, as well as Peer Mentor schemes and other School-based initiatives.
- Provision of advice and guidance to Widening Participation entrants on the range of support and assistance available, including access to bursaries and scholarships, to enable a positive transition to university life.
- Provide a range of student wellbeing support to ensure students are supported throughout their student journey.
- Further promote the provision of dedicated services for the support for students with disabilities and additional learning needs.
- Specific support for care experienced students including dedicated staff contacts, bursary, and accommodation support.
- Provide support to ensure positive employability outcomes for Widening Participation cohorts.

- Provide support to address barrier to progression through the student journey based on identified need.
- Further promote one-to-one and financial support available for care experienced students.
- Continue to develop partnerships that will support engagement in and delivery of pre-entry widening participation outreach programmes.

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

Queen's continues to focus on the student experience, with a particular emphasis on improving student transition, retention and attainment. The University carefully monitors the recruitment of students from disadvantaged areas using the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure. In recent years, some 29% of our undergraduate intake is from areas in quintile 1 and 2.

The previously reported HESA Performance Indicators on student continuation have been discontinued. Nonetheless, the Education Committee at Queen's continues to monitor all aspects of students' performance and success. For the 2022-23 intake, the first-year continuation rate improved to 94% (93% in prior year).

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

You will need to provide details on key target groups within Access to Success, anticipated expenditure and the measures of success – your response should include a description of your approach to targeting, as well as the areas targeted for improvement over the next 3 years. You may wish to add to the projection tables below to report on your own institution's specified target groups if not already included in Access to Success.

Queen's are committed to ensuring that those groups who are underrepresented in Higher Education should have an equal opportunity to do so. Widening Participation is a key focus of Strategy (2030) and will endeavour to work with priority target groups including:

- First in Family Students (those with no parental experience of Higher Education)
- Those from lower income families (eligible to receive Free School Meals (FSM), Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), or have a household income of less than £19,203)
- Students who have experience of care
- those with disabilities, long-term conditions, or a working diagnosis or additional learning needs

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- Carers for a family member or dependent
- Newcomers, refugees and / or those seeking asylum
- Students from disadvantaged postcode area as defined by NISRA
- Mature Students/Adult Returners

Queen's engage with a range of key stakeholders including statutory and voluntary agencies, school and colleges to identify those who meet Widening Participation priority groups allowing the promotion of pre-entry and outreach programmes and opportunities.

Additionally, Queen's seek to promote support and opportunities to current students who meet Widening Participation criteria by targeting support based on university held student information such as household income level, Care Experience indicated by students who have 'Ticked the Box' upon application, and students who have indicated that they have a disability or additional learning need.

Projected figures of spend are detailed in Part 2 of the return with forward plan for 2025-2026.

In December 2024 Queen's brought together a group of key senior staff to review the existing Widening Participation Strategy. The group Chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) and Vice Chair the Director of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility (CESR) will drive the strategic refresh of the exiting Widening Participation strategy reflecting, pre-entry, on course and post-graduation student success. Plans beyond 2025/26 will be shaped by the outworkings of the group.

Queen's have also provided representation and hosted the WP Regional Forum facilitated by DfE to shape the future Widening Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland. Once published, Queen's will endeavour to reflect the strategy within future institutional planning.

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 2025/26 – 2027/28**. These groups are regarded as being under represented in Access to Success.

***NB Targets to be updates in line with New DfE Regional Strategy Priorities.*

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2019-2023)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
1,474	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>Note: Metric rebased to include NI full-time and part-time first-degree students (aligned to HESA).</small>				

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2019-2023)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
1,875	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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

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AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2019-2023)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
645		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2019-2023)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
310		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2019-2023)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
1,300 Note: Metric rebased to include NI full-time and part-time first-degree students (aligned to HESA).		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

As HESA data is largely incomplete for the following area, the figure that you provided in a previous WAPP for 2020/21 has been inserted as a base line.

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

BASE YEAR	Targets/Outcome			
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
60	Number	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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

(i)

Group:	
Outcome:	

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	Number	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>
	Percentage	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>

(ii)

Group:	
Outcome:	

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	Number	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>
	Percentage	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>

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(iii)

Group:	
Outcome:	

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Number				
Percentage				

1.3(c) 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 2025/26 (£)	Estimated Spend 2026/27 (£)	Estimated Spend 2027/28 (£)
Bursaries	952,000	*	*
Scholarships	391,117		
Other financial Support			
Outreach	2,185,694		
Retention	1,103,299		
Research Activity			
Staffing/ Administration			
TOTAL	4,605,110		

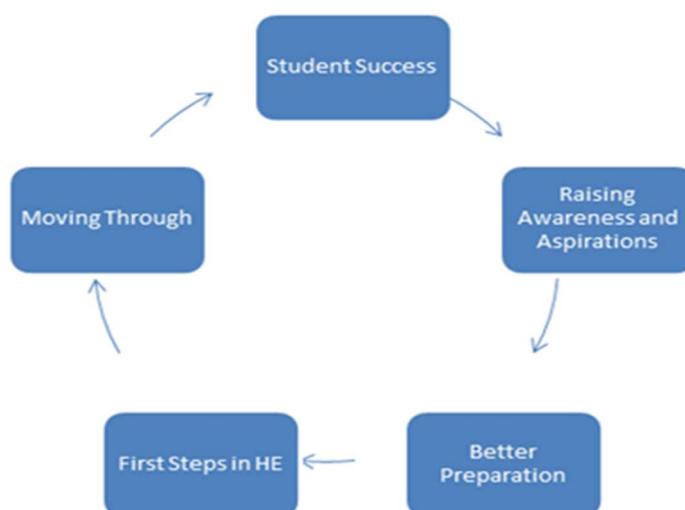
** Figures in will be reviewed considering the new DfE regional Strategy for WP.*

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- 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.)

Queen's Widening Participation programmes reflect an integrated learner-centred framework, our work recognising that widening access and participation must be addressed at different phases of the 'student lifecycle' as illustrated.

STUDENT LIFECYCLE MODEL



- Raising awareness and aspirations (from primary school age upwards, including adults).
- Better preparation/pre-entry support (raising attainment to enable transition from school/FE College/Access courses to higher education).
- First steps in higher education (including induction programmes and transition support on course).
- Moving through the degree programme (supporting students in a holistic way, both their academically and personally).
- Student success (achievement and preparation for work and/or further study).

Ten programmes are presented as illustrative examples against this student lifecycle model.

RAISING AWARENESS AND ASPIRATION

1. Primary School Programmes

The **Professor Fluffy Programme** has been reviewed and enhanced to reflect an increased partnership approach to delivery and increased emphasis on introducing the diversity of subjects within Queen's University. The programme will be delivered via a mixed model of in-school and on-campus activities. Participation will also be encouraged from those who influence future decision making including;

parents/guardians, community leaders and teachers. This will be achieved by having:

- a focus on 'doorstep' schools with high percentage of Free School Meals (FSM). Numbers of Newcomers/Asylum Seekers and Refugees pupils will also be considered,
- a combination of classroom activities and an on-campus celebration event using current Queen's students as ambassadors,
- a collaborative partnership approach to delivery with the various Queen's Faculties to showcase the range of options available.

Reading Together aims to improve reading skills and foster positive attitudes toward reading for children aged 7–9 with experience of care. For the 2025–2026 academic year, paired reading sessions will support 12 children and run over two semesters. These sessions will take place online and be led by trained Queen's student mentors.

The **Student Unions' Homework Clubs Programme** gives Queen's University volunteers the chance to provide homework support to children and young people who live in areas of educational underachievement. These pupils may not have the opportunity to complete their homework at home which can lead to underachieving in school, low confidence, and limited future opportunities. The Homework Clubs initiative will support up to 150 student volunteers providing homework support in 18 homework clubs (for primary and post primary pupils). The programme will continue to:

- deliver volunteer training to support student volunteers allocated to Homework Clubs throughout the Greater Belfast Area.
- support Homework Clubs by providing trained Student Volunteers to support academic attainment with primary and post primary pupils in areas of educational underachievement.

2. Queen's Junior Academy

Junior Academy Sports Programme aims to introduce pupils to Higher Education through sport. The programme targets young males in Year 8 providing a progressive programme through to Year 10 and had been designed to develop communication, leadership and teamwork skills. In Year 10 participants have the opportunity to complete a Level 1 Qualification in Sports Leadership accredited by The Leadership Skills Foundation (LSF). Forty places are offered each year to Year 8 pupils, with up to 100 young people on programme (Years 8-10) annually. The Sports Leader qualification provides a starting point for learners who wish to develop their leadership skills. The practical course allows learners to demonstrate their ability to lead others in sport and helps set the foundation for future sports and career development. Pupils attend structured learning sessions including a one-hour practical session where they deliver a sports activity to younger pupils in their respective schools. To complete the qualification, participants demonstrate the ability to lead others, communicate effectively, and work as part of a team. Pupils are also required to complete a portfolio of evidence and deliver a one-hour practical session.

The **Junior Academy Programme** is designed to introduce pupils to Higher Education and life at university. Participating schools have the opportunity to nominate pupils to take part in the programme delivered over Year 9 -Year 12. Each year approximately 100 young people are nominated to take part. The programme aims to raise awareness of Higher Education and the opportunities available by developing academic skills and supporting attainment. This is achieved through a progressive programme of engagement:

- In Year 9 - Participants take part in a Welcome and Orientation programme, where they are offered an insight into university life which includes a campus tour. Pupils also gain insight into university life by having the opportunity to work with Student Ambassadors on a range of campus challenges.
- In Year 10 - Pupils gain knowledge of the variety of subjects offered by Queen's University by taking part in three faculty-based taster days. Pupils attend lectures, workshops, and complete tasks set by academic staff supported by student ambassadors. Pupils gain information on the importance of GCSEs through a seminar with Queen's Careers and advice on selection and subject specific requirements needed for certain courses.
- Year 11 and 12 GCSE support in the form of study skills sessions. Pupils also attend Master Classes in English and Mathematics to support GCSE attainment.

Queen's University are currently investigating further evidence-based practices to **support attainment** raising for elements of the Junior Academy Programme. The initial focus will be to explore ways to support GCSE attainment implementing pilot initiatives with targeted groups.

BETTER PREPARATION/PRE-ENTRY SUPPORT

3. Queen's Outreach to Schools and the Community

Across 2025-26, the Queen's Outreach to Schools and the Community Programme will further enhance awareness of the importance of higher education among students, parents/guardians, and teachers alike and through a diverse range of recruitment activities, continue to provide educational support and guidance enabling young people to make informed future choices. Key school engagement activities will include:

- Regular 1-2-1 contact maintained with key school contacts via personalised emails and telephone calls.
- Monthly Careers Teachers Newsletter developed in conjunction with Faculty Student Recruitment Hubs to ensure pupils are informed and kept up to date on upcoming events and matters of interest.
- Annual Careers Teachers Briefing event.
- Delivery of physical and virtual talks to pupils across Years 10-14, teachers, parents, and guardians. The series of talks will include:
 - Choosing your GCSE's,
 - Why Queen's,
 - Bespoke talks based on individual school requests.
- Attendance at a range of Schools/FE College careers fairs, exhibitions, and conventions.
- Provision of bespoke University tours and talks to student groups across years 10-12 to raise their awareness of what University can offer, providing useful insights into university life.
- Provision of bespoke campus tours, subject and/or support service talks to prospective students and their parents/guardians.

- Schedule of live virtual events and student panels enabling prospective students to hear from and chat to current students about their experiences, share advice and offer support to each other.
- Planning and execution of a series of Open Days, Offer Holder days and Clearing and Confirmation events aimed at prospective students.
- Development of a marketing and communications plan with key messaging at the core and in line with student needs.
- Attendance at Higher Education Fairs, Exhibitions and Roadshows including UCAS NI.
- Participation in Career Conventions in collaboration with Area Learning Communities.
- Maintain and develop the career's teachers' website and newsletter as a resource for careers teachers to avail of up-to-date information and a range of teaching resources and links, to support the delivery of CEIAG across schools.
- Collaboration and engagement with a range of key external contacts in the community including teachers, parents, local politicians, employers, and other professional organisations.

4. Queen's Senior Academy

The **Queen's Senior Academy** will deliver a comprehensive and progressive programme of support which aims to raise attainment and increase the number of entrants to Higher Education from targeted Widening Participation backgrounds. Over 50 places are available each year on the 18-month programme.

This will be achieved through:

- A targeted approach in collaboration with targeted NI-wide schools and FE colleges, to ensure those who meet WP target groups are nominated to take part in the Senior Academy programme.
- A targeted approach with NI Social Care Trusts to ensure nominations of care experienced young people.
- An intensive programme combining on-campus and online resources.
- Subject specific tuition.
- Information and guidance sessions hosted by Queen's University on the UCAS application process, to ensure informed course selection and career development planning.
- Information and guidance sessions hosted by Queen's University to give participants access to various educational institutions, including Further Education Colleges, Apprenticeships, and other local universities and provide more information on available options.
- An opportunity to gain a taste of student life by spending time with current Queen's students.
- Previous Senior Academy students will have the opportunity to become employed as Student Ambassadors. The role includes hosting events, discussion facilitation, provision of information and guidance to participants on student life, the journey to, and experience of Higher Education.
- Renewed and further emphasis on ongoing evaluation to inform the development of the Senior Academy going forward.
- The programme targets Year 13 pupils meeting WP criteria in targeted schools, with a particular focus on young people with experience of care. Key target groups include:

- First in family to attend Higher Education
- In receipt of/eligible to receive FSM and/or EMA
- Annual household income £19, 203 or less
- Have a disability/additional learning need

- Are the main carer for a family member
- Care experienced
- Refugee, Asylum Seeker, Newcomers

5. Pathway Opportunity Programme

The Pathway Opportunity Programme delivers a structured series of events, designed to aid progression to Queen's University Belfast, including admissions guidance and support. Participants take part in a blended model of on campus and online events via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Activities include of workshops, master classes, and seminars. Participants complete an assignment based on work completed during a week-long summer school. The programme includes:

- Province wide targeting of Year 13 students who meet specific eligibility criteria.
- Subject specific coursework working with university lecturers and postgraduate students to expose participants to university level academics while increasing enthusiasm and motivation to study selected pathway subjects.
- Academic Skills programmes to better prepare participants to attain the necessary A-Level/BTEC grades to attend university as well as preparation for future academic study at HE level.
- Increasing knowledge and awareness of university life.
- Information on the application process through workshops and seminars provided by Queen's Admissions and Access Service.
- Residential experience at Queen's to increase knowledge and awareness of the student experience giving the opportunity to gain further insight into university life.
- Participants who successfully complete the programme received a guaranteed conditional offer or guaranteed interview for courses within their Pathway subject and based on assessed coursework, may also receive a reduced entry offer of one or two A-Level grades (or equivalent).

As the Pathway Opportunity Programme currently offers 13 Pathways covering almost all undergraduate courses at Queen's, the future focus will be to continue evaluating and evidencing programme impact.

6. Access and Open Learning

Queen's will continue to promote and monitor Open Learning Courses and Access programmes with a view to increasing the number of mature students progressing to undergraduate study at Queen's via these routes. Open Learning Courses offers adult learners the opportunity to undertake short courses to sample Higher Education experience at Queen's. The provision of Access programmes facilitates entry to Higher Education for applicants from specific groups in the community, identified as under-represented in Higher Education, who have the ability to benefit from and succeed in third level education, but for a variety of reasons do not have the traditional qualifications required. The programmes are designed for those who have been out of full-time education for more than two years.

The aim is to increase the possibility of those participating in Open Learning Courses and Access programmes exploring options that will lead to further engagement with Higher Education. Specific tasks include:

- Review the delivery of the existing Queen's validated Access Programme with NWRC (postponed from 2024/25).
- Monitor the outcomes of the 2024-25 Periodic Review of the new Queen's validated Access programmes delivered at Belfast Metropolitan College and South Eastern Regional College.

- Annual monitoring of Queen's validated Access programmes at the three partner Colleges through University and College quality assurance procedures.
- Annual Monitoring of the new Open Learning Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action with Foróige and R-CITY approved in 2023-24. Ensuring best practice through shared moderation and parity of academic standards across programmes and providers in a consortium model where possible, through the engagement with the University co-ordinators.
- Work with education providers at community level to explore awareness raising opportunities to promote Higher Education.

Supporting Transition, Retention and Attainment and Employability

7. Transition Support Programme

The Transition Support Programme aims to ensure that a diverse student body settles successfully into university and becomes fully engaged in the Queen's student experience. The Transition Support Programme normally includes the following, but is adapted every year based on evaluation of the previous year and emerging student needs:

- Academic-based induction delivered at subject level and incorporating meetings with staff, current students, peers, personal tutor and information on course relevant support.
- Pre-Semester Engagement Programme designed to support the transition of new and returning students to build campus connections, prepare to effectively engage students with their studies and develop skills, knowledge, and awareness to proactively manage and maintain well-being during their time at Queen's.
- Transition support for students entering Queen's from Widening Access Programmes including the Senior Academy and Pathway Opportunity Programme.
- Increase awareness of support available for students with disabilities by delivering advice and guidance at open days, Offer holder events and targeted inductions.
- Broaden outreach to students who may not have previously identified with the term "disability" but could benefit from support, fostering inclusivity.
- Students in receipt of DSA receive assessment and support from university services in an informed, timely and efficient manner as indicated by Student Satisfaction measure. (Target: 85% of respondents)
- Students are supported by Accessible Learning Support in an informed, timely and efficient manner as indicated by Student Satisfaction measure. (Target: 85% of respondents).
- Enhance support for students with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC), providing transition guidance, tailored adjustments, and peer support.
- Increase awareness and uptake of HEI-funded reasonable adjustments, including one-to-one support and assistive technology (AT) available through DSA and other funding streams.
- A Transition Skills for University course available via the Learning Development Service to all students completing UG programmes.

Each of these activities will cover elements of learning in higher education, raising awareness of support available, and provide an opportunity to socialise with other students:

- School-based peer mentoring providing transition support to new students.

- Programme based peer assisted learning to help students as appropriate with academic content/skills.
- Promotion of supports available to empower students to become Healthy Learners via digital platforms, e.g. digital screens, and social media campaigns, as well as physical formats, e.g. events in One Elmwood and pop up stands and paper leaflets available across campus.
- The University has also established a Transition and Retention Working Group to make recommendations for future initiatives and activities. The Group meets regularly to monitor progress in this area.

ON COURSE SUPPORT

8. Academic Support Framework

The University is committed to the delivery of an Academic Support Framework to ensure that students progress through their course and attain a degree classification reflective of their academic potential. The framework combines generic support with a range of specialist academic and related supports based on student needs. The framework is evaluated on an ongoing basis and innovative methods of support are developed and piloted to ensure support reflects the changing environment of learning and the needs of a diverse body of students.

The Framework includes:

- Personal Tutors, who play a key role in terms of engagement with and increased retention of our students. The personal tutor is key to guiding the student through their academic study by providing feedback on academic performance and signposting to additional, relevant support if appropriate; for example, the Learning Development Service (LDS).
- The Learning Development Service (LDS), which provides academic skills support to undergraduate students as part of taught degree programmes, and via individual one-to-one engagement. The Service aims to empower students with the skills and knowledge they need to develop as learners and achieve their full academic potential at Queen's.
- Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) schemes, developed as an innovative approach to students supporting students within taught programmes.

In the context of the Strategy 2030 and supporting students as healthy and successful learners, the University has developed an Assessment Support Framework and digital Hub. This embedded framework offers a continuum of procedures for students to access support for assessments depending on need. It enhances student transition and wellbeing, as well as building staff capacity to manage interventions. The Assessment Support Framework comprises three tiers of support, as follows:

Tier 1: General Information

Information that proactively educates students about assessment within higher education, advice on how to be healthy learners, and guidance on what supports are available to them at each stage of their academic journey.

Tier 2: Pre-Assessment Support

Effective policies, procedures, and mechanisms in place to provide early-intervention focused support that effectively enables students to complete their assessments successfully, along with reducing the risk of subsequent escalation.

Tier 3: Interventions and Mitigations

Enabling specialist solutions to ensure students are supported throughout an exceptional or ongoing issue, providing relevant interventions or mitigations where needed, with a view to identifying the best course of action that works in the best interests for everyone.

Queen's University also provides **specific Student Service Supports**, including;

- Disability Services (Renamed Accessible Learning Support in 2024) support students who disclose a disability or long-term condition to access a range of "in-course" and funded supports. The nature and type of support provided varies and is tailored to meet individual student requirements. Once registered with the service, their allocated Disability Officer will support the student to develop an Individual Student Support Agreement which outlines all supports and reasonable adjustments that a student is entitled to. The Disability Officer then liaises with all appropriate areas to put support in place. In addition, each academic School has a Disability Adviser (academic staff member) who assists in the arrangement of reasonable adjustments within their School to support the student's learning and assessment.
- Disability Services also assists students with applications for funded support such as Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).
- The Examinations Office make arrangements for reasonable adjustments in examinations for example; additional time, rest breaks, individual rooms, scribes/readers and use of a PC, and use of the 'green room' to accommodate students.
- Additional support to enhance accessibility to Library and information resources is provided and assistive technology is available on computers throughout the University.
- Continued focus on increase in positive response rate to Q26 in NUS survey.

9. Student Wellbeing Support

Queen's University believes that wellbeing is fundamental to a positive student learning experience. It is widely recognised that students who are happy, confident, and able to establish meaningful relationships are better placed to achieve their full potential. The Student Wellbeing Team provides co-ordination of support to students on a range of issues and complexities. These may include academic pressures, personal and family issues, financial difficulties, and emerging mental health concerns. The service adopts a matched stepped care model of support ensuring students access the most appropriate level of support for their presenting needs. This ranges from protective wellbeing activities based upon the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing approach through to 1-1 consultations, counselling and risk de-escalation and crisis intervention.

- Queen's Well being team will continue to utilise a stepped match care model, where students will be assessed and referred to the appropriate level of mental health and wellbeing support in a timely and efficient manner.

Tier 0	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Preventative and Protective	Supportive Guidance and Signposting	Assessment, Consultation and Therapeutic Interventions	Risk Management, De-escalation and Crisis Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellbeing on Weekdays activities based on the Take 5 Approach QUBeWell - Healthy Campus Campaign and Flag Days (e.g. University Mental Health Week, World Suicide Prevention Day) Transitions support Cost of Living Self-Help Hub and Resources (including Inspire Hub and website resources) Peer Support Groups (e.g. ASD, Epilepsy and Mature Students) Student-led Wellbeing Events (e.g. Mind Your Mood and International Student Guides, Consent Ambassadors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drop-in Clinic Walk and Talk sessions Talking Table events Active Campus Referrals Target Group Initiatives (e.g. grief peer support) Psychoeducation Initiatives (e.g. Belfast Recovery College) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-1 Wellbeing consultations Low-level CBT Counselling via Inspire 	<p style="background-color: #00a0e3; color: white; margin: 0; padding: 2px;">Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional wellbeing support Risk management De-escalation/ Safety planning Links with trusted contacts <p style="background-color: #00a0e3; color: white; margin: 0; padding: 2px;">Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Mental Health Service - BHSCT, Inspire Crisis Helpline <p style="background-color: #00a0e3; color: white; margin: 0; padding: 2px;">Secondary Mental Health Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GPs Mental Health Liason Team Community Mental Health Team, CAMHS etc

- Tier 0 – 3 of the stepped match care model is illustration above.
- Queen's will continue to provide students with same day access (Monday-Friday) to Disability & Wellbeing advice, guidance, and signposting through its Drop-in service.
- Well being services will aim to increase sense of Belonging where students feel connected to campus.
- Queen's will continue to development of Faculty facing model for student well being support including, collaborative working with schools and Student Support Officer partnerships.
- A specialist service focusing on promoting "Safe and Healthy Relationships" across campus offers 1:1 support, advice and guidance to students impacted by sexual misconduct, hate crime, bullying or harassment will be offered for students. A team of advocates working across campus have been trained as an additional level of support to students reporting and responding to disclosures.

Additional Health, Wellbeing and Practical Supports available to Queen's Students include:

- Student Advice Centre offering one-to-one guidance on budgeting and finance.
- Residential Life Team, part of the University's Accommodation provision and provides access to a range of social events.
- University Health Centre providing health care that is accessible and responsive to the needs of students.
- #QUBeWell Healthy Campus Framework designed to support the health and wellbeing needs of students, staff and staff supporting students.
- Student Support Fund which provides discretionary financial help for students who get into financial difficulty during their course.
- Creche facilities, open to all full-time students.
- Partnership with Belfast Trust and UU to provide a Student Mental Health service.

Queen's is also committed to providing tailored support for students with experience of care, ensuring they have the resources and opportunities needed to succeed in Higher Education. For the 2025/2026 academic year, eligible students will receive a £1,000 bursary, distributed over two semesters. This support will focus on:

- One-to-one support, offering personalised academic and pastoral support.
- Group social opportunities, helping students build connections, develop confidence, and engage with university life.
- Access to dedicated resources and services, ensuring a smooth transition into and throughout their time at Queen's.

This initiative reflects our ongoing commitment to widening participation and fostering an inclusive, supportive university environment.

STUDENT SUCCESS

10. Employability and Further Study

The University seeks to ensure that undergraduate students from under-represented groups have access to opportunities for Information Advice and Guidance, mentoring, work experience, placements, or internships, as part of the University's commitment to improving the employment prospects of its undergraduates. This is achieved through a 4 staged approach to careers readiness under the umbrella term of the 'Future Read Roadmap', which supports students to develop new skills, explore the right opportunities, build their support network and gain the confidence to realise ambitions. Student can join support activity at any of the 4 stages: Discover, Explore, Prepare and Realise (<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/careers/future-ready-roadmap/>)

Activity includes:

- Tailored employability information, advice and guidance for students.
- Work related learning opportunities including working experience and skills development via short internships, skills development projects, summer work, or international programmes.
- Bursary support (varying amounts) to enable students to access opportunities including; covering travel, subsistence, and visa costs, to paid project or short-term work. This financial support can be vital in ensuring students gain valuable experiential learning that they would not otherwise be able to undertake.
- Continuation of the now established Business Mentoring Scheme which is specifically targeted at students from WP backgrounds. The scheme seeks to bridge the gap between education and industry and helps students to develop skills as well as build vital networks and connections with business professionals, who can support in their future careers. Business mentors are selected with differing skills sets from employer partner organisations across a range of sectors, thus providing a valuable opportunity for our students as well as strengthening links between graduate employers and the University.
- Review of the Widening Participation Careers mentoring scheme as part of Careers Employability and Skills planning to ensure alignment with strategic priorities outlined in the University's 2030 strategic plan; accounting for other support programmes emerging within faculty and schools.
- All students who join the University via the Queen's Senior Academy, Pathway Opportunities Programme, or who are identified as WP Schools/Colleges have the opportunity to apply for the Business Mentoring Scheme to potentially aid access to a variety of professions.

- Provision of one-to-one advice and guidance and a range of support events in the run up to, and post-graduation. Students are supported in exploring options for further study.
- The University seeks to provide clearer, relevant, comparable information about the choices available, steps students need to take, and where applicable the costs involved and the funding available. This is achieved through enhanced and targeted information (paper and online).

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

All activities mapped to Queen's Widening Participation Framework have been written to reflect the key actions of the Access to Success Strategy.

The activities seek to engage with key cohorts identified by the Access to Success Strategy for inclusion in future widening participation support initiatives:

- Low participation neighbourhoods (areas of high deprivation);
- Disability (physical, sensory, or learning);
- Young males;
- Adult returners;
- Care experienced.

This is achieved by highlighting the above as required entry criteria for our pre-entry programmes in addition to 'first in family,' 'experience as a carer', 'refugee, asylum seekers and newcomers to Northern Ireland.

Queen's have also provided representation on the Widening Participation Regional Forum alongside HEI and FE colleagues to help shape and inform the new regional strategy.

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

Queen's University continue to ensure that prospective students, their parents and guardians and other supporters have the information they need to make an informed decision about the commitments they will be making, financial and other, if they come to study at Queen's. This information is made available on the University's Website and in its printed Prospectus and other publications.

Widening Participation Outreach Programmes including the Queen's Senior Academy and Pathway Opportunity programmes include a student finance awareness presentation from Advice SU, ensuring that participants are made aware of the financial support available to them at Queen's and how to access information relating to other institutions.

Additionally, students have access to professional advice and information services to help them to make the best use of the resources available to them during their time at Queen's. Advice SU provides advice on a range of issues, including; loans, tuition fees, bursaries,

the Support Fund, scholarships, Social Security Benefits, and budgeting skills. This advice is also available to prospective students at the pre-entry stage allowing them to be more informed. Disability Services also provide information on support available to students pre-entry and throughout their course of study.

Queen's University work on an ongoing basis with prospective and current students and their parents/guardians/carers to develop and focus our messages and choice of information channels and to determine which information is of most importance to prospective students and the most relevant medium to convey this information.

The provision of advice and information on financial support is a shared responsibility for all within the University who work directly with students, particularly Finance, Students' Union, Admissions and Recruitment and Outreach Officers. Advice SU provides expert advice in this area.

Bursaries, Scholarships, and other sources of support are also highlighted on social media channels and by directly targeting potentially eligible students through targeted correspondence.

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

Widening Access and Participation Plan is monitored internally to ensure that core commitments are achieved. Targets are monitored through Education Committee relating to student success. Key achievements against Strategy 2030 are also reported at Queen's University Senate.

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.

(Full details on how to complete this section are in the guidance notes)

In order to ensure consistency across institutions we would ask that you use the Kirkpatrick Model for this exercise. The concept is that individual institutions will learn from this self-evaluation and obtain evidence to influence future widening participation activity and plans. You may evaluate the institution's widening participation activity as a whole or evaluate individual projects.

The following sub headings should help focus your response. The Department expects that most institutions will be able to evaluate widening participation activity to at least Level 3 (as below).

Level 1 Evaluation – Reactions

What participants thought and felt about the programme

Examples of Level 1 evaluation illustrated as follows:

Care experience Student Feedback - To ensure the effectiveness of our support initiatives, evaluations are conducted after every event. A streamlined feedback process is also carried out following one-to-one sessions thus maintaining an open evaluation loop, allowing

continuous tracking of both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach enables the assessment and impact of services, identify areas for improvement, and ensuring that Queen's support framework continues to meet the needs of students with experience of care. Feedback examples include:

"Thank you for all the support given from WPU, it made Uni a lot easier than it could have been!"

"I always knew someone was there for me, staff often reaching out via email to offer supports, it was good to know they were there."

"The care experienced named contacts reached out often, it was really beneficial, especially helpful in first year. I knew who was there for me, it helped me settle and find my feet."

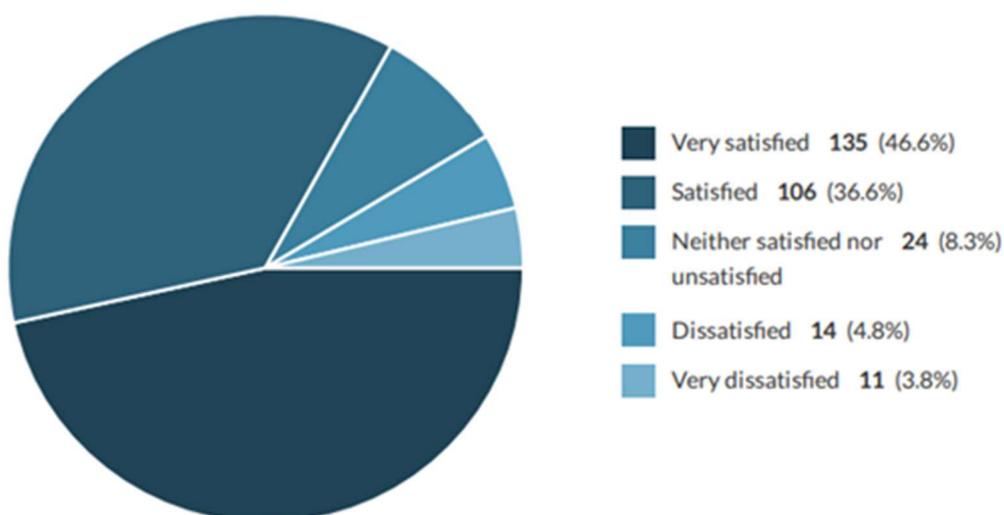
Accessible Learning Service Feedback (formerly Disability Services) - Students receiving DSA were provided with efficient and informed support, ensuring they could access funded support. The service student satisfaction survey showed that 85% of students were satisfied with the assessment process they received through the Needs Assessment Centre and 91% were satisfied with support from the Queen's Register of Support Provider following DSA approval. Student Feedback included:

"I received my needs assessment in an efficient, timely and informed manner"

"I received my one-to-one support in an efficient, timely and informed manner"

In the student survey, when asked to describe their overall satisfaction with their interactions with Disability Service, 83% of respondents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied.

Disability Services Survey Results 22/23



Feedback highlighted how helpful and knowledgeable the team was, with some respondents praising the 'personal and human aspect of contact.

NUS Survey asked students specifically about their awareness **of wellbeing support** at their university. The question 'How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?.' This question received 73.68% positive response overall from Queen's students.

To continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of our **widening participation outreach programmes**, participants are asked to provide an evaluation both at the end of individual activities and at the end of overall programme. This information provides useful feedback on how the programme satisfied participant needs and expectations. This will allow reflection on how programmes could be improved in the future. Evaluations and feedback forms of this nature are designed to be age specific for the pupils/students. For primary school pupils it takes the form of anonymous questions on screen via our Personal Response Systems or paper questionnaires completed either after the activity or when pupils return to school. Post Primary pupils are asked to complete evaluation sheets or complete online surveys after the event or programme in which they have taken part. Where relevant feedback is also sought from teachers via online surveys.

Examples of this kind of evaluation would include:

Professor Fluffy Programme is evaluated through a pre and post survey in line with Level 1 Reactions. Survey Questions asked at the beginning of the programme are then repeated at the end to then measure change.

Pathway Programme Evaluation at the conclusion of the Pathway Programme, students were asked for a rating of the programme from 1-10. Average rating was 9.7. Some example comments:

"I scored it a 10 and the reason for this is that the memories made will be unforgettable and that experiencing what it is like being a university student is unbelievable, and the facilities provided were excellent. The staff and mentors throughout the whole thing have been a pleasure to have and met they are unforgettable, and I will always remember them."

"Score 10 because It was a really good opportunity where you can just have a taste of what University is like and having fun at the same time, talking to the academics and seeing what the course will be like in the near future and creating connections coupled with gaining/enhancing new skills and qualities."

Annually the **Strategic Marketing and Communications** (Insights Team) conduct an Undergraduate Applicant survey to gain market intelligence on drivers of awareness, selecting universities for application and Queen's Website. Additionally, post event evaluations are conducted, for example after UG events such as Open Days and Offer Holder Days, with attendees invited to provide feedback. Activities are refined on the feedback provided taking key learnings into future event planning. Tools such as Slido are also employed to collect feedback during and post virtual sessions.

Level 2 Evaluation – Learning

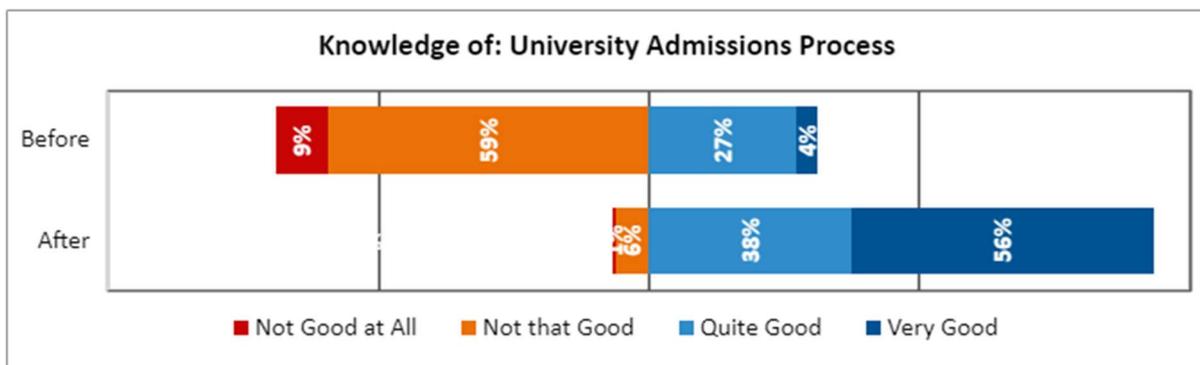
The resulting increase in knowledge or capability

Examples of Level 2 evaluation illustrated as follows:

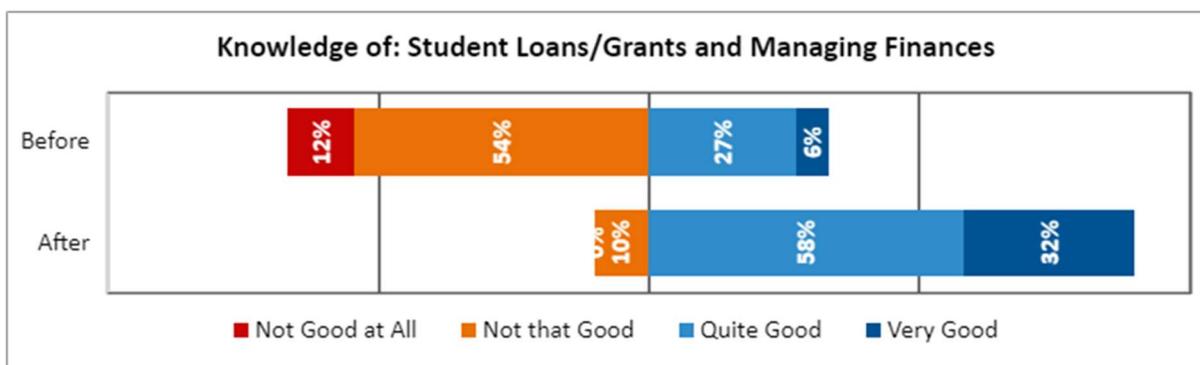
In order to evaluate the participants' learning resulting from engagement in outreach programmes, participants are asked to complete surveys focusing on the key objectives of the programme. Results include rating the effectiveness of the programme. Examples include:

Pathway Opportunity Programme - Students completed a "Pre" survey prior to commencing the programme asking about their knowledge of the University Applications Process and Student Finance, amongst other topics. Students were again asked in a "Post" survey the same questions. The changes in their responses indicate the learning they gained during the programme.

When asked about their **knowledge** of the University Admissions Process, those responding Quite Good or Very Good increased from 31% to 94%.



When asked about their **knowledge** of the Student Loans/Grants and Managing Finances, those responding Quite Good or Very Good increased from 33% to 90%.



Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer

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

Examples of Level 3 evaluation illustrated as follows:

Junior Academy and Junior Academy Sports Programmes currently use level 3 evaluation methods. Evaluation currently takes place through a four-year study following programme participants and study participants. Treatment Group (5 Programme Participants per school) - Attend all events and complete a survey each year. Control Group (5 Study Participants per school) - Complete a survey each year and receive a £25 voucher for doing so.

Using survey monkey, students' experience of the programme are gathered including personal goals and priorities and GCSE choices. Students are surveyed each year from Yr9 - Yr12. The survey remains the same each year, except for the addition of GCSE related questions for Yr11 & 12. Study currently underway.

Measuring behavioural change is complex and this type of evaluation requires ethical approval. To address this Queen's University Widening Participation Unit are involved in ongoing work with the Russell Group Widening Participation Group and the National Education Opportunities Network.

Working in partnership with colleagues in the Schools of Education had been key to developing evaluation processes and frameworks to evidence this level of evaluation.

Level 4 Evaluation- Results

Results- the effects resulting from performance

Examples of Level 4 evaluation illustrated as follows:

As part of the **Reading Together Programme** Evaluation, each participant is asked to complete both a pre-test and a post-test to assess their reading accuracy and comprehension. Participation in these tests is voluntary, and children are informed that they can opt out at any time if they felt uncomfortable completing the tests.

During the Reading Together 2023-2024 programme, which spanned October 2023 to June 2024, a total of 23 children completed the programme. Each child was asked to complete both a pre-test and a post-test to assess their reading accuracy and comprehension.

Summary of impact:

The post-test standardised scores highlight progress in children's reading skills. For reading accuracy, 15 children either stayed the same or improved their standardised scores. These scores take maturation effects into consideration and so may indicate an improvement in their ability to read more accurately. While 4 children did not make any gains, it is important to acknowledge that maintaining reading scores is also a positive outcome, as it indicates that children did not fall behind further and were able to maintain their trajectory of improvement in line with age-based expectations.

In terms of reading comprehension, 10 children either stayed the same or showed improvement in terms of standardised scores, which considers maturation effects and expected progress over time. In total 9 children did not make gains in reading comprehension over the course of the intervention. Reading is notoriously difficult to improve, and the overview provided here does not account for those who did increase their scores but not in line with levels expected and age-based standardisation.

Widening participation outreach programmes are reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme at meeting the key objectives and getting results. "Pre" and "Post" surveys are used to verify how the objectives have or have not been met and feedback surveys provided qualitative data on the results. Examples include:

Pathway Opportunity Programme - has the objectives of achieving 90% retention rate through the programme and meeting a 50% conversion rate of Pathway Students into Queen's. Results: Of the 305 participants on the Pathway Programme in 2022/23, 277 completed the programme (91% Retention Rate). From the earlier Pathway cohort who entered Queen's in 2022/23, out of 255 original participants, 133 entered Queen's (52% Conversion Rate).

Queen's **Graduate Outcomes** survey data gathered, monitored and reported annually.