



Step Up Project Interim Evaluation

March 2024

Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. Background	5
2. Methodology	7
3. Surveys	8
3.1 Further Education Surveys	8
3.2 Higher Education Surveys	8
4. Survey Results	9
4.1 FE Student Survey Results	9
4.2 Key Points from FE Survey	16
4.3 HE Surveys	17
4.4 Queens University Belfast (QUB)	17
4.5 St Mary's University College (St Mary's)	19
4.6 Ulster University (UU)	20
4.7 Stranmillis University College	22
4.8 Open University (OU)	22
4.9 Key Points from HE Surveys	23
5 Engagement with Providers	24
5.1 Approach	24
6 Further Education Colleges	25
6.1 Impact and Good Practice Findings	25
6.2 Points for consideration (relevant to FE)	26
7 Higher Education Institutions	27
7.1 Ulster University	27
7.2 Queen's University Belfast	28
7.3 The Open University	29
7.4 St Mary's University College	29
7.5 Stranmillis University College	30
7.6 Points for consideration (relevant to HE)	31
8 Recommendations	32
8.1 Recommendations for Year 2 regarding FE	32
8.2 Recommendations for Year 2 regarding HE	32
Conclusions	33
Appendices	34
Appendix i	34
Step Up Project Providers	34
Appendix ii	35
Further Education Provision	35
Appendix iii	36
Higher Education Provision	36

Appendix iv	40
FE Online Survey	40
Appendix v	43
FE number of survey responses	43
Appendix vi	44
Queen's University Mentors Survey	44
Appendix vii	46
Queen's University Bursary Survey	46
Appendix viii	47
St Mary's Support Mentoring (Student) Survey	47
Appendix ix	49
St Mary's Support Mentoring (Lecturers) Survey	49
Appendix x	50
Ulster University Virtual Campus Survey	50
Appendix xi	51
Ulster University Targeted Bursaries Survey	51
Appendix xii	53
Stranmillis University Student Mentors Survey	53
Appendix xiii	54
Open University Carers and Care Experienced Survey	54
Appendix xiv	56
FE Participants in Focus Groups	56
Appendix xv	58
HEI Participants in Focus Groups	58

Executive Summary

This paper produced by CCEA Regulation, provides an interim evaluation of the Step Up Project which was launched by the Department for the Economy (DfE) in April 2023.

DfE has tasked the further and higher education sectors in Northern Ireland to be the key delivery mechanism to roll out the Step Up programme. The programme targets those who are economically or socially disadvantaged. The components of the programme are not uniform, and each college and Higher Education Institution (HEI) has tailored programmes of support to target specific priority groups which may have previously been regarded as 'hard to reach'. The communication, engagement and recruitment of individuals for the Step Up programmes was therefore as critical as the type of support and training given.

In this interim evaluation, qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken. Online surveys were issued to the providers (the colleges and HEIs) to share with relevant stakeholders.

Unstructured interviews were also carried out with stakeholders to discuss the impact of the provision in greater detail.

It is premature to capture the full impact of the project. Evidence however points to an overwhelming success of the programme in firstly reaching priority groups; and secondly in providing support and training that has a positive impact on those groups.

The provision of mentors and their role was one aspect that led to the success of the project. The engagement with external agencies such as food banks, community groups and health trusts in reaching out to individuals, will most certainly contribute to the further success of the programme in its second year.

There were original challenges regarding clarifying target cohorts and the duration of strands and also recruiting staff within short time frames. However, as this is now in place, the second year of the project looks very positive.

1. Background

In 2022 the DfE along with the Department for Communities (DfC), Invest NI and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) explored options to expand the NI labour pool via targeted interventions. The aim was to target individuals who are economically inactive and those who find it hardest to access skills, education, and employment opportunities within our society.

The outcome was the establishment of the Step Up Project, a two year funded programme, launched in April 2023.¹ The programme was open to individuals of 16 years of age and over and eligible to work in Northern Ireland. It offered a range of flexible, individualised support within the Further Education Colleges (FECs) and HEIs in Northern Ireland to help re-engagement with skills and education and to access employment.²

5 cohorts were to be addressed through this project:

- those with a disability, including those with special educational needs;
- care experienced young people;
- those not in employment, education or training (NEET);
- those unemployed and economically inactive; and
- areas where there was clear gender imbalance.

The Step Up programme provided flexibility to enable providers, the 6 FECs and 5 HEIs (Appendix i), to structure the support in innovative ways that would address one or a number of these cohorts. Work strands were agreed at the start of the project and the content evolved and was refined as they were implemented. Some titles of work strands were modified to clarify target audiences or project aims.

Further Education (FE)

Each of the FE colleges were issued with Operational Guidance, and it was agreed with the 6 colleges that all courses should be a minimum of 324 hours or 12 weeks. A key element of any of the programmes was the focus on targeting and supporting individuals' specific needs with flexible delivery solutions including collaborating with external agencies. This required comprehensive mentoring schemes to ensure that individuals' needs were assessed, and achievable goals set.

Courses started at different times throughout the year across the colleges, often dependent on the allocation of staff and the recruitment of candidates.

The FE provision is classified under 3 work strands.

- Disability Access Route to Education and Employment (DARE), prioritising those with a disability including a special educational need.
- College Connect + for those who are economically inactive or unemployed.
- Women Returners Access Programme (WRAP) for economically inactive and unemployed women returners.

College Connect + is split into two parts. College Connect + for young people aged 16 to 24 years old who are care experienced and also those in that age group who are not in employment, education or training (NEET); College Connect 24+ for people aged 24 years and over who are economically inactive or unemployed.

¹ [DfE Step Up Project Circular \(PDF\)](#)

² [Step Up – the person-centred skills project | nidirect](#)

For further details on each strand see Appendix ii. The delivery summary for FE is set out in their Letters of Offer and unlike the universities they all support the same cohorts and have the same targets.

Higher Education (HE)

There are 12 work strands to the HE Step Up programme from five providers. In general terms, 3 of the work strands involved bursaries, 6 work strands involved university students acting as mentors for school pupils, 2 were support for university students and one was a digital resource to support learners in familiarising them with a campus. All these work strands targeted one or more of the five cohorts and they were refined as they progressed from the start date.

See Appendix iii for the HE provision and targeted numbers.

2. Methodology

The interim evaluation had 4 objectives:

1. Evaluate the impact of the Step Up programme in creating skills development and employment opportunities.
2. Evaluate the impact of supporting and enhancing the personal development of individuals engaging in the Step Up programme.
3. Evaluate the suitability of the Step Up programme on relevant aspects relating to recruitment, delivery, support and retention from the learner and provider perspectives.
4. Report for each cohort on any lessons learned (as this is a two-year project), including evidence of any challenges, associated benefits or quality improvements associated with the Step Up programme. (This point was discussed, and the objective modified as FE data is collected by work strand as opposed to cohorts and some HE work strands are intersectional).

The evaluation focused on the experiences and opinions of providers, participants and other stakeholders engaged in the Step Up Project across FE and HE.

The evaluation comprised of:

- an online survey; and
- engagement via online focus groups with providers delivering the programme across FE and HE and key stakeholders identified by the providers.

3. Surveys

3.1 Further Education Surveys

An online survey (Appendix iv) was developed by CCEA Regulation and distributed to learners on Step Up programmes by the 6 FE colleges. All FE learners received the same survey and were asked to identify their college and Step Up programme. The focus of the survey was to collect learners' reasons for engaging in the Step Up Project and their aspirations on completion of the course. Other information was also gathered including how they found out about the Step Up Project and their views on the ease of enrolment.

All respondents were invited to comment at the end of each survey and a sample of responses has been noted in this report.

3.2 Higher Education Surveys

Online surveys were developed by CCEA Regulation and distributed to the 5 HEIs. As these programmes varied greatly, a separate survey was developed for each (apart from the Skills Success Centre at UU as it had not commenced at this stage).

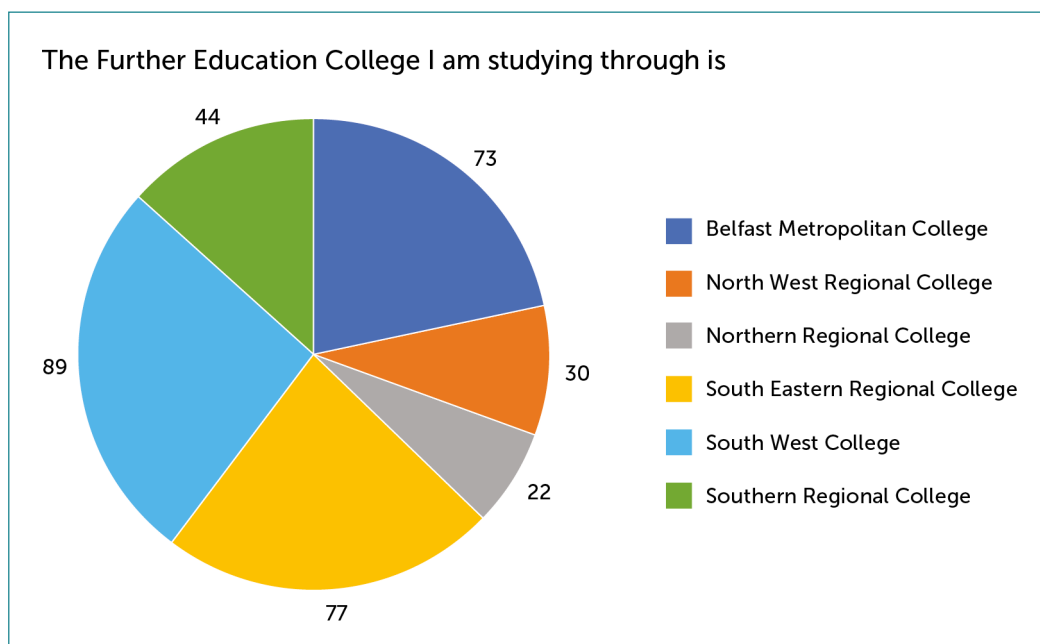
All respondents were invited to comment at the end of each survey and a sample has been noted in this report.

4. Survey Results

4.1 FE Student Survey Results

335 learners responded to the survey (Appendix v) from all the colleges (Figure 1). At the time of survey some programmes had not yet started, however there were around 721 learners registered for the Step Up programme at the time of the survey.

Figure 1: FE survey response by college



There was a representation from each of the work strands (Figure 2) and the majority of the courses were face to face (Figure 3).

Figure 2: FE – Work strand breakdown of respondents

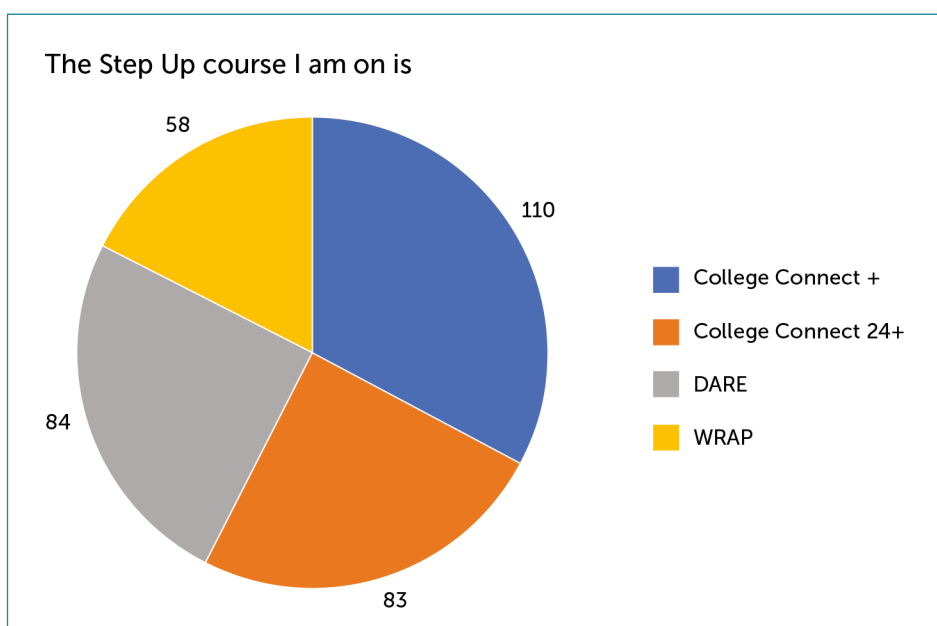
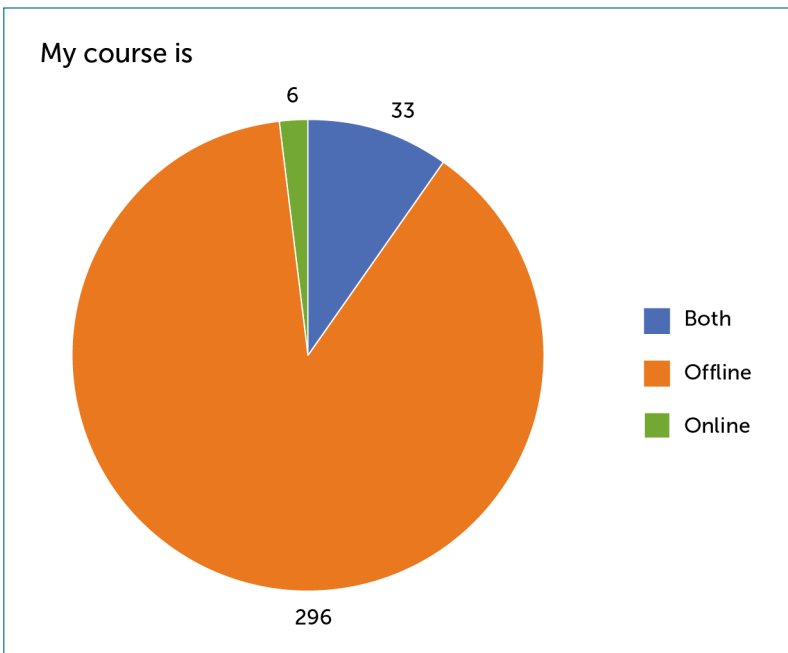


Figure 3: FE course provision



There were 182 female and 150 male respondents (Figure 4) and the gender balance by work strand (Figure 5) shows significantly more males on the College Connect 24+ work strand and all but one from the WRAP work strand were female.

Figure 4: FE gender balance of respondents

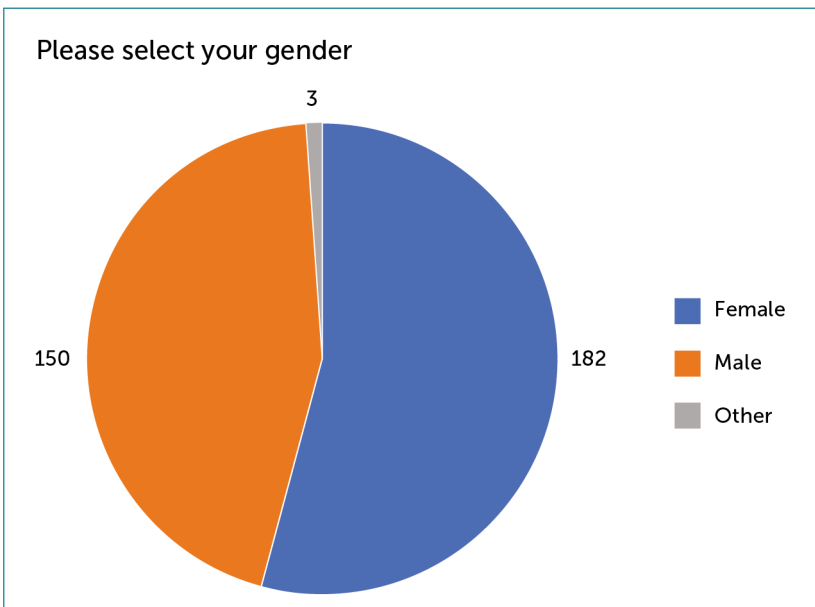
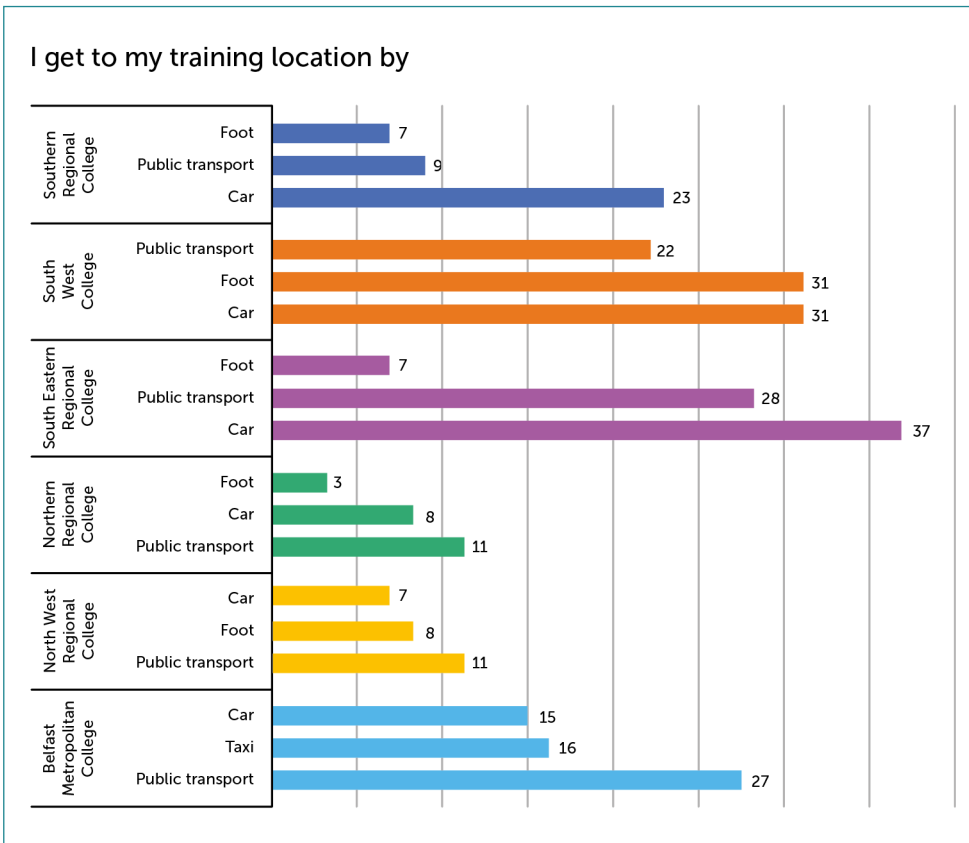


Figure 5: FE gender breakdown of respondents by work strand

Gender	Workstrand	Number of respondents
Female	College Connect +	52
	College Connect 24+	31
	DARE	43
	WRAP	56
Male	College Connect +	57
	College Connect 24+	52
	DARE	40
	WRAP	1
Other	College Connect +	1
	DARE	1
	WRAP	1

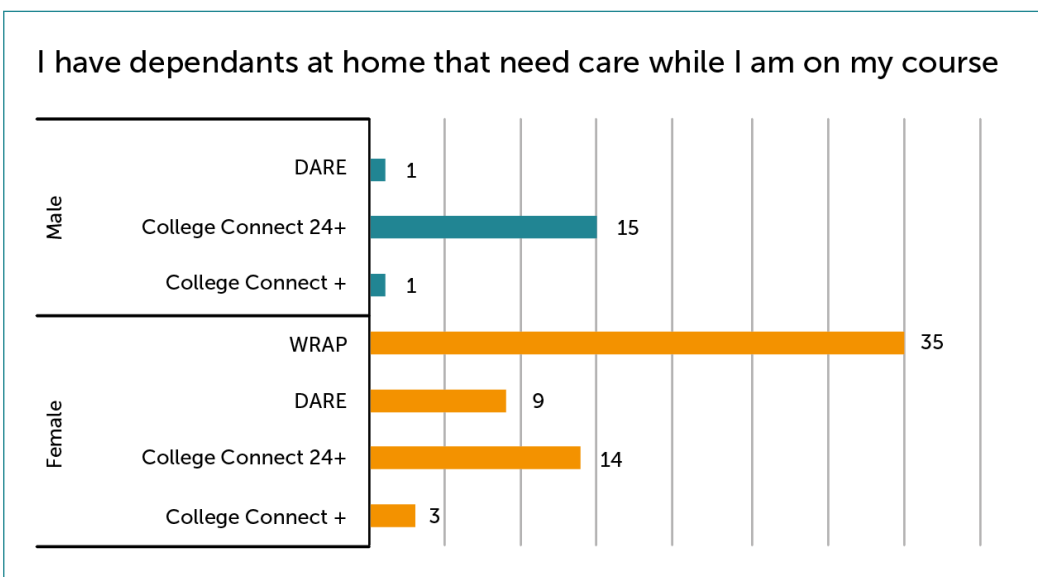
Respondents travelled to college for the Step Up courses by a variety of methods mainly by public transport, car, taxi and by foot. The only noteworthy group of respondents who walked to their courses were in SWC, possibly due to the proximity of the college to local housing. Travelling to the college by taxi, although one of the top three methods of travel for the respondents from Belfast Met, may be misleading as 'black taxis' could have been included here and they are essentially public transport. Figure 6 shows that travel is a significant cost for Step Up participants and may deter those economically disadvantaged from progressing their education at local colleges.

Figure 6: FE top three means of transport for respondents by college



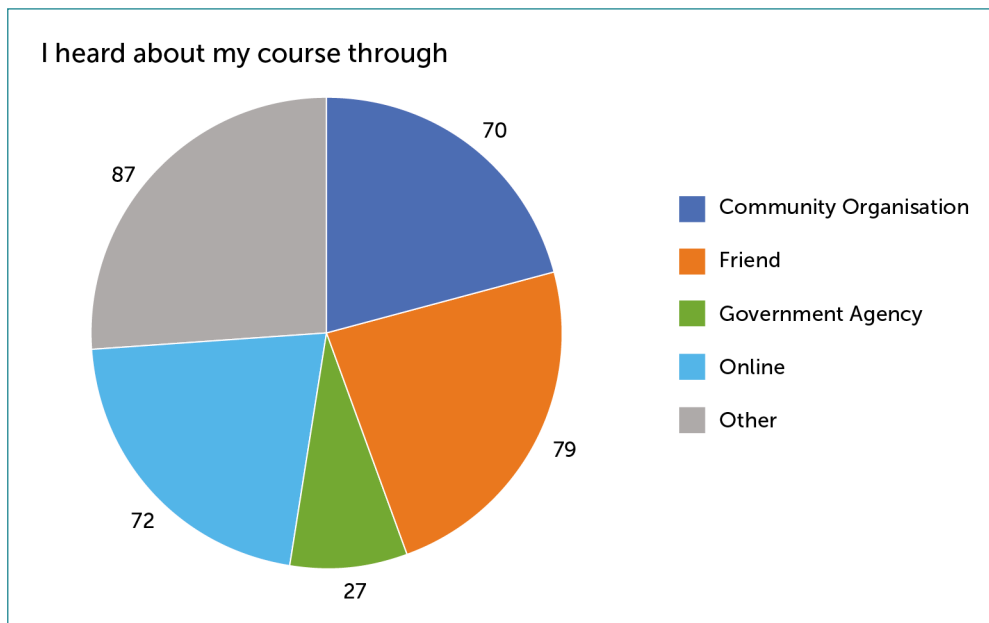
78 respondents indicated that they have dependents at home that need care while they are on the course (Figure 7). Of this group that have dependents that require care, 61 were female and 35 of these were from the WRAP programme. 15 males and 14 females from the Connect 24+ strand indicated that they had dependents requiring care at home highlighting care responsibilities are an issue for both genders in that age group. 67 of the respondents reported that the dependents are children and 11 had adult dependents.

Figure 7: FE – Breakdown by work strand of those who have dependents at home that need care



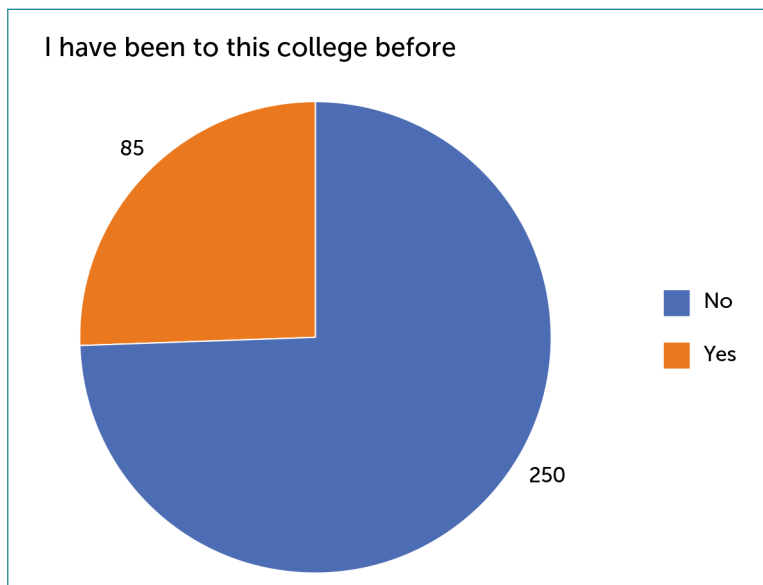
Respondents learned about the Step Up programme from a variety of sources. 70 respondents heard about the programme from Community Organisations (Figure 8). This clearly indicates the success of the Step Up programme in accessing learners through non-traditional channels that are relevant for the cohorts. A very significant number, 87 respondents, identified 'other' channels that had not been listed as options in the survey. The majority of these 'other' channels were through the college, foodbanks and family. Food banks being identified as a channel is a clear indication that the programme did access a significant number of those who are economically disadvantaged and direction for Year 2 of the project for taking advantage of this channel of communication.

Figure 8: FE – How all 335 respondents heard about the Step Up Project



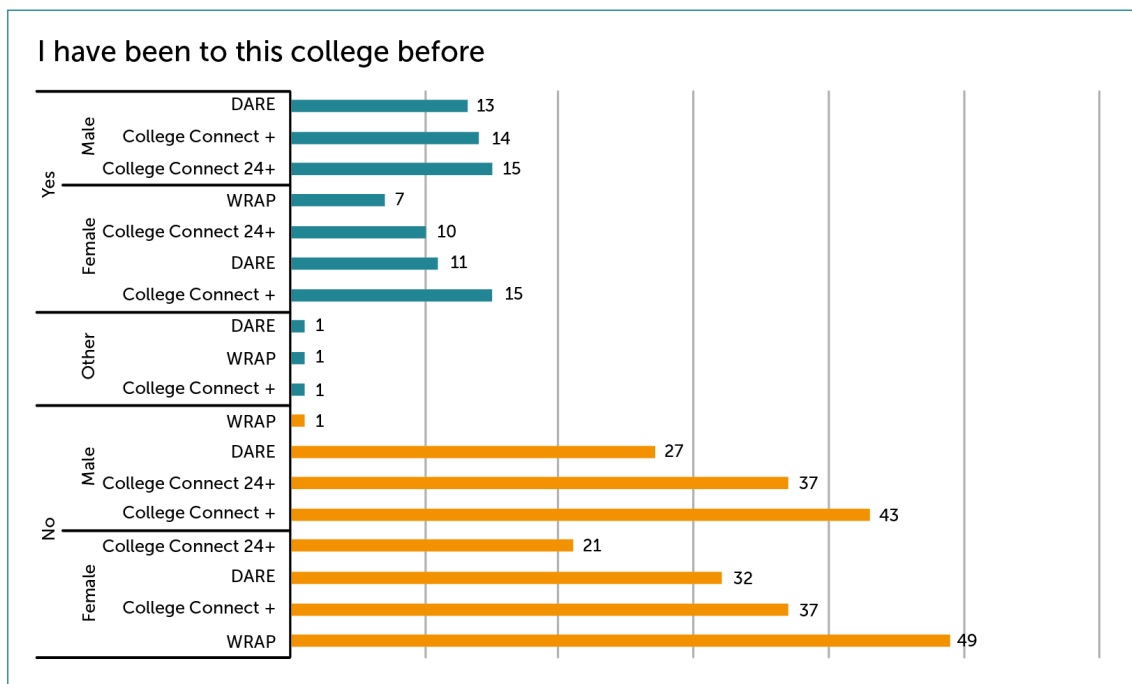
The majority of respondents (250 learners) had not previously been to the college before the Step Up programme (Figure 9). This clearly indicates that the Step Up project was successful in accessing individuals not previously engaged in FE courses and therefore the colleges did not have 'easy access' to these learners. All of those who had indicated that they had heard about the Step Up programme through foodbanks had not previously been to the college.

Figure 9: FE – Numbers of respondents who had not previously been to the college



Of the 250 respondents who had not previously been to the college, 139 were female and 108 were male (Figure 10). The course that was most popular from those 'new to College' learners was the College Connect + work strand with 43 males and 37 females but all work strands with the exception of WRAP attracted significant numbers from both genders.

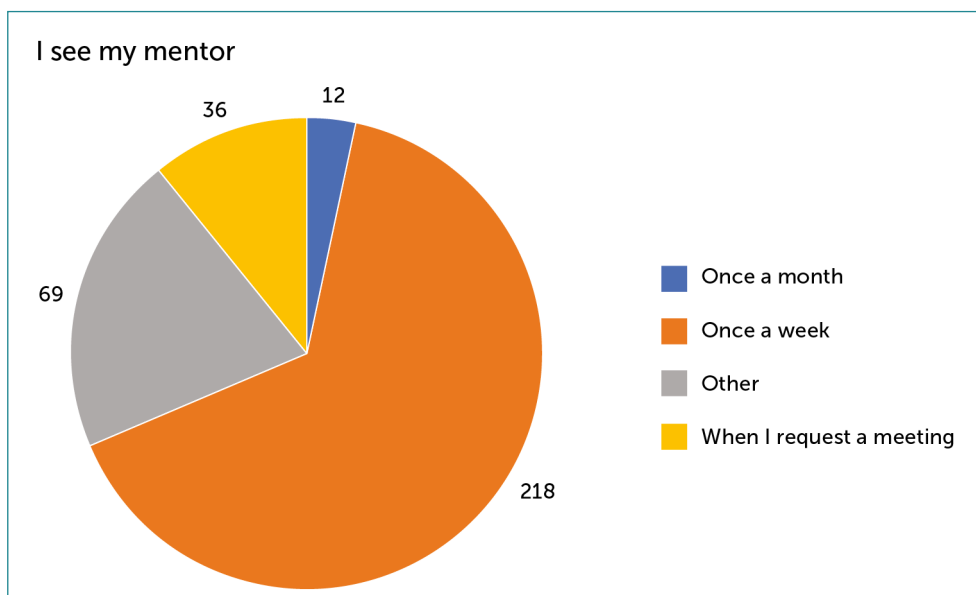
Figure 10: FE – Number of respondents who had not previously been to the college by gender and work strand



98% of learners found it was straightforward to enrol in the Step Up programmes and the few that had difficulties had varied reasons ranging from IT skills to concerns regarding suitability.

An important element of the Step Up Project was mentoring with the majority of respondents seeing their mentors once a week (Figure 11). In the 'other' responses 28 of 69 respondents met their mentor every day (this had not been an option in the drop-down menu).

Figure 11: FE – Frequency of learners seeing their mentors

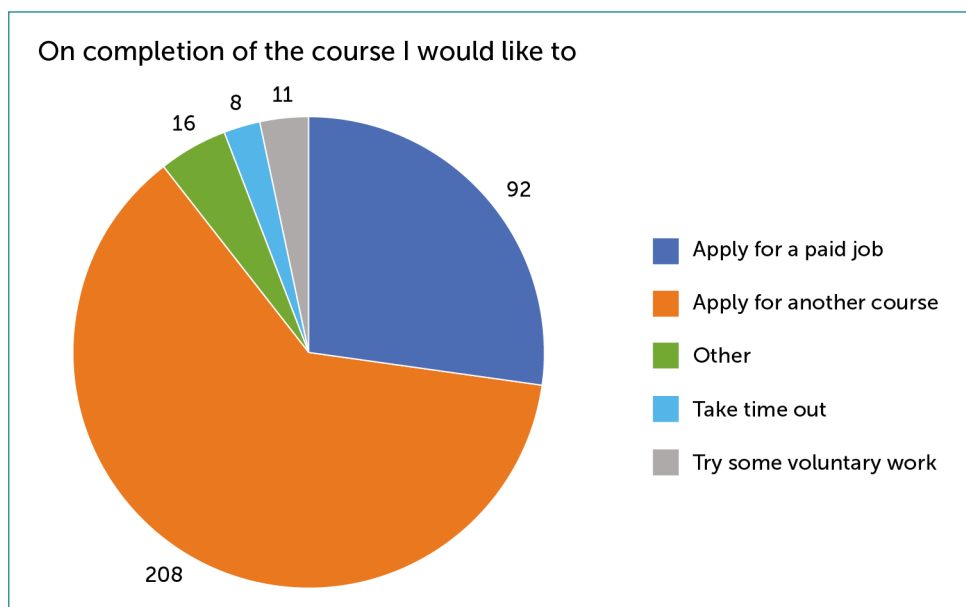


Overall, the programme met the expectations of the learners (97%) and the reasons given from the small group whose expectations were not met were varied for example too difficult.

98% of learners would recommend this course to others. 39% enjoyed learning new skills, which indicates that the Step Up Project had successfully identified programmes that would develop and support the learners. As 37% of learners enjoyed working towards a qualification, this would suggest that the qualifications offered were appropriate, engaging and seen as realistically achievable. Meeting people was also seen as important by 19% of learners and that would have a significant impact on participants' communication/social skills and mental health.

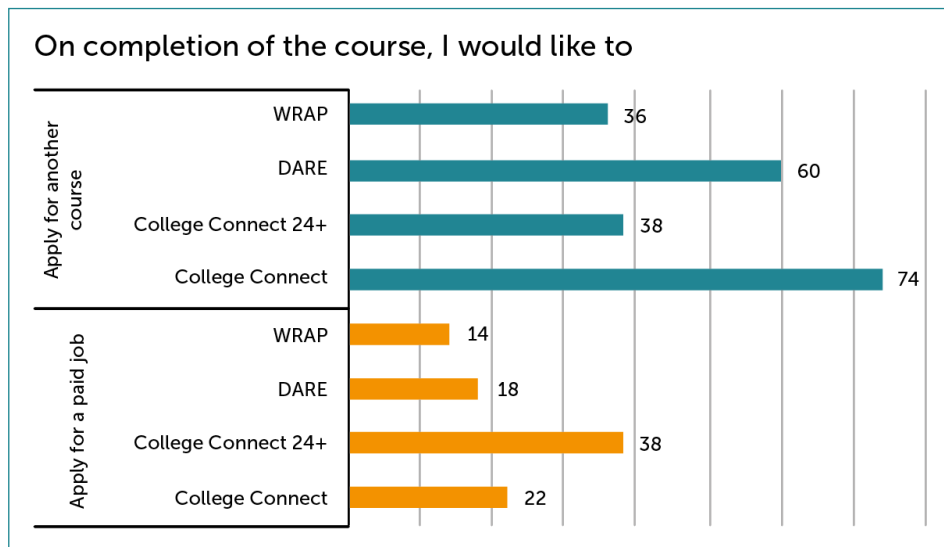
The majority of FE respondents stated they would like to apply for another course on completion of their Step Up course and a large number would like to apply for a job (Figure 12). The very small number (8 respondents) that planned to 'take time out' were random and there was no shared characteristic identified for them, e.g. being drawn from the same college or work strand.

Figure 12: FE respondents' plans on finishing Step Up programme



The majority of learners on the College Connect +, DARE and WRAP work strands indicated that they plan to apply for another course on completion of the programme (Figure 13). They evidently felt their course/s had been worthwhile and are motivated to continue progressing their education. 60 of the 78 DARE respondents plan to apply for another course highlighting the evident need for training and development for these learners. College Connect 24 + had the largest number of learners planning to apply for a paid job, indicating the success of the programme in preparing these learners for the workforce.

Figure 13: FE respondents planned progression by work strand



4.2 Key Points from FE Survey

- The colleges were innovative in accessing potential learners for the Step Up Project such as through community organisations.
- As the majority of students had not previously attended the college this would indicate that the project was successful in accessing a group of individuals who most likely have not engaged in previous training programmes.
- Respondents heard about the Step Up Project through organisations that were not given as options in the survey therefore giving clear guidance for year 2 of the programme of other channels of communication for the cohorts.
- Respondents found it straightforward to enrol on the programmes and it met their expectations allowing them to learn new skills or work towards a qualification.
- As the respondents felt that they were learning new skills this indicates that the programmes were appropriately pitched as were the qualifications, as they were seen as relevant and realistically achievable.
- Mentors, an important support on the Step Up programmes, supported learners on a very regular basis. The survey showed that the majority had mentor support more than once per week.
- Some respondents enjoyed meeting people, suggesting the programme has a positive impact on mental wellbeing.
- On completion of the course most respondents plan on continuing in education or in seeking employment, which is a positive indicator for expanding the NI labour pool.

Respondents to the FE surveys were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'enrolled onto Childcare course since starting WRAP'.

'Glad I did this course – was very nervous at the start but staff put me at ease'.

'had anxiety an [sic] hated leaving house [sic] step up helping me'.

'The support I have got so far is very different and specific to me, I have been stuck for a long time and now feel I can change'.

'I am hoping to do the ACCESS course in the future'.

'I didn't think I would, but I fitted in well'.

'Having been a school refuser due to exacerbation of bullying and the covid break it is such relief to be able to catch up with GCSE with additional support without being deemed remedial or a lost cause'.

4.3 HE Surveys

There were individual surveys for specific groups within the 5 HEIs:

Provider	Surveys issued	Survey detail
Queen's University Belfast	2 surveys	one for student mentors and one for the bursary recipients
St Mary's University College	2 surveys	one for the student recipients and one for Associate Lecturers providing holistic support
Ulster University	2 surveys	one for Targeted Bursary recipients and one for Virtual Campus users
Stranmillis University College	1 survey	one survey for Stranmillis student mentors
Open University	1 survey	one survey for carers and care experienced bursary recipients

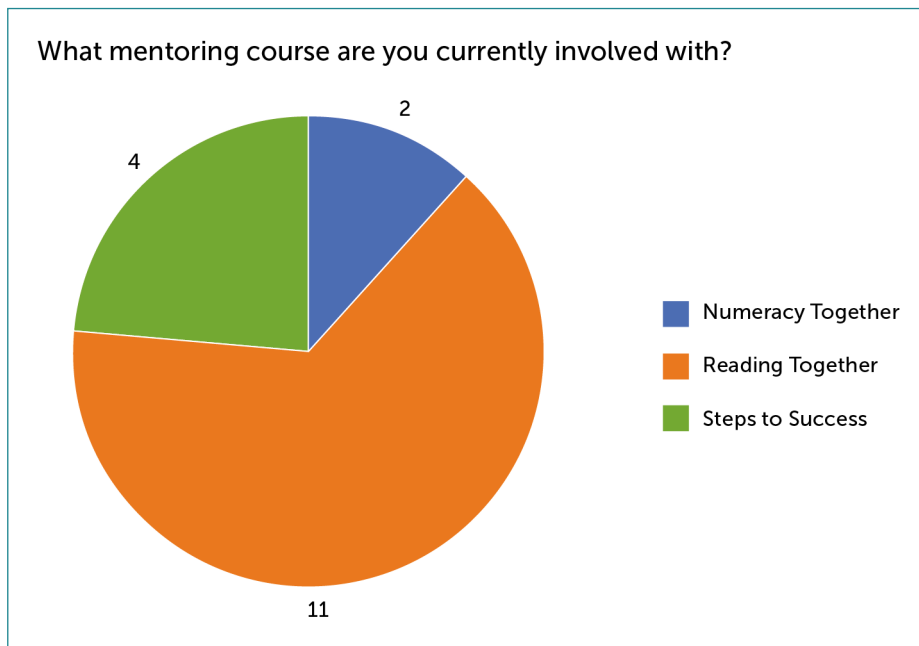
All respondents were invited to comment at the end of each survey and a sample have been noted.

4.4 Queens University Belfast (QUB)

Reading Together, Numeracy Together and Steps to Success (Appendix vi)

These programmes were all online. QUB students mentored primary school pupils in the Reading Together and Numeracy Together programmes and Year 8 pupils who had difficulty transitioning were mentored through the Steps to Success Programme. The respondents (student mentors) were mainly from the Reading Together work strand (Figure 14) and 14 out of the 17 mentors involved in the programme had previously been involved in mentoring.

Figure 14: QUB – Responses from student mentors



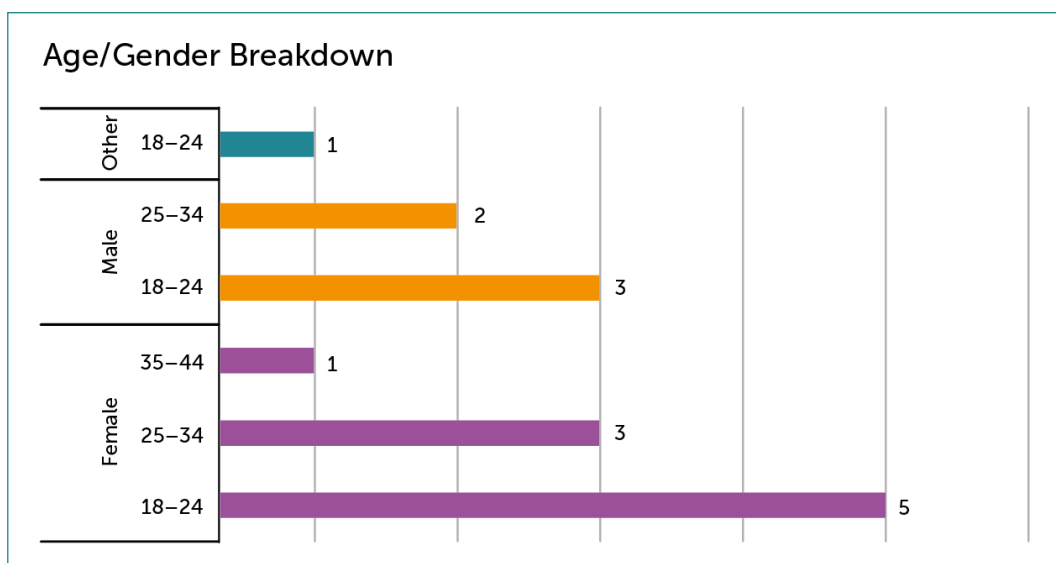
The mentors found all pupils receptive and appropriately skilled to engage in the online meetings and the pupils all did adhere to the meeting times indicating the willingness of the young learners to engage in the programme. There was evidence of progression in all programmes.

In the Reading Together Programme the young learners all did talk about topics outside of the text with their mentors indicating that the sessions supported not only the young pupils' learning but also their personal and social development.

QUB Bursary (Appendix vii)

15 QUB students responded to the survey. The majority of students were in the 18–24 age group (Figure 15) and 13 of them heard about the bursary from Student Guidance. The majority (13) used the bursary for general living expenses.

Figure 15: QUB – Age and gender breakdown of bursary respondents



Additional Comments

Recipients of the bursary were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'This has ... aided me a great deal, especially during the cost of living crisis. I really hope this continues for future students.'

'This bursary has been so helpful, especially during the cost of living crisis. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds should consistently receive this extra support.'

4.5 St Mary's University College (St Mary's)

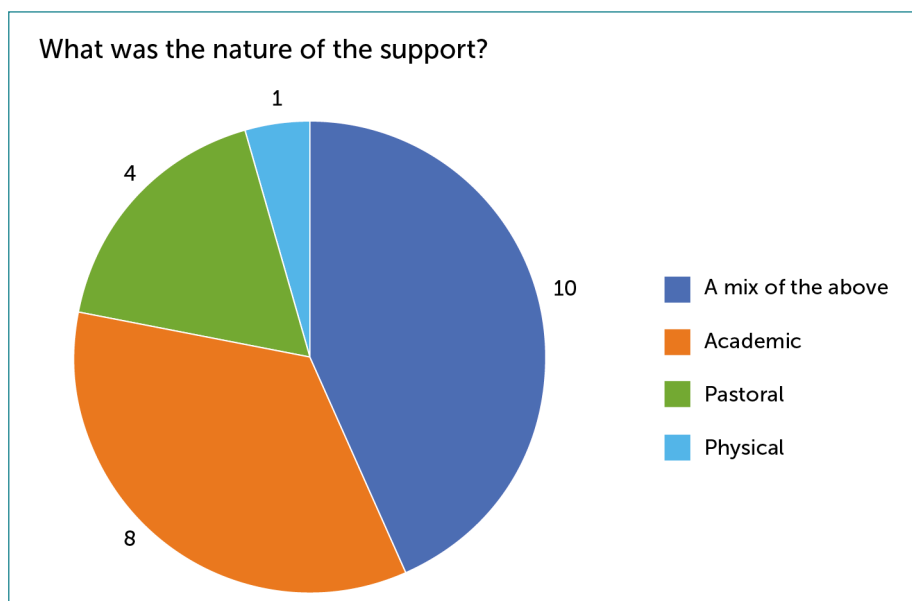
Support Mentoring Programme – Students (Appendix viii)

There were 23 student responses to the survey and 21 of them heard about the support programme from the University Student Guidance.

They all found it easy to organise the support and all their Tutors had a clear plan.

The nature of the support varied (Figure 16), most of the contact time with tutors was less than 2 hours per week and was a mixture of face to face and online.

Figure 16: St Mary's – Nature of the support given to St Mary's students



The majority of support required by St Mary's students was available in St Mary's with no outside agencies involved. All St Mary's students who responded to the survey reported that their wellbeing – academic or personal – had improved because of the mentoring support they received through the Step Up Project.

Additional Comments

Respondents were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

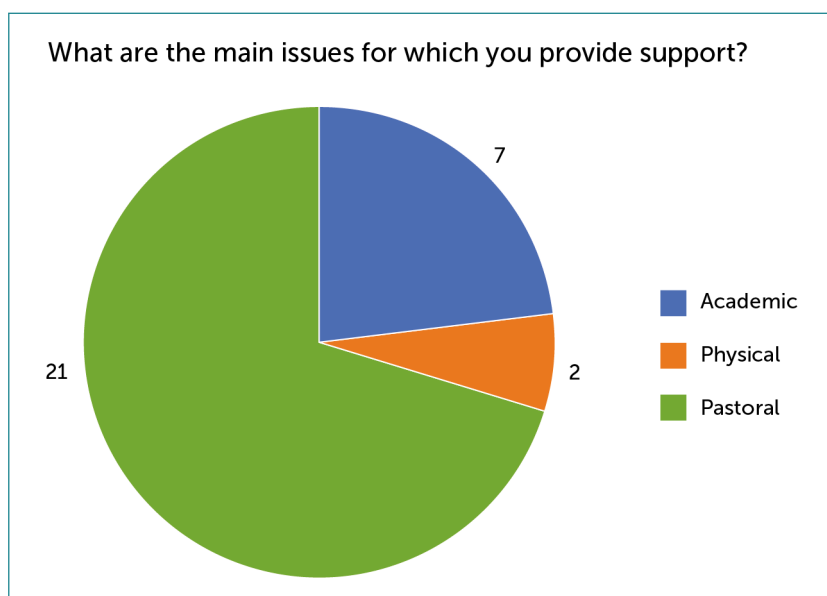
'I have found the addition of a support tutor very beneficial this year. I feel a lot more organised and the support has also been reflected in my grades this year.'

'I really struggled ... structuring my own work. Working with one on one support ... was a great help to be reassured I was on the right track with my essays instead of feeling like I was in the dark. The reassurance helped me not to feel completely overwhelmed and gave me the ability to move forward in my work more confidently.'

Support Mentoring Programme – Associate Lecturers (Appendix ix)

All Associate Lecturers responded to the survey and they reported that the support they gave was mainly pastoral supporting St Mary's students with issues such as anxiety, relationships, self-management and depression (Figure 17).

Figure 17: St Mary's – Main areas where Associate Lectures provided support



Additional Comments

Respondents were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'These students are often receiving expert medical help outside of College, but Step Up has provided them with a foundation to support their academic life and enabled them to achieve. For some students it is simply the knowledge that someone understands what they are going through and can act as their advocate.'

'The programme has been a lifeline for some students, to connect them back into the college environment that they perhaps were stepping away from.'

4.6 Ulster University (UU)

UU Virtual Campus (Appendix x)

The positive comments from the survey indicate that the respondents found the web page easy to navigate and found it most useful for locating rooms and 100% respondents would recommend it to others.

Additional Comments

Virtual Campus users were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'Really useful for young people with learning needs or social anxiety to see what the campus looks like from the comfort of their own homes. It will help prepare them and make them familiar with the environment in a low risk way. Helps them feel more confident with the idea of going to University.'

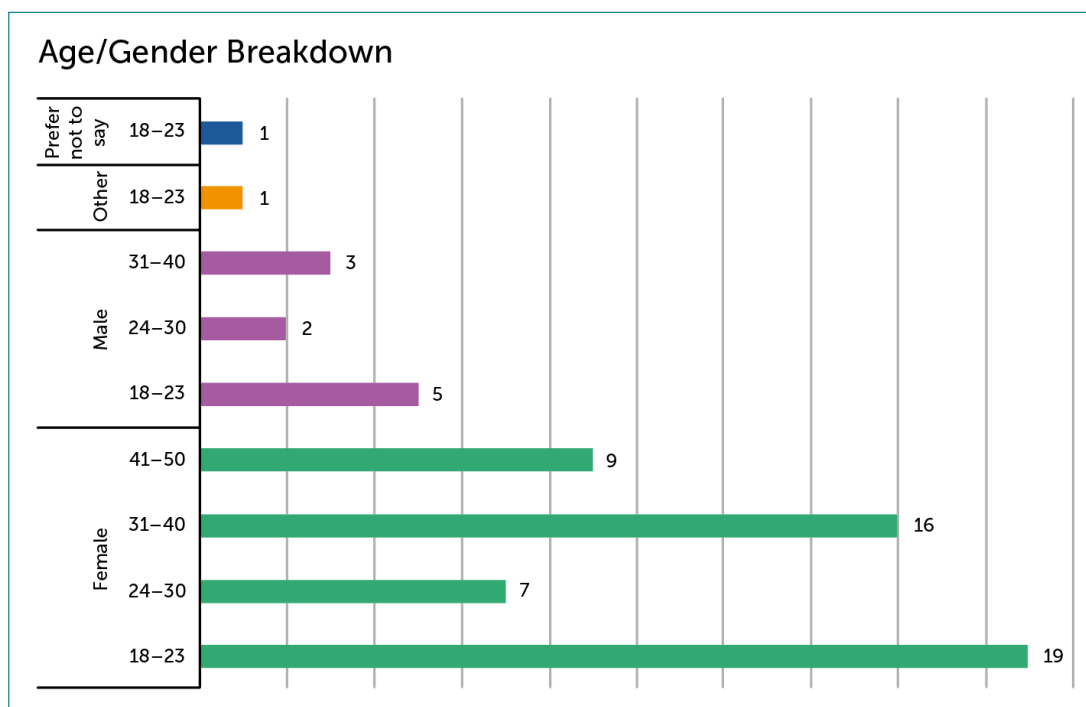
'Also for those young people who may never make it to University but have family and friends who do helps demystify what University is for them. Thank you – the pupils at Longstone Special School have really enjoyed using the goggles.'

'I often use the Virtual Campus webpage to help my external stakeholders envisage the space they may come to, either for teaching or events. I would love to see more spaces featured on it.'

UU Targeted Bursaries (Appendix xi)

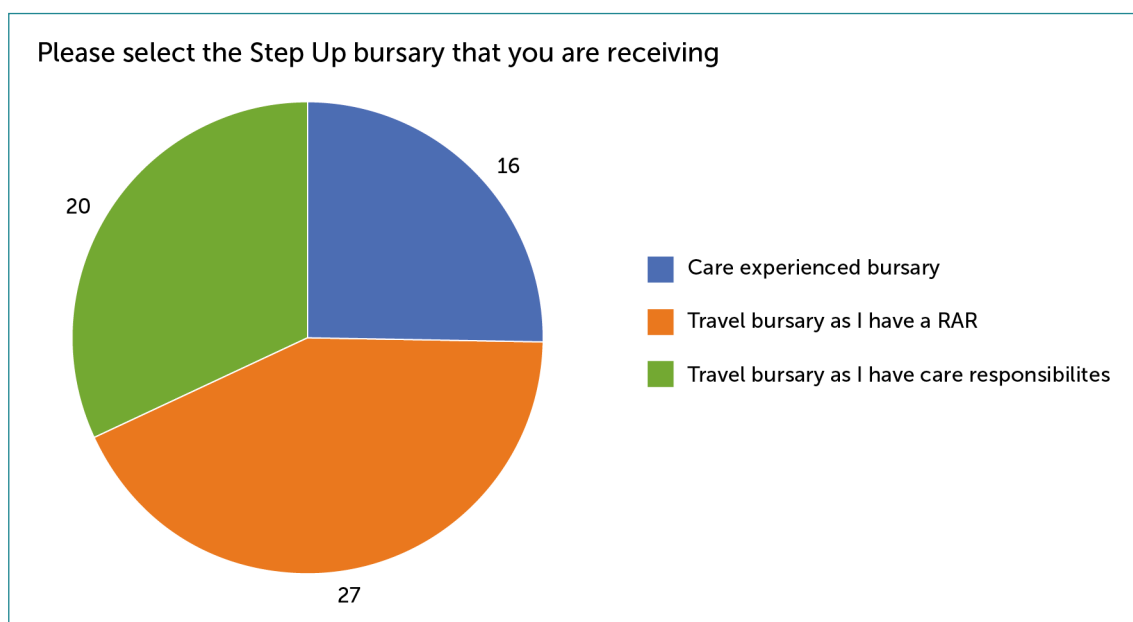
There were 63 respondents from a variety of age groups (Figure 18) to the survey on Targeted Bursaries. 51 of these (81%) were female, in line with the Allied Health programme demographic and the majority of these were in the 18–23 age group.

Figure 18: UU – Age and gender split for Targeted Bursary respondents



The respondents received a bursary as they fell into one of three categories (Figure 19) and those who received the travel bursaries acknowledged that they greatly alleviated the cost of travel burden.

Figure 19: Breakdown of bursaries for respondent



50% of those respondents who received the Care Experienced Bursary used it mainly for general living expenses.

Additional Comments

Recipients of the bursary were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'Without this bursary I would be unable to travel to university. My student finance doesn't even cover my living expenses.'

'The bursary has helped me so much with travel costs. I had grossly underestimated how much it would cost for me to travel to the campus with most weeks being 5 days a week and living approximately 100 miles away. Without this money I would certainly be in financial difficulty. Thank you.'

4.7 Stranmillis University College

Student Mentors (Appendix xii)

The number of responses to the survey from Stranmillis students was not considered statistically significant. The Ashfield Boys engagement with Glendale Nursery was not starting until January 2024 and the residential for the young people in Stranmillis College will not be taking place until June 2024. The focus group interviews on page 39 indicate that the placements with Tor Bank pupils were appropriate and beneficial to those school pupils.

4.8 Open University (OU)

Bursary (Appendix xiii)

The number of responses to the survey from OU students was not considered statistically significant. Care responsibilities were for both adults and children and the bursary was deemed easy to access.

Additional Comments

Recipients of the bursary were invited to comment. Examples of comments were:

'My bursary came at the right time for me. My mother, who I care for, was terribly ill and was admitted to hospital. I had to stop working due to extra travel time and also to provide extra care for her. This bursary made up the short fall in my earnings as I am self-employed. Thank you so very much.'

'It is brilliant to offer this support for students with caring responsibilities. The extra money allows us to look after ourselves better when we are so far down the list of priorities. As with most who receive it, mine has been used partly to support my child and partly myself allowing me to focus on study without so much worry.'

4.9 Key Points from HE Surveys

- The providers tailored Step Up programmes to target specific cohorts.
- Information gathered in some surveys is limited due to later starts.
- Reading Together mentoring programme supported pupils in social and personal development alongside their learning.
- Travel bursaries were helpful in alleviating the cost of travel burden.
- Support provided by the Associate Lectures in St Mary's was mainly pastoral highlighting the need for support for issues such as self-management, anxiety and relationships for university students.

5 Engagement with Providers

In addition to the online survey focus group interviews were held with all providers of programmes within the Step Up Project, to ascertain the operation of the provision, issues encountered, areas of good practice, impact made and considerations going forward for the second year of operation of the project.

5.1 Approach

A series of virtual focus group meetings were held in early February 2024 with all of the eleven centres that provide programmes under the Step Up Project. Those contributing to the meetings consisted of managers of the Step Up Project in their centre, administrators, lecturers, mentors, participants/students, parents/carers of participants/students and representatives from other partners in the project such as the Education Authority and Health Trusts. All of these are listed in Appendix xiv and xv.

The objective of these focus groups was to gather information on the impact of their programmes to date, and to get feedback from the providers, those participating, and other partners involved in the delivery of the project.

6 Further Education Colleges

All 6 FE colleges in Northern Ireland offer 3 programmes, funded from the Step Up Project. These programmes are College Connect + (which includes College Connect 24+), Disability Access Route to Education and Employment (DARE) and Women Returners Access Programme (WRAP). Details of each of these programmes can be found in Appendix ii.

Those that took part in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xiv. The impact and good practice findings of the programmes to date are detailed below along with any challenges encountered and suggested actions for Year 2 of the Step Up Project.

6.1 Impact and Good Practice Findings

All Programmes

- Mentoring of participants is crucial to the success of the Step Up programmes – all colleges recognise that their mentors are critical personnel in enabling participants to come into the college to join a programme, to retain them on programme and to make the Step Up programmes successful.
- Step Up has enabled the colleges to build up and maintain a team of mentors to work across all Step Up programmes offered at the colleges.
- Relationships with external agencies have expanded and strengthened – colleges are working with Health Trusts, Jobs and Benefits offices, foodbank organisations, the Princes Trust, Careers Service, community and voluntary groups, the Education Authority, schools – this has enabled the colleges to make contact with potential participants for all of the Step Up programmes offered at the colleges.
- Some colleges plan to use current participants as good news stories (with their permission) for marketing purposes – all Step Up programmes.

'Foster care relationships have improved ... he has totally changed his life' – Youth Worker Health Trust talking about one young client – College Connect +

'here's one lady, actually, that starting to put makeup on again and take care of her parents' – Dungannon Trussell Trust Food Bank Manager talking about client – WRAP

'You can physically see a change in their demeanour, and they're walking taller' – Dungannon Trussell Trust Food Bank Manager talking about client – WRAP

College Connect+

- The College Connect+ programmes are enabling young people to come into education and training with a view to progression.

'As a result of being on the Step Up programme, he hopes to do joinery in September 24' – Youth Worker Health Trust talking about one client – College Connect 24+

College Connect 24+

- One college (SRC) reported a high proportion of male participants are benefitting from the programme as they can achieve qualifications quickly enabling them to work as Door Supervisors or HGV drivers – College Connect 24+

'this programme offers a second chance for people to turn their life around' – NWRC mentor talking about one client – College Connect 24+

- An additional benefit of this programme is that it has enabled participants from different backgrounds to come together to learn about and from each other.

WRAP

- Some participants gain the confidence and self-esteem to undertake the programmes to form relationships with other participants and some have started to meet socially outside of college – WRAP at SWC.

DARE

'I have to say, he is a changed person from October ... everybody's commenting about how much he has changed, like he's kind of back to his old self and it's got a bit of his confidence back' – Parent of 24 year old client – DARE

6.2 Points for consideration (relevant to FE)

- The timing of funding from DfE for the project does not link with the college teaching and financial year, making it difficult to recruit staff and have sufficient time to deliver outcomes.
- Some programmes got off to a slow start due to recruitment issues with staff and project guidelines changing with some programmes only starting in November 2023 and one college is still recruiting mentoring staff.
- Many qualifications are moving towards online assessment, thus requiring candidates to have a prior competency in IT.
- Online support programmes for young learners require parents/carers to have degree of digital literacy.
- More widespread branding of Step Up programmes – perhaps a marketing campaign similar to DfE apprenticeships.
- More local marketing of the Step Up programmes to local organisations and schools.
- Streamlining of the administration and form filling processes for Step Up.
- Specific to DARE: colleges have other providers for disability participants in their geographical area and thus find it difficult to recruit participants; and many parents have high expectations for what can be provided for participants e.g. taxis, one-to-one tuition, which can be challenging.

7 Higher Education Institutions

7.1 Ulster University

The University operates three programmes under the Step Up Project funding: the Step Up Bursary, the Student Success Centre and the Virtual Campus.

Details of each of these programmes can be found in Appendix iii.

Those that took part in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xv. The impact of the programmes to date are detailed below along with any challenges encountered and issues for consideration for Year 2 of the Step Up Project.

7.1.1 Impact and Good Practice Findings

Step Up Bursary

- The Step Up Bursary has enabled Allied Health students (e.g. Occupational Health/Nursing), who are not eligible for other bursaries, to avail of financial aid for travel expenses to the university campus and/or placement.

'I am a mature student and a single mum of three disabled kids ... I have to travel a long distance to and from university. Having three disabled children with a lot of extra care needs, definitely increases my financial pressures and this grant has helped me immensely and I am forever grateful' – undergraduate student.

'Leaving care without any family or support system has meant I've had to entirely financially support myself ... This fund helps me pay for university supplies and travel costs, helping fill the gap in support I have due to not having any family to help me through university' – undergraduate student.

'I am a mum of three ... and have a role of an unpaid carer. I applied for the support to help me alleviate some of the financial pressure of travelling from my home town ... With the cost of living crisis this support has helped reduce the financial pressure on me and my family' – undergraduate student.

Student Success Centre

This started in January 2024 and will be fully staffed by June 2024.

- The Student Success Centre has enabled difficulties for students to be identified and dealt with using the appropriate facility within the university.
- The Student Success Centre has employed 9 staff to work with students at risk and to date has delivered three maths workshops in February 2024 as a result of need identified by Nursing students. Further sessions on communication and presentation skills have been scheduled.
- The Student Success Centre is planning to deliver various skills workshops on skills areas identified by students e.g. note-making, academic writing, communication and presentation skills, time management, preparing for exams, statistical analysis, and project management.
- The Student Success Centre is building up a bank of learning resources that will be able to be used by future students.

Virtual Campus

Virtual Campus has benefited some students in terms of anxiety in transitioning to university and motivated others to consider university who may not have done so before.

'This has seen our students gain an increased awareness of what is available beyond secondary education. It has helped enthuse, motivate and inspire students and, in many cases, raised aspirations' – Head of Careers secondary school teacher.

Virtual Campus has particularly helped students familiarize themselves with the Belfast City Centre campus as it is a new site and the Step Up Project funding will enable the other campuses of the university to be mapped.

7.2 Queen's University Belfast

The university is operating four programmes under the Step Up Project funding, namely the Reading Together Programme, the Numeracy Programme, Steps to Success and the Bursary Programme. All of the programmes are managed through the university's Widening Participation Unit. Details of each of these programmes can be found in Appendix iii.

Those that took part in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xv. The impact of the programmes to date are detailed below along with any challenges encountered and issues for consideration for Year 2 of the Step Up Project.

University staff report that DfE have been very flexible in working with them as targeted numbers have changed through the life of the project.

The positive impact and findings reported to date from the programmes above are listed below, even though the first semester is only just finishing, and there is another semester to operate before a full evaluation can take place.

7.2.1 Impact and Good Practice Findings

The Reading Together Programme and the Numeracy Programme

- Relationships have been strengthened with external agencies such as the Foster Care Association, Belfast Trust and South Eastern Trust in getting access to contacts for children in care/foster care.
- Tutors and mentors have reported for all programmes that it takes 6-7 weeks of tutoring a child for a relationship to develop, so one hour for 12 weeks is a better mode of delivery than 2 hours over 6 weeks.
- All children have been guaranteed a 12-hour programme (even if this runs over the 12-week timeframe), as sometimes a week or two may be missed due to upheaval in the child's personal circumstances such as change of foster carer.

'I'm going to finish the book on my own now to find out what happens'

'I liked doing quizzes about the book with my mentor' – from children on the Reading Together and Numeracy Programmes.

- Places can be held over from one semester to the next for a child if their personal circumstances lead to them dropping out of the programme.
- Using an online mathematics programme consisting of games and tests, the Numeracy programme has seen a 12.9% increase in the numeracy skills of the group – this maths programme is called Mathletics and can be viewed at www.mathletics.com/uk/for-schools

- Some children have reported that other members of their family are now motivated to take part in future programmes.

Steps to Success Programme

- The Steps to Success programme reports that supplying laptops has been very motivational for children to become involved.
- At least 6–7 weeks are needed for relationships to be developed and for the children to trust their mentor, so one hour per week for 12 weeks/sessions was considered to be the best mode of delivery.
- Mentors from a variety of subject areas have reported that participating in these programmes has encouraged them to consider teaching or working with young people as a career, which they had not previously considered.

'I learned as much from the kids as they learned from me.'

'Seeing the confidence you have helped instil into each child is so rewarding.'

'I have loved seeing the progress made over the duration of the programme.' – from mentors.

Bursary Programme

- To date all students who benefitted from the Bursary Programme have been retained on their course.

7.3 The Open University

The OU operates one Bursary programme for carers and care experienced students, details of which can be found in Appendix iii.

The representative that took part in a one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xv. The impact of the programme to date is detailed below.

Impact

- The bursary is helping OU carer and care experienced students with study costs and also help to maintain motivation to complete their degree.

'The cost of living crisis has hit our students badly and this will help.' – OU representative.

'life complications can really throw people off course quite easily in a way ... I think with something like a bursary ... it gives that added motivation to keep going.' – OU representative.

- Sixty-six applications have been received to date, with forty-eight of these approved for carers and four approved for care experienced.

7.4 St Mary's University College

The university operates a student mentoring programme for students at risk of drop out. For the last eight years a support system has been in place and Step Up Support Mentoring Programme funding has allowed this to expand to meet the growing numbers of students requiring help. Details of the programme can be found in Appendix iii.

Those that took part in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xv. The impact of the programme to date are detailed below along with any challenges encountered and issues for consideration for Year 2 of the Step Up Project.

Impact and Good Practice Findings

- The individual mentoring is providing a scaffolding for the growing number of students who have issues with confidence, self-esteem and coping skills. Many students require support after a return to study as a result of the Covid lockdowns.

'Every single student is getting an individual approach, and that's what Step Up has allowed us to do' – St Mary's staff

'Step Up is not a brand new project for us, but it's a very serious expansion of what we already did' – St Mary's staff

- These students are the teaching workforce of the future – as they themselves having benefited from receiving interventionist support, it should make them more empathic to the needs of their future students.
- Costs for administration and management of the Step Up Project was not factored into the initial project bid by St Marys, but they have resolved this at a later date with DfE, working in a collaborative and flexible way.

7.5 Stranmillis University College

The university operates three programmes, namely Supported Work Placements, Building Professional Support and Addressing Gender Imbalance. Details of each of these programmes can be found in Appendix iii.

Those that took part in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews can be found at Appendix xv. The impact of the programmes to date are detailed below along with any challenges encountered and issues for consideration for Year 2 of the Step Up Project.

7.5.1 Impact and Good Practice Findings

Supported Work Placements

- Pupils from Torbank Special School are getting the opportunity for supported work placements in the university – in the office, kitchen, restaurant, and launderette. This is a safe environment with appropriate work experience and the support of Stranmillis students.
- Torbank pupils have been undertaking a OCN Entry Level Practical Skills Certificate to help them with employability and job seeking skills reinforcing their work placement and preparing them for future opportunities.

'So the likes of interview skills, communication skills and dealing with challenging situations and as much as they really do prefer the practical stuff they are benefiting from the theory as well.' – Stranmillis staff referring to Torbank pupils.

Building Professional Support Programme

- Stranmillis developed links and worked with Include Youth to seek suitable young people for the Building Professional Support Programme – the main delivery of this programme will be a residential in early summer 2024 in Stranmillis College.
- 18 students at Stranmillis College have completed an OCN Level 2 Certificate in Mentoring in order to support those on the Building Professional Support programme.
- Some young people aged 16 who have undertaken Building Professional Support programme are now considering attending university, as they feel less nervous of the university environment.

Addressing Gender Imbalance Programme

- Pupils from Ashfield Boys School visiting Glendale Nursery as part of this programme only commenced in January and a full evaluation will be carried out at the end of the year.

7.6 Points for consideration (relevant to HE)

- Some programmes are at an early stage and so it is difficult to gauge challenges an impact.
- A funding end date of March does not match the university semester end date of June and may be problematical if students need to continue skills training after a March date.
- Concern over not meeting targeted numbers, due to delays in getting started, staffing etc. This is not expected to be an issue in the second year of the project.
- QUB – Practical difficulties when supporting young learners online – not all children had high speed and regular connection, and not all carers had the IT skills to support the children in setting up and using the IT equipment.
- OU – Marketing for the bursary is carried out centrally in England for the OU and this can lead to delays in relaying the information to students in Northern Ireland. Target marketing in Northern Ireland to be considered.

8 Recommendations

8.1 Recommendations for Year 2 regarding FE

- Mentors are key to the success of the project. Ensure they are recruited and trained ready for supporting learners at the start of their programmes.
- Expand and cement relationships further with external agencies in Northern Ireland, e.g. there are 23 Trussell Trust alone foodbanks in Northern Ireland, giving wider access to potential participants.
- As travel and childcare are significant costs to Step Up FE learners, this should be included in future funding models.
- Specific to WRAP: Consider how the 12 week minimum delivery period could be scheduled to be most beneficial to participants needs.
- The criteria for economically inactive and residency in Northern Ireland could be clarified.
- Personnel involved in the colleges' Step Up Projects may have changed since the start of the programme due to new appointments and changing roles. Consideration could be given to updating/refreshing personnel in a uniform manner – for example the re-issue to the operational guidance across the year.

8.2 Recommendations for Year 2 regarding HE

- Meetings with DfE are appreciated and a planned schedule of meetings shared early on would be welcome.
- Measure the completion rate for those students who have obtained funding from the Bursary Programmes and mentoring support.
- School children on the QUB Reading Together and Numeracy Programmes could continue the mentor support by progressing onto the Steps to Success Programme.
- Marketing for the bursaries in some universities in Year 2 could be more focused on eligible students and should be carried out earlier in the year.
- Consideration could be given to researching why more students who met the eligibility criteria for bursaries and support did not apply for the bursary or support.
- Personnel (from the providers) involved in the Step Up Projects may have changed since the start of the programme due to new appointments and changing roles. Consideration could be given to updating/refreshing personnel regarding the Step Up Project in a uniform manner to ensure quality continuity of provision.

Conclusions

As this is an interim evaluation it is premature to draw final conclusions at this stage as to the full impact of the project. However, to date, evidence points to the overwhelming success of the programme, in firstly reaching priority groups, and secondly in providing support and training that has a positive impact on those groups.

The cohorts targeted in the Step Up Project are particularly vulnerable with the impact of the pandemic, lockdowns, lost learning, anxiety and restricted social interactions. The support offered through the project to these 'hard to reach' groups can have life changing impact on individuals, their families, society, and the economy. The Step Up programme was successful in reaching these individuals as evidenced by the majority of respondents in FE having not previously attended the college.

The Step Up programme has developed skills and employment opportunities as specifically evidenced in FE (Figure 14). Some learners have already reported that funding from Step Up bursaries has meant that financially they could remain on the course and continue their studies. There have also been associated benefits such as QUB students now considering teaching or working with young people as a career as a result of their involvement with the programme. It has also been reported that some family members of those school children involved in the Reading Together and Numeracy Together programmes are now motivated to take part in future Step Up programmes.

FE colleges' feedback shows that the provision of mentors and their role in supporting cohorts, and the engagement with external agencies in accessing cohorts significantly contribute to the success of the programme.

In the HEI feedback, key factors to success were that Step Up funding allowed them to expand support that they already know is having a positive impact. Also, the provision of financial support to assist with cost-of-living expenses and travel and the innovative approach in supporting young learners in preparation for future learning was greatly appreciated.

Overall, providers report that DfE have been very flexible in working with them as work strands have evolved through the life of the project. The providers also appreciate the flexibility they were afforded in offering innovative programmes that could target the identified cohorts and they look forward to the second year of the Step Up Project.

Appendices

Appendix i Step Up Project Providers

Further Education Colleges
Belfast Metropolitan College
Northern Regional College
North West Regional College
South Eastern Regional College
South West College
Southern Regional College

Higher Education Institutions
Open University
Queen's University Belfast
Stranmillis University College
St Mary's University College
Ulster University

Appendix ii

Further Education Provision

STEP UP Project – Frameworks for delivery

College Connect +

- Will range between 12 and 36 delivery weeks dependent upon the needs of the applicant.
- Minimum delivery of 324 hrs per programme.
- Will include a range of formal delivery/ curriculum sampling and mentoring.
- Delivery will support development of Literacy and Numeracy.
- Every applicant will be required to complete 3 reviews during the programme.
- Targeted Level 1, however depending on the nature of the applicant the qualification level offered is flexible.

College Connect 24+ year olds.

- Will range between 12 and 36 delivery weeks dependent upon the needs of the applicant.
- Robust initial assessment to produce a person – centred personal development plan.
- Unemployed/economically inactive.
- Flexible interventions – minimum 12-week delivery with progression.

DARE

Focus on neuro divergent pathway.

- Will range between 12 and 36 delivery weeks dependent upon the needs of the applicant.
- Ongoing mentoring per week for all participants.
- Job coaching and sampling mentors.
- Communication skills. Through remote, blended, and modular approach.
- Mentoring, goal setting and action planning specific to the individual to enhance the opportunities to secure qualifications and progress to work/remain in work.
- Such provision may involve collaboration with appropriate external providers to ensure the best quality provision and learning outcomes.
- Working with DfC where appropriate, to access additional mechanisms to enhance in work support. Will include employability and transversal skills.
- The level of qualification offered will depend on the individual learner's abilities.

Women Returners Access Programme

- Will range between 12 and 36 delivery weeks dependent upon the needs of the applicant.
- The programme will target this particular group of economically inactive to bring back into the workforce refreshing skills, building confidence and providing flexible delivery solutions which create progression pathways.
- Modular delivery. Focus on taster sessions – 10X Strategy priority areas. Enterprise and Go For It workshops. Short courses in the community. Micro credentials.
- Working to develop innovative approaches across a range of sectors to create progression pathways including widening access to HE where relevant.

Appendix iii

Higher Education Provision

Higher Education				
Work Strand	Description	Planned Timescale	Priority Cohort (though intersectionality is likely to exist)	Target per annum
<p>Queen's University QUB had 4 work strands.</p> <p>Structured mentoring training for the QUB students was provided internally by members of the Widening Participation Unit, and Academics from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work.</p>				
Reading Together Programme	Targeted care experienced pupils from upper primary school and offered one to one mentoring support from Queens University students using paired reading. Weekly one-hour online sessions.	Per academic term – 12 weeks	Care Experienced (upper primary learners).	28
Numeracy Together Programme	Development of mentor led numeracy support provision (as above).	Per academic term – 12 weeks	Care Experienced (upper primary learners).	30
Steps to Success	Same format as above targeting KS3 (year 8 pupils) who have been identified as having difficulty transitioning from primary school.	Per academic term – 12 weeks	Care Experienced (key stage 3).	30
Care Experienced bursaries	Additional bursary to support care experienced learners – between £800 and £1,000 per learner (per year).	Across the year	Care Experienced.	140–174 depending on sum provided to each learner

Higher Education				
Work Strand	Description	Planned Timescale	Priority Cohort (though intersectionality is likely to exist)	Target per annum
Ulster University				
Virtual Campus	This is a web-based resource which allows users to view the campus virtually via smartphones/laptops and branded VR goggles to explore new spaces, reducing feelings of anxiety and creating a more inclusive and comfortable experience for users. Students with ASD or those who suffer from anxiety can familiarise with spaces and consider potential sensory triggers such as glare, ventilation, exit points, etc.	Across the year	Disability/SEN.	14,000
Skills Success Centre	<p>This is an initiative to support student induction, retention and progression initiatives to enable student success. It started in January 2024 and all staff will be in place by June 2024.</p> <p>There is a multi-campus team of 9 supporting students in areas such as academic writing, maths and transitioning to HE. The services move to where they are required and there are future plans for a drop-in centre.</p>	Across the year	Disability/SEN (including mental health).	14,000
Targeted Bursaries	The Allied Health and Social Work programmes are delivered on the Derry/Londonderry campus. Many students studying these programmes tend to live at home and travelling long distances which creates financial difficulties. It was thought most appropriate to offer travel bursaries to students having to travel more than 40 miles from their home base either to campus or to their placement. Under the Step Up Project bursaries are given for travel and general living expenses. £500–£1,000 per learner (per year).	Across the year	Care Experienced.	150–300 depending on sum provided to each learner.

Higher Education				
Work Strand	Description	Planned Timescale	Priority Cohort (though intersectionality is likely to exist)	Target per annum
St Mary's College				
Support Mentoring Programme	Mentoring support for students who require academic and emotional guidance or physical support. This programme was distinctively not counselling but tailored support provided by Lecturers and Associate Lecturers supporting St Marys' students with a range of issues including academic, emotional and practical issues.	Across the year	Disability/SEN.	150
Open University				
Bursaries	OU provided two types of bursaries – Step Up Carers' Bursary and the Step Up Care Experienced Bursary. The Carers' bursary is for students who provide unpaid care to a friend or family member who, due to an illness, disability, mental health condition, or addiction, cannot cope without their care. The Care Experienced Bursary is for students who are currently in or have previously been in care.	Across the year	Care Experienced. Carer Learners.	50 250
Stranmillis College				
Tor Bank Programme	Supported Work Placements in Stranmillis College for 6 pupils from Tor Bank School per term. They will be supported by 6 student teachers who will have had mentoring training OCNNI level 2. Started 27 Sept finish with celebration event 29 May 2024. 5 students (17 – 18yrs) for 23 weeks. They are placed in Stranmillis Library, Bettys Café, Housekeeping, Chaps restaurant, Registry. 2 hours per week.	Academic term	Disability/SEN.	12

Higher Education				
Work Strand	Description	Planned Timescale	Priority Cohort (though intersectionality is likely to exist)	Target per annum
Building Professional Support	Engaging with that group of young people who may not be considering higher education as an option for them. To identify young people for the programme Stranmillis College worked with Include Youth a charitable organisation, for children and young people in or leaving care. ³ These young people came to Stranmillis for an insight into university life. Staff in Stranmillis and external partners such as Sentinus provided sessions on teambuilding, basic cookery skills, budgeting, completing a UCAS application. Three student teachers from Stranmillis. received training from Include Youth in Care Awareness and also completed OCNNI Level 2 in mentoring Practice. They mentored the young people on this programme. Will end with residential in Halls.	Across the year (2023/24 residential in early summer 2024)	Care Experienced.	12
Males into Education	To address the gender imbalance in teaching four boys from Yr 12 Ashfield Boys School worked in pairs to do reading support with Glendale Nursery with children aged 3–4 years of age. Story sacks were developed by Stranmillis College and in March the Ashfield Boys students and the young nursery children from Glendale will come to Stranmillis College to work on Story Sacks developed by Stranmillis College and allow the Ashfield Boys pupils to have a tour of the campus. These 10 Story Sacks will then be retained by Glendale Nursery.	Across the year	Addressing Gender Imbalance.	25

³ Include Youth | CommunityNI

Appendix iv FE Online Survey

Questions

A1. The Further Education College I am studying through is

South Eastern Regional College
Belfast Metropolitan College
Southern Regional College
South West College
Northern Regional College

A2. Please select your age group

16–24
25–33
34–42
43–51
51+

A3. Please select your gender

Male
Female
Other

A4. Please enter your postcode

A5. My course is

Online
Offline
Both

A6. I get to my training location by

Public Transport
Car
Foot
Taxi
Bicycle
Other

A7. My transport is subsidised/paid for by the Step Up Project

Yes
No

A8. I have been to this college before

Yes
No

A9. The previous course/training I took part in was

Please specify

A10. I have dependents at home that need care while I am on my course

Yes
No

A11. My dependents are

Children
Adults

A12. When I am on a course, my dependents are cared for by

Paid care
Family
School
Other

A13. The Step Up course I am on is

College Connect+
College Connect 24+
DARE
WRAP

A14. I heard about my course through

Online
Friend
Government Agency
Community Organisation
Other

A15. I found it straightforward to enrol in the Step Up programme

Yes
No

A16. Please explain any enrolment challenges you faced

A17. My course met/is meeting my expectations

Yes
No

A18. Please select the reason for the course not meeting your expectations

Too difficult
Too easy
Too long
Topic wasn't what I thought it would be
Difficult accessing materials
Other

A19. On my course I mostly enjoy

Working towards a qualification
Meeting people
Learning new skills
Other

A20. I see my mentor

- Once a week
- Once a month
- When I request a meeting
- Other

A21. I would recommend this course to friends

- Yes
- No

A22. On completion of the course, I would like to

- Apply for another course
- Apply for a paid job
- Try some voluntary work
- Take time out
- Other

A23. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the comment box below.

Appendix v

FE number of survey responses

FE College	Number of Surveys submitted
Belfast Metropolitan College	73
North West Regional College	30
Northern Regional College	22
South Eastern Regional College	77
South West Regional College	89
Southern Regional College	44
Total	335

Appendix vi Queen's University Mentors Survey

Questions

A1. What mentoring course are you currently involved with?

Reading Together
Numeracy Together
Steps to Success

A2. Please select the age range you fall within

18–23
24–30
31–40
41–50
51+

A3. Please select your gender

Male
Female
Prefer not to say
Other

A4. Have you previously been involved in mentoring learners?

Yes
No

A5. Please rate the usefulness of the mentoring training you received

Very Useful
Helpful
Adequate
Not Relevant

A6. Did you find your learners receptive?

Yes
No

A7. Did your learners adhere to online meeting times?

Yes
No

A8. Are the learners appropriately skilled in IT, to engage in online mentoring?

Yes
No

A9. Were the learners keen to engage from the outset of the Reading Together programme?

Yes
No

A10. Did learners talk to you about other topics outside of the Reading Together texts?

Yes

No

A11. Has there been progression in the learner's reading skills since the start of the Reading Together sessions?

Yes

No

A12. Did the learners suggest topics they wanted support with?

Yes

No

A13. Do you think a mentor needs a level of expertise in Mathematics to support learners in Numeracy?

Yes

No

A14. Has there been progression in the learners' numeracy skills since the start of the sessions?

Yes

No

A15. On average, how long did you spend preparing for your mentoring sessions

0–1 hours

1–2 hours

2–3 hours

3–4 hours

4–5 hours

5+ hours

A16. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix vii

Queen's University Bursary Survey

Questions

A1. How did you hear about the bursary?

Posters
Social Media
Friends
Student Guidance
Other

A2. Please select your age group

18–24
25–34
35–44
45–54
66–64
65–74
74+

A3. Please select your gender

Male
Female
Other

A4. Did you find the bursary easy to access?

Yes
No

A5. Why did you not find the bursary easy to access?

Unclear contact details
Unclear evidence
Unclear process
Online Issues
Other

A6. What was the main use for your previous bursary/bursaries?

Learning Materials
General living
Childcare
Electronic Devices
Other

A7. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix viii

St Mary's Support Mentoring (Student) Survey

Questions

A1. Please select the age range you fall within

- 18–23
- 24–30
- 31–40
- 41–50
- 51+

A2. Please select your gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

A3. How did you hear about the Support Mentoring programme?

- Posters
- Online
- Student Guidance in St Mary's
- Friend
- Other

A4. Was it easy to organise support from your tutor?

- Yes
- No

A5. What were the challenges you faced?

- Unclear contact details
- Unclear process
- Unclear support types
- Other

A6. Did your tutor develop a clear plan to support you?

- Yes
- No

A7. Why wasn't a clear plan developed to support you?

- Working towards this
- Not straightforward
- Other

A8. What was the nature of the support?

- Pastoral
- Academic
- Physical
- A mix of the above

A9. How often did/do you have contact with your tutor?

- Daily
- Several visits per week
- Less than an hour a week
- 1–2 hours per week
- Other

A10. Does the contact with your tutor address your needs?

- Yes
- No

A11. How was the support carried out?

- Face to face
- Online
- Both face to face and online

A12. Did your tutor involve outside agencies to support you?

- Yes
- No

A13. Has your wellbeing (academic or personal) improved since availing of support?

- Yes
- No

A14. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix ix

St Mary's Support Mentoring (Lecturers) Survey

Questions

A1. How many learners do you support through the Step Up programme?

A2. Have the learners found the support easy to access?

Yes

No

A3. What are the main issues for which you provide support?

Physical

Academic

Self management

Addictions

Anxiety/depression

Self esteem

Subject specialism

Relationships

Other

A4. Do the students generally request a follow up session with you?

Yes

No

A5. Is the follow up generally related to?

The same issue

A separate issue

A6. Do you think that some students that you have mentored would have left their course if they had not engaged with this Support Mentoring Programme?

Yes

Difficult to say

No

A7. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix x

Ulster University Virtual Campus Survey

Questions

A1. How would you rate the Ulster University Virtual Campus experience?

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

A2. Did you find the Virtual Campus app easy to use?

Yes
No

A3. Please specify the ways in which the app was difficult to use.

Difficult to navigate
Hard to read
Other

A4. How often did you use the Virtual Campus app?

Once
Rarely
Beginning of term
Throughout the term

A5. What did you feel was the most useful aspect of the Virtual Campus app?

Room locations
Catering Service locations
Study locations
Accessible locations
Arranging Teaching spaces
Other

A6. Would you recommend the Virtual Campus app to others?

Yes
No

A7. If you have any further comments, please write them below.

Appendix xi

Ulster University Targeted Bursaries Survey

Questions

A1. Please select the Step Up bursary that you are receiving.

- Care experienced bursary
- Travel bursary as I have care responsibilities
- Travel bursary as I have a RAR

A2. What expense do you mainly use this bursary for?

- General living
- Paid care
- Travel
- Electronic devices
- Learning materials
- Other

A3. Does the bursary cover the cost of your travel?

- Yes
- Mostly
- No

A4. How far is your journey to university (round trip)?

A5. Please select the age range you fall within.

- 18–23
- 24–30
- 31–40
- 41–50
- 51+

6. Please select your gender.

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

A7. How did you hear about the bursary?

- Social media
- Email
- Student guidance
- Friend(s)
- Tutor
- Other

A8. How do you travel to university?

- Car
- Bus
- Train
- Walk
- Shared lift
- Other

A9. Did you find the bursary easy to access?

- Yes
- No

A10. Please specify the ways in which the bursary was difficult to access.

- Unclear contact details
- Unclear Evidence
- Unclear process
- Online issues

A11. Is this your first bursary?

- Yes
- No

A12. If you have any further comments, please write them below.

A13. What was your last bursary used for?

- Travel
- General living expenses
- Child care
- Other

Appendix xii Stranmillis University Student Mentors Survey

Questions

A1. What mentoring course are you currently involved with?

Ashfield Boys' School Placements
Building Professional Support
Tor Bank School Supported Work placements

A2. Please select the age range you fall within.

18–23
24–30
31–40
41–50
51+

A3. Please select your gender.

Male
Female
Prefer not to say
Other

A4. Have you previously been involved in mentoring learners?

Yes
No

A5. Please rate the usefulness of the mentoring training you received.

Very Useful
Helpful
Adequate
Not Relevant

A6. Did you find your learners receptive?

Yes
No

A7. On average how long did you spend preparing for your mentoring sessions?

0–1 hours
1–2 hours
2–3 hours
4–5 hours
5+ hours

A8. What best describes the support your learners required?

Interview skills
Working with others
The challenges of work experience
General life queries
Other

A9. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix xiii

Open University Carers and Care Experienced Survey

Questions

A1. Are you receiving the bursary as a carer or as having experienced care?

Carer

Having Experienced Care

A2. Who do you care for?

Children

Adults

A3. What do you use the bursary for?

Paid Care

Additional resources/support for them

Additional resources/support for yourself

Other

A4. What is the main use for your bursary?

Learning materials

General living

Childcare

Personal well-being support

Other

A5. Please select the age range you fall within.

18–23

24–30

31–40

41–50

51+

A6. Please select your gender.

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other

A7. How did you hear about the bursary?

Posters

Social Media

Friends

Student Guidance

OU Website

Targeted email

Other

A8. Did you find the bursary easy to access?

Yes

No

A9. Why did you not find the bursary easy to access?

- Unclear contact details
- Unclear evidence
- Unclear process
- Online Issues
- Other

A10. Have you previously received a bursary/bursaries to support you in your studies?

- Yes
- No

A11. What was the main use for your previous bursary/bursaries?

- General living
- Paid care
- Other

A12. If you have any further comments, please provide them in the box below.

Appendix xiv

FE Participants in Focus Groups

Further Education Colleges		
Lorraine Kelly	Employability Skills and Apprenticeships Executive	Belfast Metropolitan College
Kathryn Stewart	Skills & Apprenticeships Manager	Belfast Metropolitan College
Joane Burney-Keatings	Step Up training provider	Cinemagic (Belfast Metropolitan College)
Laura McCurdy	Step Up training provider	Cinemagic (Belfast Metropolitan College)
Deane Ellis	Jobs and Benefit Officer	DfC (South West College)
Joanne Fitzgerald	Careers Advice	DfE (South West College)
Alastair Moore	Compassion Co-Ordinator	Dungannon Food Bank (South West College)
Katie Slevin	Step Up training provider	FIT.ie (Belfast Metropolitan College)
Anne Downs	Step Up training provider	GEMS (Belfast Metropolitan College)
Marie Holmes	16+ Pathway Team	HSCNI Western Trust (South West College)
Celine McElroy	Community Co-Ordinator	Mullaghmore and Castlevew Community Association (South West College)
Catriona Sweeney	Curriculum Manager Community Education	North West Regional College
David Blair	Tutor	North West Regional College
Emma Kee	Tutor	North West Regional College
Marie Donaghy	Project Manager Step Up	Northern Regional College
Gary McKeegan	Lecturer	Northern Regional College
Emma Rouke	Mentor	Northern Regional College
Christine O'Neill	Mentor	Northern Regional College
Jackie Caskey	Lecturer	Northern Regional College
Chris Murray	Lecturer	Northern Regional College
Shannon Smillie	Mentor	Northern Regional College
Maggie Campbell	Mentor	Northern Regional College
Janice Cooke	Step Up Project Manager	South Eastern Regional College

Further Education Colleges		
Heather McKee	Director	South Eastern Regional College
Elaine Bradley	Deputy Head of School	South Eastern Regional College
Orla Higgins	Step Up Lead Mentor	South Eastern Regional College
Tatiana Seed	Step Up Lead Mentor	South Eastern Regional College
Catherine Shipman	Head of Engagement	South Eastern Regional College
Emma O'Neill	Programme Development and Delivery Manager – Step Up	South West College
Paula McElduff	Parent	South West College
Harriett Acheson	Tutor	South West College
Marianne Rasdale	Tutor	South West College
Leon Hughes	Step Up Programme Manager	Southern Regional College
Catriona Regan	Head of External Engagement	Southern Regional College
Gerard Houlahan	Key Worker	Southern Regional College
Gavin Haughey	Project Administrator	Southern Regional College
Alec White	Step Up training provider	USEL (Belfast Metropolitan College)
Ciara Cavanagh	Step Up training provider	Workforce (Belfast Metropolitan College)

Appendix xv

HEI Participants in Focus Groups

Higher Education Institutions		
Maggie Bates	Widening Access Senior Manager	Open University
Sinéad O’Kane	Outreach Officer Widening Participation Unit	Queen’s University Belfast
Cassie Campbell	Outreach Assistant	Queen’s University Belfast
Caitlyn Smyth	Graduate Intern	Queen’s University Belfast
Dorothy Jenkins	Graduate Intern	Queen’s University Belfast
Patricia Hampson	Widening Participation Unit Manager	Queen’s University Belfast
Deirdre Cree	Coordinator Student Guidance and Support	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Joe Donnelly	Support Mentor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Simon Hare	Support Mentor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Sinead Beare	Support Mentor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Patricia Corrigan	Support Mentor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Fiona Healy	Support Tutor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Aedin Geary	Support Tutor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Róisín Geary	Support Tutor	St Mary’s University College Belfast
Danielle Armstrong	Student Engagement Coordinator	Stranmillis University College
Holly Joyce	Mentor	Stranmillis University College
Sasha White	Mentor	Stranmillis University College
Donna O’Neill	Senior Employability Worker	Stranmillis University College (Include Youth)
Julia Rafferty	Project Co-ordinator	Ulster University
Andrew Toye	Widening Access & Participation Officer	Ulster University
Catherine O’Donnell	Widening Access & Participation Officer	Ulster University

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