

## WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2024/25 – 2026/27

**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 these fits in with the institution's strategic direction.

North West Regional College (NWRC) was established in August 2007 following the merger of the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education and Limavady College of Further and Higher Education. As the main provider of professional and technical education and training in the North West, NWRC plays a central role in up-skilling and re-skilling the population through the delivery of an economically focussed curriculum from Level 0 - Level 6. NWRC have strong partnerships with civic, business and community including schools and employs 581 FTEs across five campuses. We have an annual turnover of around £37m and to date NWRC have invested over £20m in College estates in recent years to provide industry standard learning and teaching environments including the successful refurbishment of the Springtown Campus which is the site for delivery of the majority of the College's training programmes and apprenticeships. Our purpose is 'Making Lives Better' for our students, our businesses, our community and our staff and our vision is to improve the life chances of everyone, no matter how 'hard to reach'. Our values are collaboration, innovation, integrity and respect.

NWRC operates in a very challenging socio-economic environment which is still impacted by the economic downturn. Despite the fact that unemployment is falling, we have the highest claimant count and the highest rates of economic inactivity in NI within our city and region and five out of the top ten most deprived super output areas (SOAs) are within our catchment area. A high percentage of our working age population hold no qualifications. However, despite our socio-economic challenges, we have a strong education sector in the North West and our students achieve above the NI average at GCSE and at 'A' level.

The College plays a central role in the delivery of Local Government Community Planning in both Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC) and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCG). It is a strategic partner with DCSDC and other key stakeholders in City Deal for the Derry~Londonderry City Region. The College is committed to the further expansion of Apprenticeships to include Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) taking cognisance of the recent change to the all age criteria plans to be centre to the delivery of public sector apprenticeships when available. As part of the DCSDC City Deal the College is in the process of preparing an Outline Business Case for consideration to build a new Strabane Campus in the town centre/canal basin. The aim is to further enhance opportunities for education, skills and training and to work collaboratively with the other stakeholders bidding to develop in the same area. The College intends to strive for a diverse curriculum offer that will meet the needs of the local community and industry helping reduce the skills gap in this area of high deprivation. There is also now momentum in the city and region around health excellence as a strategic economic competence. The College, designated as the 'Hub' for the FE Sector in Health and Social Care, is leading curriculum development from Level 1 – Level 5 in this vocational area.

Our College's role in supporting the widening access and participation agenda in the City region is widely recognised and we remain committed to providing a curriculum that supports the participation of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, those from underrepresented groups in society and those not in employment, education or training (NEETs) examples include

the College's partnerships with the Princes Trust, and participation in a range of externally funded programmes. In addition to this, NWRC led the sector in strategically creating the Step-Up programme across all FE Colleges which will further enhance widening access for targeted groups across Northern Ireland.

The College's economic engagement continues to be outward facing and is unlocking the potential of the city and region to create prosperity. The Business Support Centre, which manages economic engagement and economic development, is central to supporting businesses with skill acquisition and innovation awareness to assist them to move up the skills and innovation escalator. The College currently has a number of Innovation Centres – Foodovation, Product Design Centre, XR Centre and Design Innovation for Assisted Living (DIAL) Centre with a further centre and Industry 4.0 became operational in Springtown in 2022/23. These innovation centres are industry facing and link with curriculum through applied research, idea generation, prototype development and proof of concept. As a 'Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Assured' accredited College and the Lead College in Creative and Cultural Skills, the College continues to be a success achieving numerous awards. Pearson Teaching awards - Silver Award for Further Education Lecturer of the Year 2023, Gold Award for Further Education Team of the Year 2022 (Health Studies team), WorldSkills UK Diversity award 2023 and Skills Competitions Advocate Award 2023. The College has a long and successful working relationship with HMP Magilligan, and the curriculum offer there continues to broaden and expand under the current Service Level Agreement in collaboration with Belfast Met as lead college.

The College has experienced a recent trend in declining full-time enrolments. However, an increase in part time enrolments is evident partly due to the increase in the employer support provision. Despite the challenges experienced following BREXIT - NWRC remains an outward and forward-looking College that is internationally connected across Europe and beyond. The college is a partner in the North West Tertiary Education Cluster group (NWTEC) which is a cross border collaboration established in 2018 and brings together the four education partners in the North West City Region namely, Atlantic Technological University, Ulster University, North West Regional College and Donegal ETB. The aim of the cluster is to provide pathways and progression routes for students on a cross border basis and to work with industry to ensure greater economic prosperity and high value jobs for the region.

NWRC is committed to delivering a curriculum that aligns with the 10X Economy and NI Skills Strategy. The College Curriculum Policy states the curriculum offered at NWRC will:

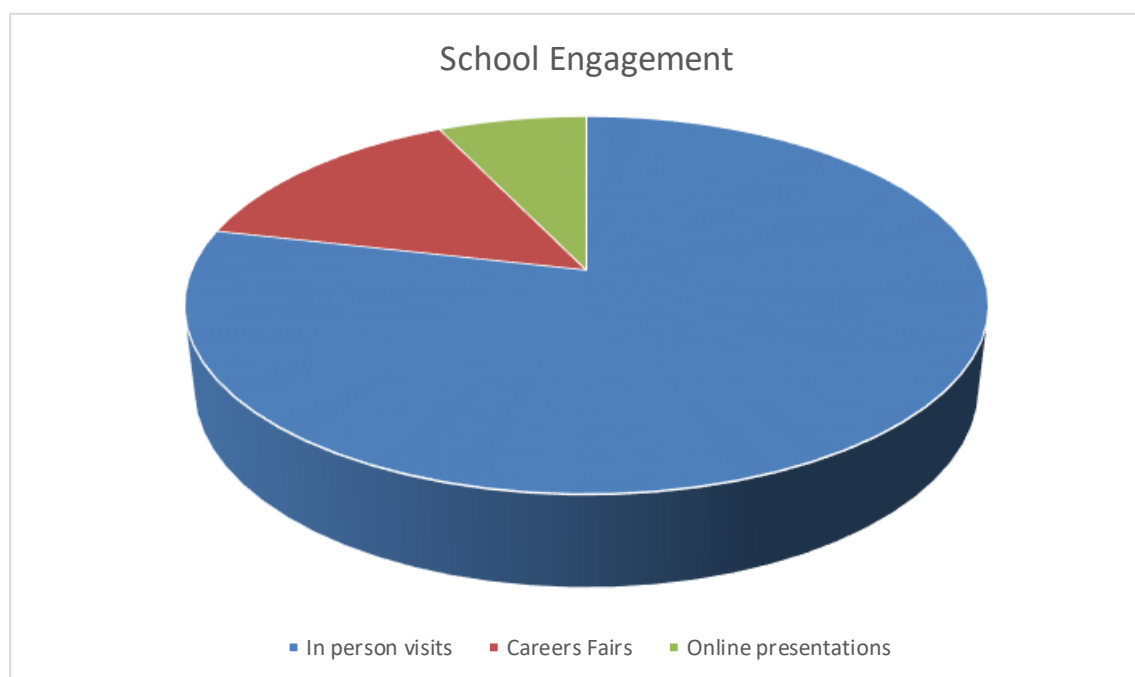
- Be economically relevant, demand led and responsive to local needs (including the significance of digital skills).
- Be innovative and sustainable.
- Provide progression pathways for FE, Apprenticeships and HE and employment;
- Be inclusive and accessible to learners.
- Be of the highest quality.
- Be delivered in a flexible and learner focused manner.
- Have appropriate physical and staff resources.
- Be delivered in a cost-effective manner.

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

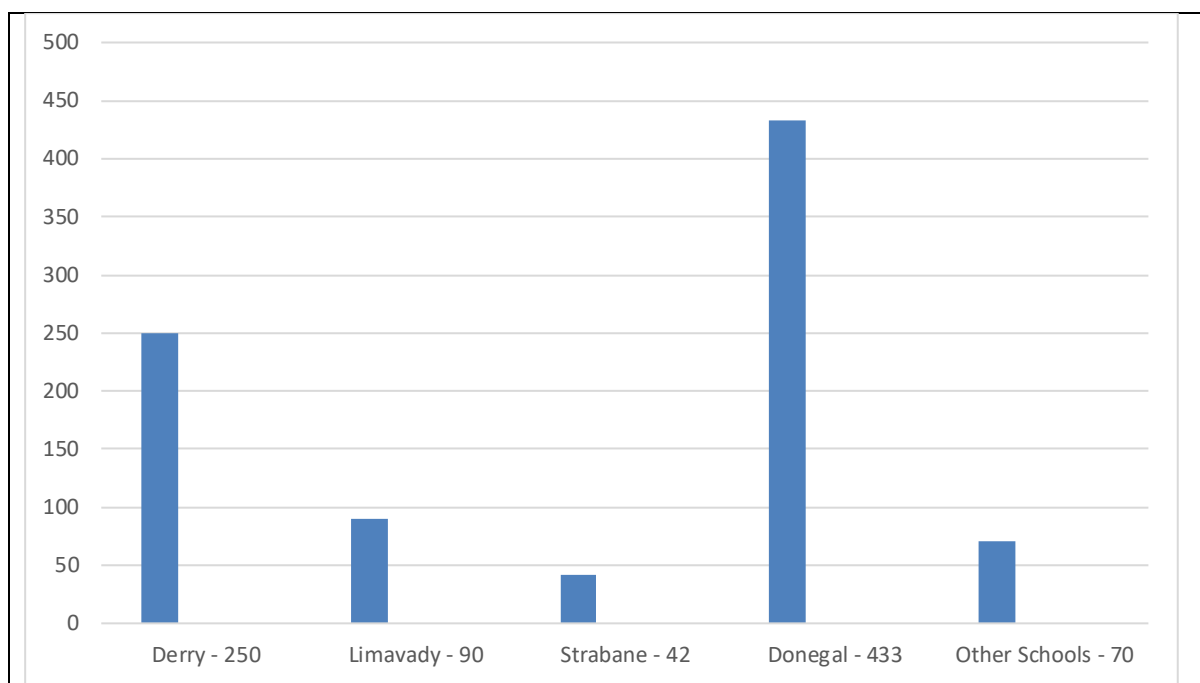
**School Engagement**

The college's Careers Academy team deliver a series of presentations and workshops and attend Careers Fairs which aim to help students at secondary schools understand their options and take a proactive and reflective approach to decision making. With a range of support offered to post-16 students in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the team help students make informed choices at key decision points in order to make the most of their future prospects. The college's Careers staff provide information on higher education, progression routes, course options as well as information on NWRC and the wide range of opportunities it has to offer. In 2023 the WAP officer, along with our careers team attended:

- 22 in person school visits
- 4 careers fairs
- 2 online engagement talks



Over the course of 2023 our careers team and WAP officer met with 885 secondary school students to NWRC provision, student support and progression routes to employment and further study.



### International Students

NWRC continues to welcome and support international students through our engagement programmes. The widening access officer has met with various groups of ethnic minorities at different locations including the women's centre and on street youth engagement. Our international officer has processed 122 Asylum Seeker applications/enrolments from countries including Afghanistan to Yemen; 31 Ukrainian refugees; 6 Syrian refugees. We also have a waiting list of 38 Asylum seekers/refugees. With daily requests coming in from international students (the war in Ukraine, Syrian refugee crisis etc.) we are certain these numbers will increase. These are the countries of birth of those who have applied to study with us or submitted an Expression of interest for our ESOL classes.

Afghanistan	Kuwait	Syria
Algeria	Morocco	Tajikistan
Democratic Republic Congo	Namibia	Tunisia
Egypt	Nigeria	Ukraine
El Salvador	Palestine	Vietnam
Eritrea	Poland	Yemen
Ethiopia	Saudi Arabia	Sudan
Germany	Somalia	Syria

### Widening Access & Participation Officer Outreach

The Widening Access and Participation Officer continues to deliver the Inspire Employability Programme at various external organisations within the DCSDC and Glens Borough Council area. The aim of the programme is to provide help, advice and support to participants from widening access backgrounds and who are unemployed to support them in moving towards accessing training, education or starting a new job. The programme is designed to help individuals break down the barriers preventing them from finding work or accessing training or education. The Widening

Access Officer supports individuals to overcome the barriers and challenges often faced in finding employment or accessing education. The programme is tailored to individual needs and includes help & advice regarding accessing training and education, anything from basic skills to vocational and professional qualifications as well as personal development and developing essential life-skills to help individuals realise and achieve their goals and aspirations.

The Widening Access and Participation Officer also continues to deliver general information sessions on courses and support available. In 2023 this included locations such as Donegal Parent & family Support Service (DPFSS) Community Hub and Foyle 'Dress For Success'. The aim is to promote the college and the wide variety of courses it has to offer. The WAP Officer also promotes to participants access to the WAP Applicant Support Scheme, whereby they can make appointments alongside the WAP Officer. Support includes completion of an online course application together with advice on funding, and referral to appropriate support services based on their individual needs; this ensures applications are completed and submitted on the day of their appointment and support is in place.

### **Retention**

The Progress Coaches at NWRC continue to provide one-to-one support to students to monitor performance and maximise retention and achievement at the college. Current students at the college can be referred to the Progress Coaches for several reasons including but not limited to attendance issues / non engagement, issues with course, personal issues, health issues, finance concerns and potential withdrawal from Course.

#### **Number of progress coach one to ones 21/22 and 22/23:**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Progress coach one to ones 21/22</b>	<b>Progress coach one to ones 22/23</b>
Training & Skills	141	151
Health, Sports & Science	275	358
Business & Professional Services	85	214
Technology & Creative Industries	34	201
External	N/A	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>935</b>

#### ***Impact Statement:***

***There is approximately a 60% increase in the number of one to ones from 585 21/22 to 935 22/23. The one to ones recorded are based on the contact the Progress Coaches had with students. The significant increase is partially attributed to the development of the Student Referral tool and a more efficient process when recording data.***

#### **Destinations of the students referred who met with the progress coaches:**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Numbers 22/23</b>
Successful Engagement (Attending)	420
Successful Engagement (Withdrawn)	31
No Contact Attending	100

No Contact Withdrawn	61
No Contact (Unknown)	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>649</b>

**Impact Statement:**

***In total 649 students were referred to the progress coaches***

***451 students engaged with the Progress Coaches and 93% of those students who engaged remained on their course.***

***Out of the 649 students referred to the Progress Coaches 100 students (15%) did not successfully engage but remained on the course. These students were contacted using various methods but despite no response to contact support was offered and they were signposted as to how to avail of the support.***

**Progression**

NWRC Careers Academy team within Student Services support students throughout the academic year to make informed choices about their progression options, this is done using a variety of methods such as:

- Careers Advisors meet with Level 3 Extended Diploma groups to highlight the necessity to think seriously about progression options post Level 3. They provide general workshop highlighting options including internal Higher Education and the external UCAS process.
- In October/November UCAS Registration and Personal Statement workshops are offered to all BTEC Level 3 Year 2 students and access full-time and Access Year 2 students.
- Tailored progression presentations are delivered during a dedicated Progression Week to all Level 3 Year 2 students focusing on internal HE progression for those who want to consider Foundation Degrees, HND etc as a backup plan or indeed as their primary progression route.
- Progress coaches monitor any issues with students initially highlighted by attendance problems but can be through referral from lecturer or self-referral. If Progress coaches successfully work with students to retain them on their course, then referrals to Careers advisers allow students to identify valid progression routes. If they are not retained on their course but reorientated to an alternative course, then Careers Advisors will meet with individual students to highlight their new progression options.
- The Careers team also meet L3 course groups within the first six weeks to identify their English and Maths GCSE requirements. For those who are identified as not having the required passes then the college Careers staff must support them to ensure they are accessing and attending Essential Skills classes as part of their timetable and additionally enrolling in GCSE night classes if possible.
- Disability Services discuss DSA and other learning support available at HE level.
- Finance Teams discuss financial assistance available alongside information on scholarships.

### 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.*

- NWRC will continue to raise awareness of the WAP HE Scholarship and increase the number of applications from learners from Q1 and Q2 backgrounds by 2% each year.
- The Widening Access & Participation Officer will promote the value and opportunities of higher education amongst underrepresented target groups.
- Our Student Services team will provide accessible information advice and guidance to widening access students and their support networks.
- The Widening Access & Participation Officer will pro-actively seek out and engage those from underrepresented groups to raise their aspirations of studying at Further and Higher Education.
- Student Services will ensure that all widening access students have the appropriate tailored resources available to them, that all resources are accessible to them and that they are sign-posted to what they need, when they need it.
- Increase HE & FE applications by 2% after the annual NWRC Roadshow Event.
- Continue to retain current percentage for targeted groups each consecutive year.
- Increase use of the Maths Cube within the college for HE students by 1%.
- The Widening Access & Participation Officer will continue to foster strong relationships with relevant external stakeholders who can help us to better understand and meet the needs of learners from widening access backgrounds.

NWRC will continue to strive to create an inclusive teaching and learning environment in which all students, regardless of background, are able to achieve their full potential through the further curriculum development and promotion of the following programmes:

### Step Up

The Step up programme was strategically developed within the Further Education sector to provide individualised pathways that increase accessibility and widen access. It offers a range of new learning and skills courses suited to a range of people, particularly those who experience increased barriers to education. Most courses will be delivered face-to-face and will provide an opportunity to build on existing skills, gain qualifications and to benefit from one-to-one mentorship. Other courses will provide supported work experience, action planning and careers. Step up courses range from 12-36 weeks and routes have been identified to support the strategic delivery of the programme to widen access for targeted groups. These include:

- **Women Returners Access Programme (WRAP)** - This programme will have flexible duration of delivery depending on the learners needs. Applicants will receive support in getting: refresh skills, build confidence, job coaching and mentorship.
- **College Connect +** - This is aimed at people who are aged 16-24, not in employment, education or training (NEET).
- **College Connect 24+** - Aimed at people aged 25 and over who are currently not in education, employment, or training. An individual development plan, together with a range of flexible delivery modules and short accredited courses will build additional transversal skills to support further training, education or employment.

- **Disability Access Route to Education and Employment (DARE)** - This is a programme of courses that targets neurodivergent young people and to enhance skills and offer experience to create pathways into Further Education and employment.

### **On Street community youth**

Between March and April 2023, the Widening Access and Participation officer worked with the On Street Community Youth Club in Galliagh Community Centre in Derry/Londonderry. The aim of the workshops was to support young people aged 14–16-year-olds to prepare for applying for jobs as well as preparing them for interviews for the future. The workshop entailed building and developing their CV's along with a transversal skills workshop whilst also implementing communication, team building and problem-solving activities to gain valuable experience which they can forward into their chosen career paths. The widening access officer also uses the college curriculum to take the youth club members through the wide variety of courses available at NWRC. The young people were made aware that we can take them through the application process on an individual basis and provide individual support in a wide range of areas. The widening access officer worked alongside the marketing team to provide the youth club with branded merchandise along with college prospectuses so that they had easy access to courses on offer, but the college brand could also be there to see in the wider community. The Widening Access and Participation Officer is keen to further develop this engagement into areas of high social deprivation by targeting Youth Clubs in the local region.

### **Education Other Than at Home – The Edit Programme**

In 2023 the Widening Access and Participation officer and NWRC careers advisors have worked closely with the EDIT programme. EDIT is a programme funded by the Education Authority where young people who find mainstream schools unsuitable for them can attend and achieve GCSE qualifications. As there is no provision for 6th form at EDIT, most of their students look to progress to NWRC. Transition support has been implemented through the Learning Link at NWRC which means that EDIT students can begin familiarising themselves with key services, staff and buildings months before they transfer to Further Education from EDIT. This partnership will further be developed and enhanced with the Step Up DARE provision available which had this cohort of young people in mind when it was developed.

### **INSPIRE**

The development of a Careers Academy bridging programme is used to support and encourage members of the community who are currently not engaged in employment or education, and it has proved successful since its development, therefore it will continue to run. The non-accredited programme is made up of short modules developed to build confidence and resilience and is delivered in targeted communities, which are currently recognised under multiple deprivations measures including but not limited to young school aged mothers and fathers, socially excluded students and students who have faced significant barriers to education. Our aim is to close the gaps and support students to creatively meet their employment potential through innovative development of soft skills. The Inspire Employability Programme is a free tailored programme that allows participants to select the content. It offers a flexible, tailored approach which provides personalised support, particularly for those facing additional barriers in the education and labour market. The programme offers participants the chance to enhance their soft skills, grow in confidence and receive a NWRC certification upon completion of the programme. The programme covers all areas of employability including CV, interview skills and teambuilding, with progression planning included. The programme aims to promote to participants progression, whether that is



into full-time education, part-time education, community courses, higher level apprenticeships or training and employment. The advantage of the Inspire programme is the ability to remove barriers that prospective disengaged students have about returning to education by undertaking the Inspire Employability programme they eliminate those barriers.

#### Princes Trust

This course is designed for young people who may have been through school or courses which resulted in a negative experience or outcome. The Princes Trust take a different approach and encourage positive outcomes while mentors support young people to find their passion and enthusiasm for their next step. Young people are encouraged to take part in community projects and experience a sense of achievement on completion. The course is run in both Strand Rd and Limavady. This programme will run for 5 days a week over a period of 12 weeks. In 2023 the Strand Road campus ran three separate 12 week Princes Trust programmes.

### 1.3 (a) TARGETS

You will note that the tables numbered (i) to (vi) below have been pre populated with your institution's average enrolment for the last 3 years. You are now required to insert numerical targets for each of the groups identified across the **3 years 2024/25 – 2026/27**. These groups are regarded as being under represented in Access to Success.

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

AVERAGE (based on 4 years 2018- 2022)	Targets/Outcome			
4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
434		434	438	442

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

AVERAGE	Targets/Outcome
---------	-----------------

(based on 4 years 2018-2022)				
<b>4 Year Average</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>
<b>73</b>		73	74	75

(iii) Group: **Students with a Disability**

Outcome: **To increase the number of students in receipt of DSA**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 4 years 2018-2022)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>			
<b>4 Year Average</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>
<b>35</b>		35	36	37

(iv) Group: **Young Males from Quintile 1**

Outcome: **To increase participation of young males from NI MDM Quintile 1**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 4 years 2018-2022)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>			
<b>4 Year Average</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>
<b>79</b>		79	81	83

(v) Group: **Adult Learners**

Outcome: **To increase the number of adult learners participating in HE**

<b>AVERAGE</b> (based on 4 years 2018-2022)	<b>Targets/Outcome</b>			
--	------------------------	--	--	--

4 Year Average	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
610		610	615	620

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.

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

BASE YEAR	Targets/Outcome			
		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
10	Number	10	11	12

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

- (i) Group: Young Adult Carers  
 Outcome: To maintain/increase the number of enrolments for t

Baseline (statistical or % participation last year monitored)	Targets/Outcome			
		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
8	Number	10	11	12

	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 2024/25 (£)	Estimated Spend 2025/26 (£)	Estimated Spend 2026/27 (£)
Bursaries	£62000	£67000	£73000
Scholarships	£10000	£10000	£10000
Other financial Support	£0	£0	£0
Outreach	£12000	£14000	£16000
Retention	£26000	£27000	£28000
Research Activity	£3000	£3000	£3000
Staffing/ Administration	£25000	£25000	£25000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£138000</b>	<b>£146000</b>	<b>£155000</b>

- 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.)

#### **Widening Access Application Support Scheme**

##### *Recruitment*

In January 2022, the Widening Access Application Support Scheme was introduced hoping that it would prove a success to widen access and participation for disadvantaged groups. Since

January 2022 the scheme has helped 30 students apply and enrol for a course at NWRC. The support provided includes:

- Tailored and individual advice on the courses available at NWRC
- Tailored and individualised guidance on support available i.e. safeguarding, student finance, learning support etc.
- Campus tours/ transition support
- Individual meetings with curriculum staff
- Course fees information for PT (Full & concession fees etc.)

### **Mental Health Awareness**

#### *Retention*

Problems associated with the rising rates of loneliness and social isolation among young people in general, are magnified for students who belong to marginalized and underrepresented groups. NWRC provide students with a range of college mental health initiatives which are designed for them and their unique circumstances. When mental health issues go unaddressed, students are more likely to struggle academically which may affect retention at the college, but a key component of making education more equitable lies in making mental health services more inclusive. Students need to be educated about mental health in order to be aware of the signs, so that they can know where to go for help and may also be able to help others. Integrating mental health awareness into our resources and outreach activities continues to increase knowledge and understanding of those experiencing difficulties, removing the stigma or social misconceptions, and replacing these with an atmosphere of positivity and acceptance. This in turn significantly benefits the lives of our students' experiencing problems and potentially even reduces their symptoms. Our Safeguarding team continues to promote the Elephant in The Room Campaign, Lifeline, Action Mental Health campaigns and Inspire Counselling Services throughout the year using the Student Portal, Student Handbook, social media, and internal resources. Student Services is the main hub when it comes to Mental Health within NWRC, with staff members undertaking a range of support activities, including pre-admission activity with WAP applicants, allocating tailored support and wider well-being activities. The Student Services team alongside the Safeguarding team educate students on mental health issues with the aim of reducing self-harming behaviours, reducing stigma associated with mental illness and promoting help seeking behaviours and emotional well-being practices through outreach events. By acting on any concerns that students from underrepresented groups have and giving them a space to connect with others whilst enhancing traditional support with digital offerings and providing adequate mental health resources, we as a college can help students who would otherwise fall through the cracks in the system.

### **NWRC Roadshow Events**

#### *Recruitment*

Our roadshows are outreach and recruitment events which take place outside NWRC and are specifically targeted at WAP cohorts to encourage HE course applications each year. Staff from Student Services, including the Widening Access & Participation Officer host the roadshows annually in three different locations: Derry-Londonderry, Strabane and Limavady. NWRC Roadshows are identical events that produce event engagement that allows NWRC to take its services out in to the heart of the communities and meet potential students face to face beyond their normal territory. These events are fully focused on removing barriers and targeting the hard to reach and the roadshow model is essential to reach individuals who may have never considered returning to education. The Roadshows comprise interactive

curriculum demonstrations which are done during the events such as hairdressing/beauty/barbering demos, bricklaying and cookery with information stalls providing information on the different areas within Student Services including Student Finance, Student Union, Safeguarding, Health and Well-being and careers/progression advice from Careers Academy staff members. The roadshows primarily target areas within our two district councils where there are low progression rates to higher education, and focuses on assisting students to reach their potential, as well as demystifying the NWRC experience through overcoming common misconceptions. The Widening Access & Participation Officer is responsible for managing the NWRC Roadshow events, with a specific focus on engaging and inspiring students from under-represented groups and helping them to gain an understanding of the benefits of higher education and the opportunities available to them.

### **Induction / Freshers**

#### *Induction Programme / Retention*

Although retention needs to be considered throughout the student experience, at NWRC we provide a strong and inclusive student induction/freshers within the first few weeks of the academic year for all students, as this time period (post-entry) has been identified as a key time in retaining students. It is a critical part of early student engagement and ensures they feel a sense of belonging at college. This programme of events also guarantees our new and returning students are made aware of the existence of student support services and how they can use them. Our induction programme is delivered centrally driven and co-ordinated; this limits the potential for information overload. Our overall aim of the programme is to reduce students' level of anxiety and through taking this pro-active approach it allows us to troubleshoot problems allowing the student to feel at home in the college environment. We also provide all students with a Student Handbook, which was first introduced in 2018/19 and is updated each academic year. This handbook is designed to help all students make the most of their time at the college. It provides information that will help them access the many services and opportunities open to them at the college.

### **Widening Access Scholarship / Higher Education Bursary**

#### *Aspiration Raising / Retention*

The Widening Participation Scholarships are for students who have experienced financial hardship and/or educational disadvantage that has impacted on their ability to achieve their full potential. The scholarships are worth £2500 and are awarded to a limited number of students per academic year to help with their tuition fees. In 2022/23, the scholarship was awarded to 4 students, amounting to a £10,000 reimbursement of tuition fees to students from underrepresented backgrounds. As a college we want to ensure that students with financial need can access suitable advice and appropriate financial assistance, therefore we continue to offer our £500 Higher Education bursary, this bursary is awarded to students from low-income households, in 2022/23 the bursary amounted to £54,500.

### **Student Voice**

#### *Aspiration Raising / Retention*

The Student Voice provides an opportunity to engage and include students from marginalised groups, with the aim that achievement and engagement will increase when these students have more ownership of their college community. Our Student Voice Initiative reinforces that what our students have to say matters in how the college operates. We welcome current students to represent NWRC as Student Representatives and inspire young people by visiting schools and events to promote NWRC and the benefits of further and higher education. The

Student Union manages, mobilizes, and trains over 200 Class Representatives per year. They underpin the Student Voice in the College. They are trained to deal with conflict, advocate for their peers, and innovatively, in Safeguarding Awareness. Another innovation has been the end of year Student Voice Conference, at the conference more than eighty delegates take part in a professional event, engaging with external stakeholders, building relationships with peers, and thoroughly impressing NUS-USI, our national organization. In 2018/19, we officially developed the Student Representative role at NWRC, whereby representatives share their experiences of what it is like to study at NWRC with prospective students, their families, and teachers. They represent NWRC at events on and off-campus, with members of staff or with other student representatives. The number of people they engage with can vary from a handful to hundreds depending on the type of event. Types of events that Student Ambassadors help with include Open Events, School visits, NWRC Roadshows, Higher Education and UCAS Fairs, Community Events and Festivals, Campus Tours, Schools Visits to Campus. The Student Voice Initiative allows students to develop their public speaking, teamwork, and independent thinking skills. The programme is a way of building self-confidence for many students and allows them to meet other NWRC students from a wide range of different courses and backgrounds. The Student Voice helps the WAP Officer to identify causes for non-engagement and what students feel are the most useful sources of support within the college, and it identifies young people's perception of their educational experiences today, which can be a powerful tool in helping the WAP Officer to investigate and improve practice towards WAP cohorts.

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

- At NWRC we believe that every student of the college has the right to enjoy a full and fulfilling experience, regardless of socioeconomic background, and we aim to make all aspects of college life as inclusive and accessible as we can.
- NWRC offers a wide range of bursaries, scholarships, awards and prizes as well as an extensive portfolio of outreach targeted activities, initiatives and programmes delivered in partnership with schools, communities and employers specifically for individuals and groups from underrepresented areas.
- The college continues to offer non-traditional routes into Higher Education through Adult Access courses and increased part-time opportunities. The Careers Academy team also promote the APEL system as an alternative route into Higher Education courses offered at the college, APEL gives students an opportunity to be credited for learning that they have done before they started at the college. This could include experiential learning whereby learning is achieved outside of a formal learning environment. It may include learning gained as part of work experience, volunteering or as part of a training course, but for which there is no formal qualification.
- Since gaining the Carers Federation Quality Standard in Carer Support in 2021, the Carers Support Team at NWRC continue to ensure Young Adult Carers at the college are properly supported and can succeed. This includes offering Learning Support Plans, Carers Passes and activities to enjoy outside of their classroom setting. We as a college have also

introduced the “Tick the box” option on our application forms. This now allows students with caring responsibilities to advise they have caring responsibilities so that the college can let them know what additional support they are entitled to if they wish to take advantage of this. This could include finance and other support services.

- Through our School Engagement, the College seeks to raise aspirations of young people.
- The College’s dedicated Student Support Services team offer guidance to students applying for government funding & support. Students can also avail of assistive equipment, help with academic writing and the making of all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access and progression in HE.
- The College’s dedicated Widening Access & Participation Officer works with the Student Services Manager, Head of Client Services, and the College Curriculum Leadership Team to prepare and submit a WAP Plan on an annual basis.
- Our Widening Access & Participation Officer engages with under-represented groups throughout the student life cycle, in order to raise aspirations, support access, and encourage success and progression.
- We ensure that costs of Higher Education are clearly understood by students from underrepresented backgrounds through offering a variety of information on the college website to prospective students and student finance announcements on Canvas/social media platforms for internal students. Our financial support is designed to ensure that students can engage with their studies and college life, allowing them the best possible opportunity of success.
- The Student Services team and the wider curriculum team work together on the colleges commitment to be a place of opportunity for a diverse group of students – including those who have not had equal opportunity to demonstrate their full academic potential. As lecturers and Student Support staff, we engage with individuals from some of the most deprived communities and under-represented groups in the DCSDC and Glens Borough Council areas and beyond.
- Our Safeguarding team continue to assist students with accessing the required support to overcome any personal or social disadvantage that might prevent them from completing their further or higher education programme at the college. This does mean referring students to external stakeholders if necessary, using Elemental Social Prescribing and referring students to the wraparound service Inspire Counselling which is available 24/7, 365 days a year.

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

NWRC publishes clear, accessible and timely information for existing and prospective students on the fees we intend to charge and on the financial support we offer. We do this both through our own information channels including the main college social media platforms as well as social media platforms belonging to Student Services, NWRC SU and the Careers Academy at the college. The



NWRC website provides our most comprehensive source of up-to-date information about funding and fees presented by year of entry and by student type, enabling students to see what fees and financial support package applies to them. Targeted web content is provided for under-represented and non-traditional groups including students from low-income families, students with disabilities and student parents with advice on funding and financial support where this is applicable. We send regular email communications to prospective students, applicants and current students providing links to key financial advice and information at critical points during the academic year. We also provide regular presentations on fees and funding at our open days and deliver these through our recruitment, outreach and engagement activities.

We will also continue to deliver information to students using a variety of methods including:

- The colleges full-time and part-time prospectus (available online and hard copies). NWRC publishes information on fee rates alongside information on financial support including student loans, grants, scholarships, bursaries.
- Open Day Information sessions give applicants the opportunity to visit the different college campuses and engage with our staff and student ambassadors where they will promote NWRC, including our financial support packages.
- College Induction and Freshers Week. This includes short student services introduction videos and resources that share vital information on areas such as Students Union, Student Finance, Careers Academy, Safeguarding, Learning Link, Library and Health & Well-being that can be shared in classrooms, on social media and on the student portal.
- Email and text message campaigns to students.
- Our Student Newsletter allows us to provide consistent, open communication with our students and is used to provide information on events, resources, activities and offers tips for supporting the whole student's health and well-being.
- Plasma screens are located around college campuses in key areas where students, staff and visitors can find useful information e.g., upcoming events, announcements, and news. The aim is for key information to be presented consistently on screens across the college, to complement information on other communications channels.
- Our Student Handbook, the intention of the handbook is that it should act as a reference document for students throughout their time at the college. It provides information on specific support that students may make use of and how it can be accessed should and is easily navigable for both new and experienced students.
- Every course has an Academic Course Handbook. Chapter one within the handbook is generic and ensures that academic information is shared with all students from induction and includes Academic Referencing, academic integrity and key terminology pertaining to curriculum and policies.
- Promotion of all financial assistance including emergency financial support by student finance staff through a range of interactive events and drop-ins and classroom visits throughout the year during Money week, drop-in sessions, and classroom visits throughout the year.
- The student finance team have developed a Student Finance Self-Assessment tool available on the college website. This tool allows prospective students to determine the correct student funding package for their circumstances prior to coming to NWRC. Given the complexity of fees and the various forms of financial support available to students depending on their circumstances, it is essential that we communicate this clearly and accurately through a dynamic tool.

Our current Widening Access and Participation Plan is published in full in appropriate areas of our website for both prospective and current students alongside a wide range of other relevant advice including finance, disability and learning support.

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

Monitoring of the progress towards meeting the targets outlined in this widening access & participation plan is carried out regularly through the Student Services Manager and the Widening Access & Participation Officer. Success of delivery, targets and achievements are also assessed on a termly basis collectively by the WAP Officer, Student Services Manager and Head of Client Services, after which they are then reviewed by the CLT (Curriculum Leadership Team) and the Senior Leadership Team. The college's Board of Governors will be provided with regular reporting on progress with the targets set out in this plan, in order to enable it to meet its oversight responsibility in this area. In addition, the targets and milestones set out in this plan will be translated into KPIs, this will provide for regular points in the year where performance will be scrutinised by the college leadership team to drive continual improvements towards targets. Any initiatives funded through this plan will also be required to provide evaluation outcomes for the academic year as well as highlighting key challenges and successes. If any areas within this plan are identified as worsening or lacking sufficient progress to meet our stated aims and objectives, the college will take appropriate action to ensure that this trend is reversed. This will include undertaking further analysis to understand the reasons behind the performance, and if necessary, the redirection of resource to ensure that the targets outlined within this plan are met within the desired timescales.

**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*

**WAP Scholarship winners' testimonials 2023**

*'I am dedicated to pursuing a career in cyber security. I have a great interest in Technology and a curiosity for understanding digital security. I feel that getting this scholarship means I wouldn't have to worry so much about finances and focus entirely on my studies. It would greatly aid me in achieving my ambitions and goals, and in the future I could make a difference in the world.'*

*'Nearly half of my SUSI grant will be spent on fees, which doesn't leave me much to live on or pay expenses... If I received this scholarship, it would be a huge weight off my mind as I could pay my fees and use my maintenance grant to live on. In the future, I hope to become an animator, film/video editor or photographer and use my combined skills from the course.'*

*'I really worry about student debt which I'm not used to. This scholarship would not only help me financially as I intend to continue my education, but also recognises that not everyone has an easy time in the education system. Personally, with all I have faced with my ASD, mental health worries and functioning on a daily basis, I am proud of what I have achieved and hope that I can continue to reach my full potential.'*

**Level 2 Evaluation - Learning***The resulting increase in knowledge or capability***SO FAR SO GOOD (SFSG)**

	Number of Students 21/22	Percentage	Number of Students 22/23	Percentage
Very Happy	572	56%	505	54%
Happy	356	35%	351	38%
Okay	80	8%	67	7%
Unhappy	7	0.7%	7	0.8%
Very Unhappy	3	0.3%	2	0.2%
Total	1018	100%	932	100%

**Impact statement:**

*932 students responded to the SFSG survey rollout, although overall response decreased from the previous year 92% of students ranking as happy to very happy on their course. Of the 8% of students ranking okay to very unhappy Progress Coaches carried out a targeted approach contacted all 76 students. 1 of the 76 students switched to an alternate course but all other students remained on their course at the time and support was offered.*

**Destinations of the students referred who met with the progress coaches:**

Destination	Numbers 22/23
Successful Engagement (Attending)	420
Successful Engagement (Withdrawn)	31
No Contact Attending	100
No Contact Withdrawn	61
No Contact (Unknown)	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>649</b>

**Impact Statement:**

*In total 649 students were referred to the progress coaches*

*451 students engaged with the Progress Coaches and 93% of those students who engaged remained on their course.*

*Out of the 649 students referred to the Progress Coaches 100 students (15%) did not successfully engage but remained on the course. These students were contacted using various methods but*

*despite no response to contact support was offered and they were signposted as to how to avail of the support.*

*From the end of March, because of Action other than Strike registers were not always available therefore the destination of 35 students was unknown during this period.*

#### Breakdown of referrals made to the Progress Coach

Referrals made to Progress Coaches :	Number of students 21/22
Curriculum	390
Self-referral	21
Safeguarding	7
SFSG	223
Learning Link	5
Careers	1
Attendance	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>649</b>

#### **Impact Statement:**

*60% of students referred to Progress Coaches were from Curriculum Staff which shows positive buy in from Curriculum.*

*34% of referrals came as an outcome from the So Far So Good (SFSG) survey showing the value of completing the SFSG survey.*

#### Number of students the progress coaches referred to internal departments

Referral to from Progress Coaches :	Number of students 21/22	Number of students 22/23
Safeguarding	27	44
Learning Link	32	58
Finance	1	10
Counselling / Elemental	41	26
Careers	36	15
Library	n/a	n/a
Student Support Services	n/a (not previously tracked)	135
Curriculum	n/a	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>322</b>

#### **Impact Statement:**

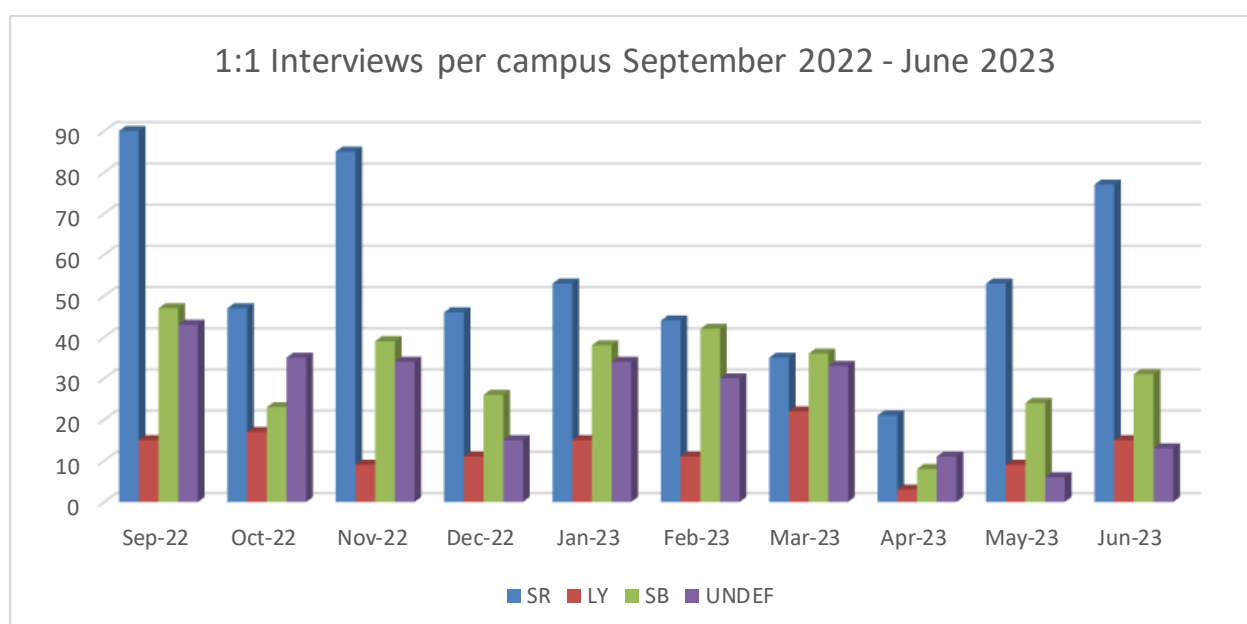
***The progress coaches successfully referred 322 students (57% increase) to other student services support areas, indicating a positive interdepartmental collaboration with a holistic approach to student centred care.***

***Of the 322 students referred 42% of students were referred to Student Support Services, meaning that no formal referral was accepted but raised awareness of the support services available and how they can self- refer at any stage of their student journey was made apparent.***

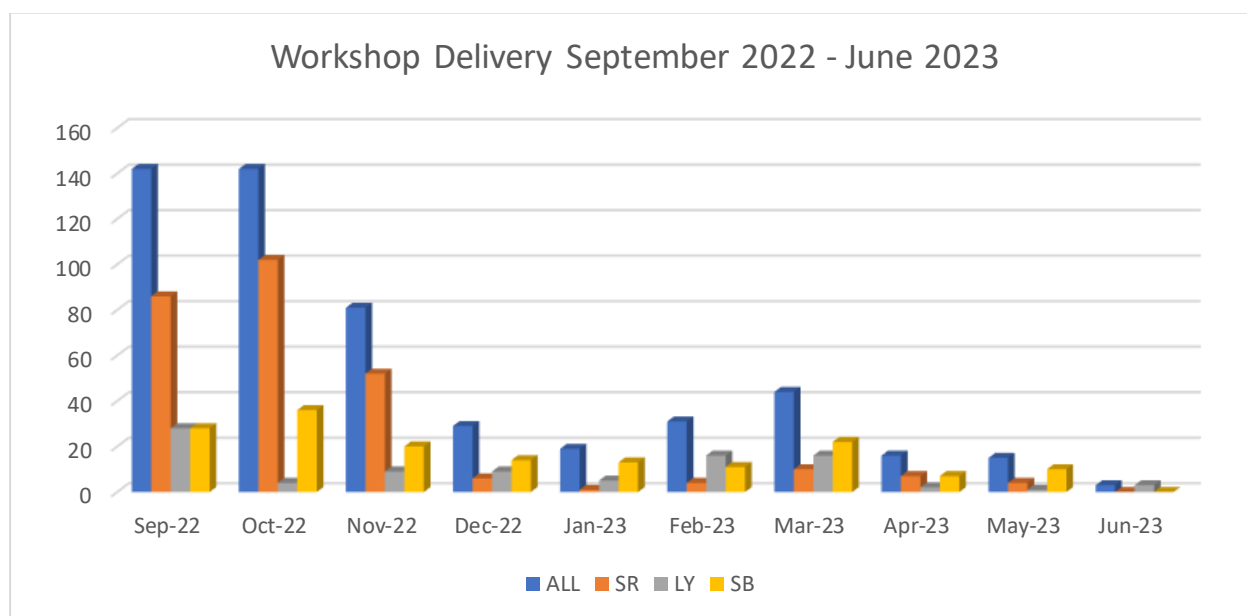
### Level 3 Evaluation – Transfer

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

#### Analysis of Careers Academy 1:1s & Workshop Provision 2022 / 2023



1 to 1	All	SR	LY	SB	UNDEF
Sep-22	195	90	15	47	43
Oct-22	122	47	17	23	35
Nov-22	167	85	9	39	34
Dec-22	98	46	11	26	15
Jan-23	140	53	15	38	34
Feb-23	127	44	11	42	30
Mar-23	126	35	22	36	33
Apr-23	43	21	3	8	11
May-23	87	53	9	24	6
Jun-23	125	77	15	31	13
	1230	551	127	314	254



Workshops 22 23	ALL	SR	LY	SB
Sep-22	142	86	28	28
Oct-22	142	102	4	36
Nov-22	81	52	9	20
Dec-22	29	6	9	14
Jan-23	19	1	5	13
Feb-23	31	4	16	11
Mar-23	44	10	16	22
Apr-23	16	7	2	7
May-23	15	4	1	10
Jun-23	3	0	3	0
	522	272	93	161

#### Level 4 Evaluation- Results

*Results- the effects resulting from performance*

The Widening Access and Participation Officer delivers the Inspire Employability programme at the Women's Centre in Derry. The aim of the programme is to provide help, support and advice to women who are currently unemployed so that they can develop the skills needed to begin a successful job hunt. We work with these ladies delivering different workshops which include CV building, interview preparation, building resilience as well as making them aware of job opportunities. Along with these workshops we can work together to discuss college courses, should any of them want to return to education. We inform them of all the support that is available within the college as we understand returning to education can be quite daunting for some people.

- 36 Women took part in the Inspire programme at the Women's Centre.

- 91% agreed it has a lot of relevant information.
- 81% would recommend the programme to a friend.
- 100% agreed it got people involved and engaged.
- 81% found the programme inspiring.