

Institution: Stranmillis University College, Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 23 – Education
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <p>Since REF2014, Stranmillis University College (SUC) has greatly enhanced the vitality and sustainability of its research activities, building capacity through investment in people and infrastructure and the development of more robust research and impact strategies. SUC is a small, specialist institution focusing almost entirely on education and teacher education with (on the census date) a total of 45 academic staff (FTE 42).</p> <p>Evidence of the achievement of strategic aims for research and impact outlined in REF2014</p> <p>[1] <u>To continue to develop a sustainable and [2] ethical research culture:</u></p> <p>The Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team funded the creation of three new research office posts during 2014-2020. These were: a new Senior Leadership post of Director of Research and Scholarship in January 2015 (Purdy); a new post of Research Office Finance and Development Officer in April 2015 (Shields) to provide focused support to academic staff on funding opportunities, budgeting and financial management of research projects; and a new post of Research Impact Coordinator in August 2015 (Walsh) to lead the development of a new Research Impact Strategy and to coordinate the preparation of REF impact case studies. These new appointments contributed to the development of a new Research Strategy in 2015, revised and updated in 2017 and 2019 and outlined below. In addition, the Research and Ethics Committee was reconfigured (now named the Research and Scholarship Committee), the Research Office moved into the heart of the College's main teaching building to encourage staff drop-ins, and a new accountability structure was instituted with regular reporting to the Research and Scholarship Committee, Academic Leadership Committee, Senior Leadership Committee, Corporate Planning Committee and the Governing Body's Education Committee. Each year Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are established for Research and Scholarship as part of the College's Annual Business Plan, and progress against these KPIs forms the basis of the quarterly reporting and accountability process. A specific Risk Register for Research has also been maintained throughout the REF period and allows key risks to be identified and mitigating actions to be planned, implemented and monitored.</p> <p>The role of research was greatly enhanced in the June 2015 College Corporate Plan, which committed to creating "a rich, vibrant and supportive scholarship and research environment", to "increase the knowledge transfer and impact arising from the College's scholarship and research activities", and to "facilitate a larger submission to REF2021". We are pleased to report that this last objective has been achieved. In REF2014 there were 5 staff (FTE=5) submitted; in REF2021 the submission has more than doubled in size to include outputs from 12 staff (FTE=11). A new <i>Research Code of Ethics in Research</i> and accompanying <i>Regulations Governing the Allegation and Investigation of Misconduct in Research</i> (available here) were also instituted in 2015 (updated 2018), providing clear guidance for staff and student researchers in the College. A thorough review led to revised procedures, forms and associated paperwork for internal ethics applications which have ensured robustness and efficiency. The small pool of experienced ethics reviewers has been extended from 6 to 12 members with training provided.</p>

[3] to extend and develop high-quality research activity across the College:

Since 2015 SUC has revised and extended its voluntary mentorship scheme to encourage support for less experienced researchers. We have introduced a system of internal peer-review to provide critical feedback on draft journal articles and external funding applications. Throughout the assessment period the College benefitted enormously from its visiting professors (Prof Elizabeth Wood, Sheffield University and Prof Colleen McLaughlin, University of Cambridge), who have provided strategic direction, delivered staff workshops, reviewed funding applications and articles, and advised on REF preparations. Staff have been encouraged to complete individual research and scholarship planners during the assessment period, and the annual appraisal process includes target setting in research/scholarship. All of this has contributed to the publication of substantially more outputs than in the preceding REF period. Quarterly reports highlight an increasingly wide range of activity across the College, including: peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, single-authored/edited books, book chapters, conference papers and proceedings, articles in professional periodicals, classroom resources, book reviews and most recently, blogs and podcasts. A fundamental part of the promotion of high-quality research has been the College's doctoral funding policy which has provided full funding for ten academic members of staff to undertake part-time doctoral studies 2014-2020, with six colleagues graduating with EdD/PhD qualifications. The percentage of academic staff holding doctorates has risen from 54% (2014-15) to 67% (2020-21).

[4] to develop research of national and international quality in a number of clearly defined areas:

There are broad cross-cutting research themes across the following areas: Pedagogy/Curriculum (Doherty, Dunn, Greenwood, Ievers, Jones, Walsh), SEN and Inclusion (McMurray, McVeigh, Purdy), Early Years Education (Doherty, McConnell, Walsh), Primary and Post-Primary Teacher Education (Greenwood, McMurray), and Pupil Well-being (McConnell, McMullen, Purdy). These are areas in which SUC has sustained a critical mass of expertise and has seen a growth in research outputs and impact, supported by a college-wide series of research seminars and workshops, which attract a regular audience of 20-30 staff, students and external visitors.

Since REF2014 Early Years education research has remained a strength. Walsh has built on the strong foundation of her previous impact case study through the further development of her close-to-practice research, publication record and impact in the area of Playful Teaching and Learning. Since 2013 this has resulted in a programme of around 40 Playful Teaching and Learning hubs providing training for over 1400 Early Years teachers across Northern Ireland, led by Walsh. Since 2016, these hubs have been recognised and facilitated by the Education Authority. Consequently, this 20-year programme of research activity in the field of play-based learning has transformed both curriculum and pedagogy in the early years of all primary schools across Northern Ireland (and beyond). This work is detailed in the first of our impact case studies.

Further research of the highest quality has been led by McMurray in the field of addressing literacy difficulties in primary schools, and this forms our second REF impact case study. Centred on one of the largest funded CPD projects in recent years in Northern Ireland (£4.3m funded by the Department of Education) McMurray's work has changed how children with literacy difficulties and dyslexia are taught at whole school level in primary schools across Northern Ireland and beyond. The main types of impact addressed include changes to practice with a focus on impacts on principals, SENCOs, primary school teachers and children's literacy outcomes.

More recently, in 2018, Stranmillis launched the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU), led by Purdy and Walsh. This was in response to the identification of educational underachievement by successive Chief Inspector's Reports as an educational priority in Northern Ireland. Particular levels of underachievement have been highlighted among the working-class Protestant community and the associated controlled school sector (traditionally identified with Stranmillis). In 2019, SUC recruited a full-time post-doctoral Research Fellow (Harris), and in January 2020 the Centre launched an evidence summary of previous research into educational underachievement in Northern Ireland which attracted media interest. CREU aims to make a significant impact on education policy and practice in Northern Ireland, and ran a series of public research seminars/webinars in 2020 attended by key relevant stakeholders. The report of the CREU online survey of parental experiences of home-schooling during the pandemic was covered in print, web and radio media. Partly as a result of this survey, Stranmillis staff were invited to present evidence to the NI Assembly's Education Committee on 1 July 2020. The report was also cited in DE circular to all schools (DE 2020/05). In July 2020 Purdy (Director of CREU) was appointed chair of the ministerial expert panel on educational underachievement, due to report to the NI Education Minister by May 2021.

In 2013, SUC was designated as a Hub of Excellence in innovation and research by the Primary Science Teaching Trust (PSTT). Throughout the assessment period this Hub has had a national impact in resourcing and training successive cohorts of 100 primary student teachers specialising in Science per year. As academic collaborators for PSTT, Doherty and McCullagh have contributed to research and curriculum development in the field of primary science, and ITE pedagogy.

Research Objectives and Activities planned for the next 5 years, and accountability measures

SUC's mission to extend our reputation as a national and international centre for high-quality, practitioner-focused educational research and scholarship is to be realized through the pursuit of five key objectives.

[1] To engage in research and scholarship of the highest quality, Stranmillis will continue to encourage and facilitate its staff to make more ambitious research funding applications. Our target is to achieve a sustained increase in research income from increasingly diverse sources over the next five years. We will increasingly apply for medium and large research grants to national and international bodies, for example SCoTENS, Nuffield Foundation, UK Research Councils and EU bodies. Staff will be supported to develop collaborative partnerships with leading researchers from other HEIs from the UK and beyond, building on existing links with universities such as Sheffield, Cambridge, Goldsmiths, Queen's, Trinity College Dublin and Freie Universität Berlin and networks such as Symposion. The College will work to develop interdisciplinary research, for instance through the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, and facilitate the wider research engagements of staff, for example acting as reviewers.

[2] To develop a rich, vibrant and supportive research and scholarship infrastructure characterised by the highest standards of integrity. Supported by its Research Office, SUC will continue to expand its system of mentorship, to provide support structures and guidance for early and mid-career researchers. Regular internally-funded research seminars and workshops will continue to provide a forum for open debate and feedback on current research and scholarship. We will continue to celebrate high-quality student research and scholarship through the promotion of

annual student research awards in each undergraduate and postgraduate programme, as well as an annual undergraduate student research conference attended by over 200 students.

As a result of staff doctoral qualifications and research experience, matched by growing student demand, the 2017 Research Strategy included for the first time the objective of developing the College's own doctoral programme. Formal negotiations are currently underway with Queen's University, Belfast (QUB), who validate SUC degrees and with whom Stranmillis has a wide-ranging Memorandum of Agreement (see REF5a), and it is our ambition that within the next five years, Stranmillis will be able to offer its own doctoral programme, building on the strength of its existing undergraduate and taught Master's programmes.

[3] To attract excellent staff and to develop and empower their careers. Over the next five years the College aims to attract more high-calibre academic staff, able to demonstrate excellence in teaching, but also a commitment to and experience of educational research. To build research capacity at all levels, we will continue to facilitate annual individual research planning with appropriate expectations and targets, and encourage staff to gain experience of research activity nationally and internationally by acting as external examiners for doctoral vivas and as second supervisors. A total of 11 staff with significant responsibility for research have had their allocated research time doubled from 10% to 20% FTE for the past two years, and the college aspires to continue this policy.

[4] To ensure that our research has an impact on our teaching but also beyond academia yielding broader economic, social and cultural benefits. SUC plans to continue its successful annual series of training workshops on research impact and use of social media, facilitated by the research impact coordinator, including media training. We will continue to host dissemination/outreach events regularly in College with external stakeholders (e.g., Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum November 2019; Controlled School Support Council June 2019, November 2020; BERA February 2020). We have improved our communications and open access through a new [website](#) (December 2019) and social media accounts, facilitated by an expanded Marketing department, and the next five years will see the further development of the research pages. During the 2020 lockdown CREU developed a series of blog posts including input from Stranmillis staff (Purdy, Jones, Walsh, McMullen, Harris) and guest collaborators which have elicited wide public/media interest and positive external feedback. SUC gained membership of the KESS programme (Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series at NI Assembly) in 2017, and although this forum was suspended due to the collapse of the NI Assembly January 2017 - January 2020, the restoration of the Assembly will lead to the re-launch of the KESS programme in 2021, with Stranmillis representation on the organising panel. We will further expand our extensive programme of CPD for teaching professionals informed by research (e.g., Beck, Dunn, Jones, McDade, M McKee, McKenzie, McMullen, O'Hagan, Purdy, Richardson, Totton, Walsh).

[5] To extend our national and international reach by engaging in collaborative partnerships and disseminating our research and scholarship. Stranmillis will develop our range of national and international partnerships with the strategic aim of strengthening our potential for research collaboration. Already since 2016 the Research Office has organised an annual International Staff Week to consolidate student and staff exchange, but also to develop the potential for research and scholarship partnerships and dissemination. This has resulted in the dissemination of research (e.g., McMullen: Uganda 2016, Denmark 2017, Barcelona 2018; Purdy: France 2017; Walsh: Norway 2017) and the development of research partnerships (e.g., Gibson: Weingarten, Germany; McMullen: Kyambogo, Uganda). Members of staff are regularly invited to present their research at national conferences (e.g., Jones, McMullen, Walsh), and the College hosted a BERA

Early Years conference in February 2020. MoUs have been signed with the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), the sectoral body representing one of the largest school sectors in Northern Ireland, and Kyambogo University (Uganda), both of which include a commitment to collaborate on research. Such collaborative partnerships will help sustain and develop the quality of the College's research activity, and also expand its dissemination and impact. Over the next five years, we will seek to strengthen and intensify existing partnerships through regular institutional visits, collaborative research projects and coordinated strategies for impact and research excellence.

SUC is supported by its Visiting Professors in the implementation and evaluation of its research strategy, and recently underwent an internal audit led by PwC (January 2020) to identify areas for improvement in the implementation of the College's research strategy and REF preparations. The successful audit resulted in improved communications with staff regarding the research strategy.

Achieving Impact

The Research Impact Coordinator (Walsh) is responsible for delivering the Research Impact Strategy and for facilitating the achievement of impact, supported by the Research Office.

Since REF2014 the realisation of these research impact objectives has been encouraged through a range of initiatives including the following: the provision of resources specifically for impact generation during and following on from research projects, including College-based seed funding opportunities; close collaboration with the Marketing and PR manager to generate enhanced reach from the research activity of all academic staff; celebration of the impact of all academic staff through effective internal and external showcasing; and, regular impact training workshops for all academic staff. Some of the many examples of research impact achieved during the assessment period, further to the two impact case studies outlined above, are given in section 4.

Interdisciplinary Research

SUC's research strategy includes a commitment "to consolidate our existing areas of specialism, while also looking to the future by supporting emerging multi-disciplinary areas that reflect the recognised needs of our society". This objective is facilitated by the interdisciplinary nature of the current staff at Stranmillis which includes teachers/teacher educators, educational psychologists, social workers, philosophers, sports scientists, and subject specialists across the breadth of the Northern Ireland curriculum. In addition, interdisciplinary research is a key objective of our research centre: CREU aims "to engage in a focused portfolio of innovative interdisciplinary research into educational underachievement in Northern Ireland", and has begun by appointing a political geographer as its first Research Fellow (Harris). SUC researchers are also encouraged to maintain professional membership of their subject-area disciplinary organisations (e.g., Dunn, UK Literacy Association; Greenwood, Geographical Association; McConnell, British Psychological Society McCullagh, Royal Society of Chemistry; Walsh, Early Education) and to seek opportunities for collaboration with colleagues beyond Education. Some innovative examples of interdisciplinary collaboration include Jones (convenor of AHRC-funded Conference on Visual Arts/French with Braganca, UCD), and Purdy (Erasmus+-funded education/psychology project on cyber-bullying).

Open Research Environment

Since 1 April 2016 Stranmillis has made every reasonable effort, commensurate with the size of the institution, to ensure compliance with REF Open Access requirements, including

communicating guidance to staff from the outset. Full compliance proved challenging due to the significant technical limitations of the College's very basic website (hosted on QUB's content management system), lack of access to the QUB research repository, ongoing financial constraints and the consequent unviability of securing access to commercial research repositories (e.g. JISC, CREST, PURE) for a small number of annual research outputs. Since the launch of its new website in December 2019, however, Stranmillis has been able to comply fully with REF open access requirements, and the implementation of the College's new Open Access Policy in 2019/20 was accompanied by focused training for all academic staff supported by the Marketing Office and Research Office.

Research Integrity

The College became a signatory of the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* in December 2019 and is implementing its published action plan to meet the key objectives of the Concordat.

2. People

As part of a small, specialist institution focused on Initial Teacher Education, Stranmillis researchers experience an increasingly lively, stimulating and supported environment where they benefit from staffing policies designed to foster strong research careers.

Staffing Strategy and Staff Development

SUC is committed to recruiting and maintaining high calibre staff, and supporting their career progression as researchers. On the census date there were 45 academic staff in the College as a whole, of which the overwhelming majority (93%) were on teaching and research contracts. The research activities of all academic staff are supported by a full-time Research Finance and Development Officer and full-time post-doctoral Research Fellow. During the assessment period, the vast majority of academic staff have had permanent contracts (95%), not including research assistants and support staff. Since 2014 a total of six new academic staff have been appointed to the College, of whom four had doctorates and two were approaching completion.

Academic staff were invited in September 2019 to apply for an additional 10% FTE research time (on top of their contractual allocation of 10% FTE for scholarship and/or research). A total of 11 academic staff were awarded the additional research time on the basis of two-year research plans. Funding permitting, our ambition is that this additional allowance of time within the workload allocation model will continue beyond 2021.

In REF2014 SUC reported that the percentage of staff with a doctorate had increased to 54%. In 2021 it now stands at 67%, with a further 15% due to complete in the next two years. It remains a strategic imperative to develop a larger corpus of highly qualified research active staff by offering full funding for members of staff to participate in doctoral programmes, as detailed in our staff development plan 2019/2020 and Doctoral Support Procedures. Since 2015 all staff are afforded 100% financial support towards qualifications (previously 50%) and through the provision of flexible working arrangements.

In order to support Early Career Researchers, SUC began a college-wide mentorship scheme in which 17 staff are currently participating, to codify our informal policy of pairing less experienced researchers with more experienced researchers. It has been encouraging to see a number of mentees progress to become mentors at the most recent review of the mentorship scheme in 2019 (in 2020 there are twelve mentors). For example, the Ballyfermot Early Years Learning Initiative (2014) was led by the experienced Walsh and McMillen but involved the mentorship of a new colleague (Doherty); the Creative Child project team (2017-18) was led by an experienced researcher (Dunn) but also included two less experienced colleagues (Elliott and Carlin); and the DfC/NICCY project 2018-19 was led by another experienced researcher (Purdy) but the team included two less experienced researchers (Totton and McClelland). As a result, the following year (2019-20) McClelland led on a SCoTENS-funded project whilst Purdy took a supportive role. In 2019, SUC began to implement the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, to provide an explicit framework within which to better integrate our current approach.

A revised Academic Promotion Policy, recognising the importance of two routes to promotion (Teaching and Scholarship & Teaching and Research), is currently under consultation with the UCU. In order to target a more diverse population and improve links with external organisations, some recent academic vacancies have been offered either as permanent appointments or as secondments (e.g., Senior Lecturer in International Development).

The Staff Development Policy explicitly supports research activities and training for staff in research methods. Separate Doctoral Support Procedures govern doctoral level support, and stipulate that the “Secondary supervisor must normally be a member of Stranmillis University College staff”. Staff members funded for EdD/PhD study must attend an annual review meeting to monitor progress as a requirement for continued financial support, led by the Director of Research and Scholarship.

Research Students

In accordance with the current Memorandum of Agreement with QUB, SUC is unable to offer a research-based Master’s or doctoral programme. However, the Agreement does permit Stranmillis staff to act as second/co-supervisors and to date a total of 16 doctorates (PhD and EdD) have been supervised by Stranmillis staff under these arrangements, with one PhD being first supervised by a Stranmillis staff member due to the area of research focus. Several members of SUC staff have been invited to examine doctoral vivas across the UK and Ireland (e.g., McCullagh - Trinity College Dublin; McMullen - Bristol & Nottingham; Purdy – Cardiff, Glyndŵr & Newman; Walsh – Anglia Ruskin, Cambridge, Durham, Sheffield, UCL & UWSTD). Each year several of our outstanding Master’s graduates progress to doctoral studies in QUB and other institutions, and external examiner reports continue to comment on the high quality of Master’s dissertations as a sign of excellent supervision. Since 2017, as a reflection of the College’s research development and in response to student demand, the College’s Research Strategy has included the objective of developing its own professional taught doctorate. Stranmillis also aspires towards offering research doctorates within the next five years through our own independent programme. A working group was formed in October 2019 and negotiations with QUB have begun to progress this important matter.

During the REF period 6 permanent members of academic staff (Burgess - Exeter, Brown - Lancaster, Campbell - QUB, Gardiner - QUB, Hanna - QUB and Moore - QUB) were awarded doctoral degrees, and 4 more are due to complete their doctoral programmes in the next 3 years

(Beck - UU, Carville - Lancaster, Magennis - QUB, M McKee - Cardiff). Their full fees have been paid by the college (totalling £66,411 Aug 2013 – July 2020), representing a significant investment by the College and reflecting the strength of commitment to developing research across all programmes. These part-time students were aided in their research by more senior colleagues (acting as second supervisors), and by use of the SUC library resources and research tools.

Equality and Diversity

SUC strives to create a supportive working environment where all staff are able to thrive and progress. Equality and diversity considerations are constantly taken into account in regard to funding, recruitment and conference attendance opportunities, which are made available to all regardless of characteristics as set out in the Equal Opportunities Policy. Unconscious bias training was provided to all academic staff in 2017/2018, with an emphasis on how it may impact on decision making, and equality and diversity training is available as an online module on the staff E-learning system. SUC is currently undertaking an audit of inequalities to help identify specific areas of work to be undertaken which will help address any inequality for staff, students and service users. SUC has a strong set of policies relating to equality including a Disability Charter which sets out how staff and students should be supported to improve the experience of all with disabilities. The College provides ongoing support for those with a disability through a range of adjustments as required such as voice recognition software, specialist office furniture and equipment, and adjustments to duties. In REF2021 13.6% of REF-eligible staff have declared a disability, whereas in 2014 6% of staff had done so. In terms of gender equality, the majority of academic staff (73.3%) are female (July 2020) and this is reflected through to the most senior positions.

During the assessment period, SUC has prioritised equity and excellence in research by instituting flexible and remote working for all academic staff. One member of staff with significant health issues was provided with several months paid time off from all other duties in order to complete PhD study. During the first covid-19 lockdown, the College campus was closed from March to August, but staff were supported to continue their research activity (where possible) through online support offered by the Research Office. This arrangement has continued through the 2020-21 academic year where most staff work from home and teach online (see covid19 annex).

Short periods of sabbatical leave are available on request for staff at all stages of their careers, subject to Senior Leadership approval. However, due to budgetary pressures, no significant sabbaticals have been awarded during the current REF period. Subject to future increases in funding, the College will prioritise re-establishing its sabbatical programme. Funding is also available for regional, national and international conferences, including consideration of needs for staff with disabilities and care responsibilities.

Staff and wider community wellbeing is prioritized in the Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategy and through events and initiatives under the internal 'Thrive' programme, which offers staff opportunities to improve their physical and mental health, get outdoors and build collegial relationships through free lifelong learning, subsidised gym access, free health checks / flu vaccines / covid testing, healthy eating initiatives, cycle to work scheme, flexible working and childcare assistance. Flexible working, for instance, allows staff with caring responsibilities and/or young children to start work later in the morning.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Research funding and strategies for generating research income

During the assessment period, SUC staff demonstrated the vitality of their research ambitions, by applying for over £6m of external research grants through 75 individual applications. 40 of these were successful, representing an application success rate of 52%, and winning over £1.7 million in research funding. External grants have come from a range of sources, from government (e.g. DE(NI) for SEN Literacy Project £722,279, McMurray 2013-15), to prestigious and competitive EU funding (e.g. Erasmus+ for Blurred Lives Project £253,000, Purdy 2017-19) and competitive international charitable foundations (e.g. Templeton Foundation for The Journey Toward Forgiveness £451,528, Magennis 2020-22).

A proportion of SUC's research income was generated as a part of larger bids. For example, the SEN Literacy Project (McMurray) was a collaboration with St Mary's University College, Belfast, where Stranmillis took responsibility for managing the entire £4.3m of DE funding. The impact of this project has been far-reaching and forms the basis of one of the College's two impact case studies. Consequently, McMurray was awarded the MBE in 2017 for Services to Children with Literacy Difficulties and to those with SEN. Ievers participated in the QUB-led ILiAD project, worth almost £300,000, funded by the Executive Office. The Blurred Lives Project, funded by Erasmus+ was worth £253,000 to the SUC-led consortium of EU institutions and £49,700 for SUC. Most recently, SUC researchers Magennis, Gracie and McDade have successfully attracted £93,632 through their part in the University of Wisconsin-led Templeton Foundation Project 'The Journey Toward Forgiveness'.

Collaborating with researchers in partner institutions scales up the impacts of the research. For example, the Blurred Lives Project aimed to empower young people aged 14-16 to better understand, prevent and combat cyberbullying. The project has produced a series of research outputs as well as 16 resources in 4 languages for pupils, teachers and parents. A 20-year collaboration between QUB and Walsh at SUC, though centred on the longitudinal Early Years Enriched Curriculum Evaluation 2000-2009, continued to lead to smaller grants for specific impact projects and further publications during this REF period. Even where smaller project grant applications have been successful, this has led to high quality publications – for example Jill Dunn's 2018 collaborative publications in *Early Child Development and Care* and the *British Journal of Educational Technology* were both produced from a small SCoTENS grant.

In its two years, CREU has secured external research income through a range of projects. These include £14,567 from government and statutory organisations (DfC/NICCY) for a research project on the experiences of parents and carers of children with special educational needs, £9,959 from international government organisations (NI/DFA) to explore paramilitarism and education, and £9,154 from a charitable organisation (TRC) for a scoping study of underachievement across Northern Ireland. Such applications are vital for the sustainability of research at SUC, providing stabilising income whilst engaging with new partners and raising new avenues for impact. The internally funded Research Fellow position is entirely new within SUC and is part of our ambitious attempt to expand our research capabilities and open new research income streams.

A range of significant research in the college has been funded by special-interest organisations both within and outside government. The Primary Science Teaching Trust (PSTT) funded a research hub at SUC with £93,900 (McCullagh) that has impacted science education in 150 primary schools over six years 2013-19. Over the same period, projects were funded by the Belfast

Education and Library Board (Gray, MoDEL, 2013-16, £18,300), the Northern Ireland Languages Council (Jones, Review of Current Primary Languages in Northern Ireland, 2015-16, £9,946), and the Education Authority (Jones, Mental Health Needs of Newcomer Children and Young People, 2017-18, £8,775).

Evaluations of education policies, projects and courses are also key areas of externally-funded research engagement. Three recent examples in 2018-20 are evaluations of SERC project-based learning (Levers & Cummins) worth £17,628, WordShark (McMurray) worth £8,000, and the Creative Child Project (Dunn) worth £5,000.

Whilst the research activity has greatly improved during the assessment period it was identified in 2017 that research income relating to a number of research projects had been recorded incorrectly on HESA during 2013/14 – 2015/16. Throughout this 3-year period some research income was entered as 'other operating income', as opposed to research income from Government Departments and other sources, for example, £722,279 income from the SEN Literacy Project (McMurray). As a result, this income has not been evidenced on our REF HESA figures under Section 4b. Once this error was identified a review of the HESA submission was carried-out (2017) and our Finance Department changed the structure of our HESA data return. This review explains the large variations in research income from 2017-18 onwards. Our Research Office and Finance Office have been working closely since then to ensure all research income is recorded correctly on HESA submissions.

Organisational infrastructure supporting research and impact

SUC has invested heavily in research administrative structures and staffing since 2013 to deliver its research strategy. The Research Office has been expanded and reorganised, now with 4 staff, to provide responsive support to academic staff. Significantly, since REF2014, SUC has recruited a Research Finance and Development Officer who is responsible for providing targeted support to academic staff in applying for and managing external grant funding. The Research team also monitors the quality of research outputs and impacts, offers professional development and training (e.g., research methods, stakeholder engagement), and administers and monitors ongoing projects. This ensures a high standard of project administration, reporting and invoicing that means that risks to project delivery are identified early and deadlines are met. The team also plays a supporting role in research dissemination, organising launch events for reports and facilitating staff social media usage.

SUC provides a high volume of CPD for education professionals, outstanding funds for which have been successfully recycled into internally-funded research projects. Key examples from the current assessment period include "Diversity and Inclusion: Start Young" (2013/14) and the "Shared Education Signature Project" (2017-19), which drew on current research to deliver training to over 400 teachers in the priority area of community integration and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the assessment period SUC has benefitted from the research advice and mentorship of two Visiting Professors, Elizabeth Wood (University of Sheffield) and Colleen McLaughlin (University of Cambridge). As well as consulting on research strategy, they have led staff seminars (e.g., 'How to make funding bids', 'Academic Writing', 'The Journey to Publication'), advised on the management of CREU, provided one-to-one mentorship, and sat on college committees and selection panels. They are also key members of the REF Steering Group.

Major changes have taken place in the Library at SUC since REF2014, both in terms of staffing structure and resources and services, without any overall budget increase. The Library provides sustainable collections of information resources that underpin the academic and research life of SUC, and since 2014 has undergone structural change and refocus. This has resulted in the Library becoming more explicit about how it supports research. New appointments in 2017 (Library Resources Manager) and 2019 (Electronic Resources Librarian) have assisted in the development of scholarly content. Since 2017, the library has increased journal access from 200 individual journals to several thousand via the EBSCO, ProQuest and Sage databases and has invested in over 5000 eBooks. These achievements have had a major impact on how the library is perceived and have resulted in increased positive student and staff engagement, reflected in 95% student satisfaction reported in the NSS (2018) and the Library being shortlisted for the Education Awards (Ireland) prize for Best Library Team 2020.

Since 2013 SUC has invested over £800k in upgrading its ICT infrastructure, supported by 4 FTE ICT staff. A further 3 FTE staff support ICT systems software and processes and 3 technicians support Teaching and Learning. SUC has also expanded its Marketing Office [4 FTE staff], and liaises closely with the Research Office. The new SUC website, launched in 2019, includes REF2021-compliant open-access functionality which makes SUC research more accessible externally but also improves internal reporting and monitoring of research outputs and impacts. The College's Research Office maintains a register of research outputs and impacts in accordance with the REF2021-compliant Open Access Policy. Cloud-based data management systems facilitate team collaborations, and complement SUC research data storage and management policies and procedures. Software specific to research, such as SPSS, NVivo and MaxQDA, is made available through the ICT department.

The College estate is used for research and impact through the regular visits of well over a thousand pupils from partner schools annually. Parts of SUC's woodland and parkland have been developed as pedagogical spaces to support D McKee and Greenwood's research in outdoor learning, and McConnell and McKay-Redmond's research on 'The Daily Mile'.

4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

SUC's research environment is geared towards staff contributions to the wider field through collaborative and participative research projects which serve education professionals, policy makers and wider society in Northern Ireland and beyond. Northern Ireland is a unique social and political context, and has a distinct set of educational challenges. Its relatively small size, however, does mean that there is the potential for close relationships with government officials and other policy makers. For example, a key Department of Education (DE) official and a former DE Permanent Secretary are members of the CREU Advisory Committee.

Research Collaborations, Networks and Partnerships

The College has been a core member of the all-Ireland Standing Conference for Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) since its formation in 2003, with Purdy as its northern co-chair since 2016. SCoTENS offers seed funding opportunities for research and require north-south partnerships. Since 2014 Stranmillis has participated in a total of 12 SCoTENS funded research projects with southern partners. Each has produced a research report, and many have produced subsequent research outputs. Funding is modest (£3-6,000) but the cross-border collaborative opportunities have been significant. SCoTENS also organises an annual conference for teacher educators to meet, develop mutual understanding and explore collaborative opportunities, which

is always well-attended by SUC staff. Stranmillis funds SCoTENS through its annual membership fee of £4,000.

Throughout the REF period SUC has been represented on UCET's national Research and International Committee which meets 3 times a year. This has allowed SUC staff to remain informed, develop new links, avail of important staff development and influence national debates.

SUC has hosted a Primary Science Teaching Trust (PSTT) Research and Innovation Hub since 2006 (McCullagh, Doherty). The cluster was established with the central aim of developing playful science and technology resources in local primary schools (particularly in the Foundation Stage). Since 2013 the cluster has delivered 4 projects involving 1000 ITE students, 150 primary schools, 15 science stakeholders, and members of the public: Playful Approaches to Science (PATS project); Playful Technology Project; Digital Storytelling Project; and Stranmillis Student Teachers College.

SUC has also signed a MoU with the CSSC (see above) which includes a commitment to collaborate on research. The CSSC is based on the Stranmillis campus and the MoU has already led to joint CPD events and already 2 joint research projects developing an 'Ethos self-evaluation toolkit' for schools (Brown), and the impact of male teachers on pupil achievement and attitudes (Cummins, Harris, Purdy, Rogers).

Since 2016 the Research Office has organised and hosted an annual International Staff Week, attended by European/US partners, which aims to consolidate student/staff exchange, but also to develop research partnerships. This has resulted in the international dissemination of SUC research (e.g. McMullen: Uganda 2016, Denmark 2017, Barcelona 2018; Purdy: Orléans 2017) and the development of long-term research partnerships (e.g. Gibson: Weingarten, Germany; Jones: Extremadura, Spain). The Blurred Lives Project (Purdy) brought together five European partners (Stranmillis University College; Goldsmiths, University of London; University of Bologna; Open University, Netherlands; Freie Universität, Berlin) with specific expertise and experience in tackling cyberbullying. It also led to a new partnership between SUC and University of South Australia which has already resulted in a joint editorship of a special issue of *Pastoral Care in Education*.

McMullen has carried out extensive work in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and is a Director of *Fields of Life*, a charity which collaborates with local communities in East Africa to bring about change through the provision of quality education, clean water, health promotion and other community based projects. McMullen has organised 3 student teams to Uganda through *Fields of Life*, resulting in over 60 students completing placements in Ugandan schools. In addition to his own research work (e.g. McMullen & McMullen 2018; McMullen & Eaton 2020), a MoU was signed with Kyambogo University, Uganda, in January 2020. This followed numerous visits to Kyambogo by McMullen over recent years. He was accompanied by Jones in 2017 and McKay-Redmond, McKee and Walsh in 2018, when the focus was specifically on Early Years Education. Staff from Kyambogo have twice visited Stranmillis. This has facilitated a joint research grant application and further plans for longer-term student and staff exchange in 2020/21.

SUC staff are actively involved in the following academic and policy organisations: NIBPS (McConnell, McMullen, McVeigh), National Association for Special Educational Needs (Beck, Totton, Purdy), Northern Ireland Anti Bullying Forum (Purdy), Qualifications Advisory Board (Walsh), Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (B McKee), International Physical Literacy Association (M McKee), North/South Primary Science Association (Doherty, McCullagh). Several

are members of BERA and ESAI. This high level of involvement ensures that College academic staff are able to influence and shape policy design and development, and also provides opportunities for research findings to be shared.

Research Users/beneficiaries/audiences

SUC hosts an extensive programme of events and speakers throughout the year that enriches the research environment of the college and are freely accessible to the public. Policy makers and stakeholders regularly attend and contribute to events such as the launch of CREU on 6 June 2018; Report Launches (e.g. Jones et al., Review of Current Primary Languages 2017; The Blurred Lives Project 2019); Book Launches (e.g. Walsh et al., 2017); a Pastoral Care Symposium with NI Children's Commissioner as part of the *Imagine! Belfast* Festival (2016); and Anti-Bullying Week seminars in 2017 and 2019 including a public workshop co-facilitated with NCB. KESS panel membership promises to lead to greater impact from 2021 following the restoration of the NI Assembly. Jones presented SUC research at KESS just before the Assembly was suspended.

SUC has developed its level of public engagement 2014-2020, and has invested in its new website to raise its profile and to improve its accessibility for research users, by providing open-access functionality for research outputs. During 2020, research outputs were viewed a total of 4,875 times. Even more public engagement was achieved through the CREU blog posts, which were viewed a total of 24,419 times, and through the Ideas for Active Minds pages developed during the COVID-19 lockdown, which were viewed 37,017 times. Supported by media training, staff have disseminated research through BBC Radio (Brown, Eaton, Jones, Purdy), BBC TV News (McMullen, Purdy) and national newspapers (Jones, Purdy). This public engagement has helped establish the reputation of Stranmillis on a regional and national level so that our experts are now regularly approached by the media.

Wider contributions to the economy and society

The PSTT hub has been involved in the Northern Ireland Science Festival in 2015 and 2016, offering workshops on primary science for educators, ITE students, members of the public and school children. In 2015 the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure awarded our 'Digital Storytelling in Enquiry-based Science' Project as winner of the STEAM category.

The most significant impact of the cyberbullying and anti-bullying research activity at Stranmillis (Purdy) has been the influence on the Minister of Education and DE(NI) which has informed the new Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. The underpinning research highlighted the uncertainty around responses to school bullying and also the inconsistent quality of schools' anti-bullying policies. The impact of the research during the assessment period has been recognised by the DE's Head of the Additional Educational Needs Team with responsibility for tackling bullying in schools.

From 2015-2019 McMullen developed, delivered, evaluated and rolled out the 'Living Well' programme in partnership with *Fields of Life*. This is a teacher-led, manualised life skills intervention for Ugandan schools (McMullen & McMullen, 2018; McMullen & Eaton, 2020). The manual was recently certified by the Uganda National Curriculum Development Centre, for potential use in all post-primary schools in Uganda.

The Review of Current Primary Languages in Northern Ireland led by Jones, which was cited in the ETI Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18 (p.37), resulted in her being invited to take part in British

Council Primary Round Table to discuss UK policy on primary languages in 2018. Jones was also an invited participant at a UK-wide *Policy Workshop on Modern Languages Educational Policy*. Jones presented on language policy relating to primary schools in NI. This workshop informed the *Policy Briefing on Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK* (Ayres-Bennet & Carruthers, 2019). Jones was also a member of advisory group of the British Council Languages Trends NI (2019).

Engagement with diverse communities and publics

Since 2018 SUC, through its widening participation programme, has supported and advised Barnardo's work in deprived communities in Newtownabbey, which aims to improve literacy and numeracy for disadvantaged children as part of an integrated community-wide approach to improving children's wellbeing. A team led by Jones produced a report for the Education Authority on the mental health of newcomer children (2018) which engaged with multiple linguistic and ethnic groups. Purdy's 'Blurred Lives' (2017-19) work on online experiences of bullying worked with socially disadvantaged urban young people in Belfast and internationally. McMullen's ongoing work in Ugandan schools, and McDade's active collaboration with US partners on teaching and learning exemplify SUC's sustained international networks for research. SUC contributed to a PGCE International (primary) in partnership with QUB from 2014-17 for Tenby Schools, Malaysia. From 2019, a new partnership with Matrix schools, Malaysia, focuses on teacher development (Masters, CPD, student placements and staff mentoring).

Contribution to sustainability of the discipline, support for and exemplars of interdisciplinary research, responsiveness to national and international priorities and initiatives

Staff have contributed to a range of professional associations and learned societies, within and beyond the discipline, both at national and international levels, and this contribution has further supported the sustainability of the discipline with Northern Ireland and further afield, and has confirmed the important contribution which educational research can make to current debates such as children's online safety (McKee, Purdy) or physical and mental well-being (McMullen; McConnell & McKay-Redmond). This includes participation by several staff on the leadership of working groups of organisations. For example, Purdy is northern co-chair of SCOTENS, McConnell is a member of the Professional Practice Board of the British Psychological Society, Jones is a member of the BERA Curriculum Forum steering group; McConnell, McKay-Redmond, McMurray and Walsh have all served as ETI Associate Inspectors; Walsh is a trustee of Early Education.

Interdisciplinary work is a key element to almost all research at SUC by virtue of the range of disciplinary backgrounds represented in the college. A particularly promising interdisciplinary project engaging with public health is The Daily Mile (TDM), a simple intervention encouraging schools to institute a daily rhythm of physical activity. McKay-Redmond is Chair of the TDM Network and a representative on the TDM Research Advisory Group in London. Her work, engaging with Psychology and Sports Science, is already having an impact in schools across Northern Ireland, with over 30% now registered in the network. Additionally, McClelland and Purdy are engaged in an historical study focusing on conceptualisations of childhood in post-partition Ireland, north and south (1921-1931).

Drawing on her research on playful Learning, Walsh has worked with CCEA in Northern Ireland and NCCA in the Republic of Ireland to develop professional development resources on play and playful pedagogies for Foundation Stage and infant teachers, respectively. Walsh was invited to

review and provide feedback on a systematic review on guided play led by the PEDAL research centre at the University of Cambridge and a research project on Education policy responses across the UK to the pandemic with a focus on Early Years for the Education Policy Institute. The latter led to her being invited to sit on the advisory panel for a new EPI research project on how and why cognitive skills evolve differently during childhood across the four nations of the UK.

Academic Dissemination

Staff also contribute to the field by reviewing for several international journals, and many also serve on editorial boards. For example, Gray was Editor of *International Journal of Early Years Education*, and Purdy is Deputy Editor of *Pastoral Care in Education*. Jones and McConnell are members of the editorial boards of *Practice* and *The Curriculum Journal* respectively. SUC staff are also regularly invited speakers for academic conferences organised by BERA (Jones, McMullen) and the British Psychological Society (McMullen), chair conferences such as SCoTENS (Purdy 2017-2020) and NIBPS (McConnell 2019), and provide training and support for the NI Education and Training Inspectorate (McMurray, McMullen, Purdy, Walsh). Stranmillis staff have also presented their research at a wide range of national and international conferences including BERA, ESAI, ECER, EECERA, AERA, BPS and TEAN.

Conclusion

Since 2014 SUC has undoubtedly delivered on its strategic objective to develop the quality, impact and sustainability of its research activity. Moreover, the vitality of the College's research environment has continued to grow, building on its REF2014 success, underpinned by a supportive research infrastructure and undaunted by its relatively small size. With its strong community links, ambitious strategy, significant investment and committed leadership, we are confident that in the years ahead Stranmillis will continue to enhance its reputation as a vital resource for research evidence, innovation and critical analysis, and will continue to have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people locally, nationally and internationally.