

EXPANSION OF THE DERRY-LONDONDERRY CAMPUS OF ULSTER UNIVERSITY

MAGEE TASKFORCE
INTERIM REPORT

September 2024



Chairperson's Foreword

It has been a privilege to lead your Taskforce on this challenging work. Our initial report is presented below for your consideration.

Our work is guided by the agreed Terms of Reference and by the evidence and submissions received thus far. These include:

- The expansion needs to be successful for the University and for its neighbours.
- The work should impact the entire city and its population and not just the immediate area around the campus.
- Success must be visible not just in student numbers and an expanded campus but in the attraction of private sector investment in the city and North West area, particularly in delivering student accommodation but also economic growth including the availability of graduate jobs.
- Economic benefit will be maximised by seeing these investments stretch towards the City Centre. This will take pressure off settled local communities and increase the vibrancy of the city's daytime and evening economy.
- Growth should be in all four faculties to ensure social, cultural, civic as well as research and economic benefits.
- Physically the city must be seen to have changed through new infrastructure, improved transport links, a learning corridor, new civic, entertainment and recreational spaces and public realm.
- The expansion should include programmes which can give the North West Region (including Donegal) a competitive advantage and meet growing challenges including in serving and delivering our health services.
- Support for Ulster University's 'campus balance' strategy to reflect the Minister's 'regional balance' aim. Expanding numbers at Magee should not be at the expense in particular of UU's Coleraine campus.

Whilst there is an undoubted sense of opportunity, both to address a historic inadequacy and to provide an appreciable social and economic stimulus to the North West, visibly there is also a reassuring determination that the time for progress has arrived and cannot be delayed further. Whilst we have not always been unanimous in our views, the creative dynamic from differences of opinion has fuelled our discussions.

I want to place on record my appreciation for the work to date of the new Division in the Department for the Economy, led by Moira Doherty, for the support provided to all of us who serve on the Taskforce. The Taskforce noted both the value of additional funding immediately following its appointment and the consequent impact on growing numbers in Derry.

I expect that the realisation of 10,000 students on site will only be possible with further significant financial input including that which Ulster University has committed to making from its own resources.

The creation of a separate Division in your Department to deliver expansion of the Magee campus is a welcome signal that necessary policy and resources will also follow. How soon it will be delivered is not within the gift of the Taskforce. The timing can be determined by those who committed to this outcome in the New Decade New Approach agreement. In my view it will take all parties in the Executive and both governments to make this happen.

Equally, it is notable that Ulster University has responded to your recent additional funding by creating additional capacity at Magee. The University is ready to respond to further appropriate stimulus.

Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) is also equipped to work to deliver projects at pace. The Council has a clear vested interest, on behalf of its rate payers, to ensure efficient delivery of the expanded campus. I am confident it will rise to any challenge presented to it.

Together, the Executive, the University and the Council have already made clear their commitment to deliver. Early progress is encouraging. Increased funding has seen increased enrolments.

The Taskforce itself has grown with additional experience and expertise in academic planning, health economics and town planning added to assist with our work.

Finally, I want to repeat the commitment that we will bring forward a meaningful plan. When the Taskforce produces its action plan, it will be nearly 5 years since the commitment was made in NDNA. It is our view that delivering this plan will require sustained direct intervention from both the NI Executive and the University. Delaying the delivery of a commitment is akin to renegeing on it. For those who made the commitment to retain their own credibility this needs to be delivered now.

STEPHEN KELLY
CHAIRPERSON
MAGEE TASKFORCE
September 2024

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Executive Summary

- The Taskforce recognises the present opportunity as a genuine attempt to address historic injustice and its consequent disadvantages.
- The Taskforce is clear that the opportunity to grow university provision itself provides a catalyst to addressing many other issues facing the North West.
- There has been considerable consultation with the local community including business interests - which has demonstrated a high level of support for growing the University.
- Ulster University reported on recent actions to increase enrolments at Derry-Londonderry which has already increased enrolments to a greater extent than is widely acknowledged.
- The Taskforce presents a series of 'asks'. The Taskforce will spend the rest of 2024 pursuing those 'asks' and constructing an action plan.
- The Taskforce is focused on seizing the opportunity in the shortest time possible and testing the Executive's commitment through delivering a challenging but realistic plan. The Taskforce recognises that even the fulfilment of such a plan will only provide a base on which future developments will grow.
- The Taskforce is clear that increasing university provision cannot exist in isolation. It can only be delivered through a collective will and action to address the multiple complex issues that have created the challenge. Equally the Taskforce is clear, that such a wider responsibility rests on others, particularly government, rather than the Taskforce (or the University acting autonomously).

“To reach 10,000 students will require interventions or ‘disruption’ to the present status quo”.

List of Asks

To assist the Taskforce in preparing its Action Plan for December 2024 in priority order

Work of the Taskforce

- The Minister, in consultation with his counterpart in Dublin where appropriate, is invited to confirm the validity of these assumptions. **(Ask 1)**

University Funding

- The Department for the Economy should demonstrate in its financial planning how it will fund expansion at Magee. **(Ask 9)**
- The Minister for the Economy is invited to confirm the Department's preferred approach to funding growth in student numbers. **(Ask 6)**
- The Department for the Economy should consider how it might additionally fund the multi-campus model to reflect the benefits to the whole community, deliver on the Minister's regional balance pledge including particularly plans for expansion at Magee. **(Ask 7)**

Programme Delivery

- The Taskforce considers it vital that the Department establishes a cross-departmental oversight group to ensure the development, delivery and implementation of relevant cross-cutting projects. The delivery of multiple projects will be necessary to secure 10,000 students as promised in NDNA. Individual departments will need to stand up supporting teams that will delivery related projects/programmes. The Taskforce believes that the Department should monitor delivery of such projects and satisfy itself regarding the speed of delivery. A Gateway 0 review should commence without delay. The Minister could demonstrate support for campus growth and its wider impact on the city and region by holding an annual public meeting in the city at which he could report on progress. **(Ask 12)**

Engagement

- Ulster University in partnership with Department for Infrastructure, Council, PSNI, Community Safety Wardens etc to establish a structured programme of continuous engagement with local residents and community groups to maximise the benefits of the planned growth and expansion in adjacent communities and to plan and mitigate any potential negative impacts. **(Ask 2)**

Capital Development

- The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment should be invited to offer its advice on the coordination and integration of planned developments. **(Ask 3)**

- Department of Finance is asked to prioritise the early consideration and approval of an augmented OBC for a growth-optimised School of Medicine building. **(Ask 13)**

Student Funding

- Department of Health to provide clarity on the future demand for Allied Health Professional (AHP) and nursing graduates as well as future supply needs from local medical schools. **(Ask 10)**
- Ulster University to produce a time-lined growth plan for its Derry/Londonderry Campus to deliver on the target 10,000 students by initially setting out:
 - (i) the contribution towards the target which can be achieved with full utilisation of existing campus infrastructure and facilities;
 - (ii) the further contribution towards the target achievable on the phased completion of planned new campus capital development to be funded by the City Deal/Inclusive Future fund, the Irish Government and the University itself to include the new School of Medicine, Innovation Centre(s), new Teaching Block etc. **(Ask 14)**
- The Taskforce asks DCSDC to consider how, through its planning and regeneration functions, it can support and expedite university-related planning applications. **(Ask 24)**
- The Department for the Economy to liaise with Department of Health to consider how to provide financial support for GEMS students to reflect the circumstances of potential students and the benefit to the health sector of a steady supply of such graduates. **(Ask 11)**
- In order to test its action plan's viability, the Taskforce invites Ulster University to work with The Department for the Economy to further develop their plans for growth and to set out in one place all considerations and associated capital and revenue cost requirements associated with delivery of the target 10,000 students. **(Ask 15)**
- The Irish Government is asked to consider providing supplementary capital and recurrent funding for the medical school at Ulster University to include enhanced undergraduate provision. **(Ask 27)**
- The growth path to 10,000 students on the UU Derry-Londonderry Campus should be planned in a manner which harnesses the significant potential of further cross-border cooperation by education institutions and the two Administrations on the island and taking account of the individual and shared ambitions of each of the partners (*Ulster University, Atlantic Technological University, North-West Regional College and Donegal Education and Training Board*) in the NWTEC. **(Ask 28)**

Student Accommodation

- DCSDC is asked to clarify its emerging HMO policy and set out its projected timeframes for implementation. **(Ask 16)**
- The Taskforce will ask Ulster University to develop a prospectus for developers with the potential to accelerate private sector investment in the required provision of high quality, appropriately sited student accommodation. **(Ask 17)**

The following 'asks' will be needed urgently following the publication of the Taskforce's Action Plan in December 2024

Programme Delivery

- The Taskforce asks that the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) coordinates relevant Government Departments and Statutory agencies to include the Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities, Translink, NI Water etc, to consider and identify all potential planning and supporting infrastructure requirements to effectively deliver on the campus expansion masterplan and growth. **(Ask 23)**
- As statutory consultees to the planning process, the Department for Infrastructure and other relevant Government Departments and agencies, in support of the Council planning function, are asked to prioritise university-related planning applications, and to expedite response times. **(Ask 25)**
- The Taskforce would like to better understand how health and social services to a rapidly expanded population could be addressed (particularly in a context where current provision is already sub-optimal). **(Ask 18)**
- The Taskforce asks the Department for Infrastructure to lead in collaboration with DCSDC and PSNI to develop an effective traffic management regime that balances the needs of the university population, the concerns of the wider community and the competing resources needed to deliver and maintain an effective transport regime. **(Ask 22)**

Destination Campus

- The Department for the Economy' to initiate and lead the scoping and costing of an intensive, targeted and sustained extensive marketing campaign to promote the city and campus as a destination of choice in partnership with Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, Invest NI and locally with DCSDC and Visit Derry. **(Ask 21)**

Capital Development

- DCSDC and Ulster University to progress the Memorandum of Understanding to develop a timeline and agreed proposals, subject to funding and affordability, for the relocation of Council offices and the acquisition and re-purposing of the existing Council building for University expansion. **(Ask 19)**

- Council and Ulster University to consider other Council-owned and/or vacant or underutilised sites in the vicinity of the Riverfront/Strand Road area for acquisition by the University for mixed use University led developments to include teaching, research and student accommodation to further drive and support planned Campus growth and investment and compliment Riverfront/Strand Road City Deal regeneration proposals. **(Ask 20)**
- That Department for the Economy strengthens and expands its programme that creates pathways into further and higher education for residents from the most deprived urban and rural communities in the North West to ensure equality of access and uptake of third level education. **(Ask 4)**

Demand for places

- The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should consider the implications of the policy on International Student Visas for higher education in NI and in particular for expansion of student numbers at Derry-Londonderry. The Department for the Economy should assess the financial consequences, that have arisen from this policy change, for higher education in NI. **(Ask 5)**
- The Department for the Economy is asked to review the extant policy on Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) to consider how it could be revised to support growth in enrolments at the Magee campus beyond 10,000 students. **(Ask 8)**
- The Irish Government is asked to update its plan to fund the expansion of higher education in the North West generally and specifically to confirm what additional funding could be provided to Ulster University to support growth to 10,000 students at the Derry-Londonderry campus in particular to support the growth of the Graduate Entry Medical School and the provision of a University Hospital similar to that available across the island. **(Ask 26)**

Introduction

This is the Interim Report of the Taskforce established to develop an action plan with associated timescales and approximate costings to achieve 10,000 students at the Derry-Londonderry Campus of Ulster University as soon as possible. The Taskforce has been given considerable latitude to act independently of the Department for the Economy (DfE) or any of the bodies from which it draws representation. Whilst the Taskforce has acted collegiately and aimed for consensus in its deliberations, the final text of this Interim Report reflects a collective view and is not binding on, or reflective of, the views of individual members or the bodies they represent. This Report is to the Minister for the Economy, although it will also be made public.

Purpose of the Report

This Report fulfils the requirement in the Taskforce's Terms of Reference to provide an interim report by the end of the summer 2024. The Report sets out progress to date, including the view of the Taskforce on that development, obstacles to further progress and an initial indication of the possible direction of travel to achieve the delivery of 10,000 students in Derry-Londonderry by the earliest possible date.

Background

The latest commitment to achieve significant growth in the enrolment at Magee was established in the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) document of January 2020 which formed the basis for the restoration of the devolved Assembly following three years of political hiatus.

The commitment stated:

“ The Executive will expand university provision at Magee in line with commitments made by the previous Executive, including through the establishment of a Graduate Entry Medical School.¹

The Taskforce itself was charged to:

“ build on steps taken to date and to develop an action plan with associated timescales and approximate costings to achieve 10,000 students at the Magee campus as soon as possible.²

1 [New Decade New Approach](#)

2 [Ulster University Magee Taskforce terms of reference](#)

Historical Concerns

The Taskforce is clear that its task is not to continue or to resolve the arguments of past decades on the need for university provision in the city, nor to debate the merits of alternative approaches. Whilst noting the publication of the report published by the Royal Irish Academy³ on university provision in the wider cross-border area, the Taskforce has been charged specifically to bring forward an action plan that will see Ulster University expand its provision in the city to provide for 10,000 students in the shortest period possible. The development of an action plan will be the product of the Taskforce in its next report at the end of 2024.

Role of the Taskforce

The Taskforce therefore has a critical role to play in identifying, understanding and addressing obstacles. This is a practical challenge. The Taskforce recognises that to overcome many of the obstacles will necessarily involve a wide range of partners to achieve the target enrolment. In this Interim Report, the Taskforce has identified a number of 'asks' that it wants to pursue in order to underpin progress which has already begun.

3 [Royal Irish Academy - Finding common ground.](#)



Assumptions

The Taskforce has based its considerations on a number of basic assumptions:

- Ulster University tells us that the 'natural market-share' for its campus in Derry-Londonderry is around 7,200 students. This is formulated on the basis of projected demographic growth in Northern Ireland together with assumed broadly similar future distribution of students across university campuses in Northern Ireland as at present. That figure also assumes a Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) uplift in proportion to demographic growth. Ulster University remains concerned about the scale of the challenge in attracting 10,000 students given the local demographics and the increased competition from other institutions. However, the Taskforce takes the view that students will be attracted to Derry-Londonderry including through increased confidence in the campus as it grows and direct intervention by the Department for the Economy including in 'Destination Derry' to justify the investment. All following references to growth at the campus reflect this view and do not distinguish between 'places' and 'students';
 - To reach 10,000 students will require interventions or 'disruption' to the present status quo;
 - The Taskforce has discounted the possibility of moving the enrolment from Coleraine to Magee (not least this would be counter to the promotion of 'regional balance');
 - Similarly, the Taskforce has discounted the option to restrict or reverse recruitment at other institutions in the North West, including on a cross-border basis;
 - UU has to date redistributed a considerable number of students from Belfast in the areas of Allied Health and related disciplines, and more recently in a range of other subjects. While some further limited redistribution may be possible, to progress its action plan, the Taskforce seeks direction on whether significant disruption to current student enrolment across existing institutions in the wider North West and/or Belfast is envisaged
- or
- whether growth at Derry-Londonderry beyond the anticipated 'natural market share limit' of approximately 7,200 is to be delivered through 'additionality'.

For example:

- To remain within existing MaSN numbers, up to 3,000 students' places in Belfast would need to be re-directed to the Magee Campus. Natural growth will halve the deficit from 2021/22, but the gap can only be closed by displacing MaSN students from other campuses in Northern Ireland;

or

- The MaSN number for Ulster University should be recalculated to provide for the growing student enrolment at Magee up to 2029/30 and then sustained beyond that period to provide a minimum of 10,000 places beyond that date.

ASK 1: The Minister, in consultation with his counterpart in Dublin where appropriate, is invited to confirm the validity of these assumptions.



MARtha MAGE
1840-1890
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Context for delivery

In the initial meetings of the Taskforce, attention has been focused on developing a clear understanding of the local context, issues to be resolved and on providing an opportunity for interested parties to contribute to the formulation of an action plan. The Terms of Reference for the Taskforce requires that it acts on a co-design basis in conjunction with the local community and its best interests.

Consultation with local community representatives

To this end the Taskforce met with representatives⁴ of the local community. In discussion, it was agreed that the plan to increase student numbers was welcomed notwithstanding their concerns on a range of practical issues. The main issues concerned capital development in the city to provide accommodation for the increased university provision both to house students and to provide appropriate teaching facilities, the management of vehicular traffic, parking and the importance of integrating both university and the wider community in infrastructural changes to public areas. In particular, the potential for integrating public realm works to meet the needs of both the university and non-university populations was highlighted as a challenge but also offers an area of potentially mutual benefit.

ASK 2: Ulster University in partnership with Department for Infrastructure, Council, PSNI, Community Safety Wardens etc to establish a structured programme of continuous engagement with local residents and community groups to maximise the benefits of the planned growth and expansion in adjacent communities and to plan and mitigate any potential negative impacts.

“The desire and enthusiasm from local people, the local economy and from the education sector itself is supportive of the expansion of student numbers at the Derry-Londonderry campus, notwithstanding ongoing scepticism arising from a legacy of historic failed delivery.”

4 Glen Development Agency, Outer West Neighbourhood Partnership Board, Aberfoyle and Duncreggan Residents Association

Consultation with local business community

The Taskforce also met a range of local economic and business interests⁵. The Taskforce was eager to address the Minister's economic vision for greater regional balance and the role that university expansion could play to assist to that end. Based on existing economic interests in the locality, there was a preference expressed for greater provision of technology-based subjects, including photonics and other electrical engineering subjects, as well as more general business and transversal skills provision. The Taskforce was reassured to hear of university plans already in development in aspects of these areas and received a commitment from the University to develop them further. However local business representatives were just as eager to press for stronger connections between secondary and tertiary education and more explicit integration of curricular provision with careers advice and links to local economic opportunity, to reflect both current and potential future areas of employment growth. Again, the University has recently taken steps with the aim of addressing some of these issues. The University has made a range of investments in the campus to both deliver and support growth in Derry-Londonderry. For example, in July 2024 alone 10 new posts were approved for the campus, including academic staff to deliver new programmes and a Schools Engagement Officer who will focus on engagement with schools and Further Education (FE) Colleges in the Derry-Londonderry and North West region exclusively. In total, 223 additional staff have been recruited onto the campus to support the growth in student numbers since 2020.

The business community referenced the importance of reflecting equality of opportunity in both how provision was expanded and what that expanded provision would mean for embedding equality of opportunity for local people.

A submission was also received on the growing Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) Degree Apprenticeship programme run by MEGA Mid Ulster which demonstrated that demand outstrips supply of apprenticeship placements by almost 3:1. The successful programme is being extended in other areas, including Finance. HLAs are becoming increasingly attractive to the student population and further development in this area, particularly with other sectors/specialisms is an opportunity which would benefit both delivery on the target number and maximise economic gain.

The Impact of Current Provision on Growing Demand - Student Survey

The Taskforce commissioned a survey of Ulster University students for views on both current experience of Derry-Londonderry and their expectations if the campus were to increase its enrolment. Whilst the response rate was relatively low, it provided circumstantial evidence of both untapped potential - students expressed their support for growth as long as it was accompanied by enhanced facilities to accommodate increasing numbers - and some level of frustration with current facilities. As with community representatives: student accommodation, parking, public transport but also the perceived limited range of course provision was seen as negative aspects of current student life in Derry-Londonderry. Some students remarked favourably on how the recent development of the Belfast campus offered hope that similar progress could be signalled for both those enrolled on existing course provision and any additional students on further courses that might arrive as a result of the proposed expansion.

The Taskforce noted that the current offering on the Magee campus was for 121 programmes. Importantly, the sense that a more vibrant academic community atmosphere could be fostered by growing both numbers and the range of academic provision was highlighted in student replies. It is proposed that a similar survey of staff views will be undertaken after the summer recess.

Impact on the City and the Region

A particular concern will be the logistics of adding substantial capital developments to an active and growing university campus and the potential consequent impacts on the wider community. The Taskforce is grateful to the Department for the Economy for providing it with additional technical support to better understand the delivery pathway. This will be a focus of the Taskforce's work in the immediate future. The Taskforce noted the proposed developments in the Council's City Deal and Inclusive Future Fund investments, particularly the planned c£60m to be invested in Central Riverfront/Strand Road and Walled City Regeneration and a further c£45m to be invested in the School of Medicine and Magee campus element of the Personalised Medicine project.

The Taskforce noted that the Council has included the expansion of the student numbers in the city amongst its strategic catalyst projects and references growth in tertiary education at Magee alongside the North West Regional College as an integrated vehicle to deliver growth for the region. It also noted the Council's identification of additional funding from the Irish government as a necessary component in delivering this objective. The Taskforce was pleased to welcome a representative of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in Dublin as a member of the Taskforce to ensure complementarity with developments on a cross-border basis with a particular focus on tertiary education in the wider north-west hinterland.

The Taskforce strongly supports the principle that the expansion of student numbers should involve increased numbers in all four faculty areas -

- Arts, Humanities and Social Science
- Computing, Engineering and Built Environment
- Life and Health Sciences
- Ulster University Business School

Such an approach also resonates with both the Council's strategic economic vision and the aspirations of those in the local private sector who have addressed the Taskforce in our initial deliberations.

Ulster University will continue to engage with Derry City and Strabane District Council in the development of its campus expansion master-plan, identification of sites and land for planned and future growth, and coordination and integration with wider planned City Development and Regeneration. Such engagement could benefit from advice from the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) for Architecture and the Built Environment and the Taskforce would welcome MAG's involvement.

ASK 3: The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment should be invited to offer its advice on the coordination and integration of planned developments.



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Target Numbers

When the Taskforce was announced in March 2024, the latest figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2021/22) showed enrolment at the campus of 4,130 students. Ulster University has reported that this figure rose to 5,337 for 2023/24 and is anticipated to rise again to 5,711 from September 2024. In those projections, the University itself expected enrolment at Derry-Londonderry campus to continue to rise to 6,500 as soon as 2026/27. Following the funding announcement in July 2024, the University has now confirmed that this 6,500 projection has now been updated to 7,000 students by 2028/29. Growth from the 21/22 figure to the 23/24 figure represents around a 30% increase in 3 years. This represents encouraging progress towards the target of 10,000 students.

The University should be recognised for this recent growth at the campus, despite the challenging operational context, and increasing numbers without guaranteed additional funding. Ulster University's published data reports a 23% increase in enrolments from 4,185 students in 2018/19 to 5,140 in 2022/23. This growth occurred despite the countering impact of Teacher Assessed Grades during the Covid period which permitted a much greater proportion of students to meet their grade requirements for entry to a Belfast campus where alternative course provision planned by the University would have favoured Magee.

Taken together, an overall assessment of the total growth from 2020/21, just after the NDNA agreement was made, to 2028/29 would be, with no further interventions, in the order of 67%. As such, the Taskforce recognises the commitment of the Vice-Chancellor and the University in prioritising expansion in Derry-Londonderry even within the current resource envelope.

The Taskforce also acknowledges the greater confidence that can attach to this growth due to the impact of the additional funding confirmed by the Minister in his answer to questions in the Assembly on 3 June 2024⁶.

6 [Official Reports \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://niassembly.gov.uk)

North West students beyond Magee Campus

The Taskforce has also noted that up to 1,000 third level students are enrolled at other, non-Ulster University, provision in the city. Whilst this provision is noted and should be both lauded and sustained, the Taskforce does not regard these enrolments as a contribution to meeting the requirement identified in NDNA. The focus will therefore remain on Ulster University's provision as the vehicle that delivers that target number alongside other provision.

Format of Student Body

The student body should include undergraduates, postgraduates, full-time and part-time students that reflects the University's wider enrolment and the desire of the local community to maintain a fully-fledged university offering. The delivery of regional economic balance, the opportunity to improve employment opportunities and the benefits of creating a 'destination university city' all require this outcome.

Whilst NDNA did not specify whether the number refers to full-time equivalent (FTE) or headcount, the Taskforce requested clarity from the Minister on whether the number should reflect full-time equivalent student numbers, headcount or some other measure. In response, the Minister has invited the Taskforce to clarify the optimum way forward. The Taskforce will consider the detail of this total and its apportionment in delivering its action plan.

Demand for Higher Education

The Taskforce considered several sources of data to establish a clearer understanding of the likely demand for university places and the competing forces in determining student destinations. It is clear that the growing number of school leavers, following demographic growth over the medium term, will add to the demand for higher education. There will be a 10% growth in the number of Year 14 school leavers in NI in the period between 2022/23 and 2028/29. The Year 14 total population is projected to rise from 13,812 (2022-23) to a peak of 15,311 (2028-29); before reducing to 14,725 by 2031-32. Nevertheless, one of the key reasons for supporting expansion in Derry-Londonderry is to extend provision of third level education to a disadvantaged community that has been denied equal access for decades. In order to redress the legacy of this injustice and to supplement the existing demand for higher education, the Taskforce supports the development of additional access routes for the local population, as well as additional opportunities for those from further afield to study in Derry and contribute to a vibrant university city.

ASK 4: That Department for the Economy strengthens and expands its programme that creates pathways into further and higher education for residents from the most deprived urban and rural communities in the North West to ensure equality of access and uptake of third level education.

An increasing number of students from the rest of Ireland is also likely to seek places outside their own jurisdiction. Table 1 shows the recent trend. It illustrates that whilst demand from southern students continues to rise, the flow south from NI-domiciled students remains relatively static.

Table 1

Southern domiciles enrolled at Northern HEIs and Northern domiciles enrolled at Southern HEIs (full-time undergraduate, first degree)

Year	Southern domiciles at Northern institutions	Northern domiciles at Southern institutions
2017/18	755	845
2018/19	765	775
2019/20	800	855
2020/21	1,020	850
2021/22	1,340	885

This increase, from south to north, is likely to be fuelled by rising living costs, especially in the greater Dublin area, and by limited availability within Irish higher education institutions. The most recent figures show that the percentage of NI-domiciled students enrolled in local higher education is lower than for comparable populations in neighbouring jurisdictions. At least in part, the demand is fuelled by the local funding arrangements which provide lower cost education to students with the availability of comparable (or often higher) levels of qualification and learning when set alongside similar provision in Britain. This combination, increasing numbers of school leavers, under supply of local provision, lower cost education at comparable or higher standard of outcome, supports the case for growing the third level student population in NI.

The Taskforce also recognised the value of existing arrangements between Ulster University and Atlantic Technological University. The Taskforce sees these arrangements as beneficial to the goal of growing enrolment at both institutions and at multiple sites. The Taskforce recognised that the impact of limited higher education provision in the North West was equally felt across Donegal as well as the area around the city of Derry and its region. Whilst further developments could also produce benefits to Derry-Londonderry and were laudable in their own right, the Taskforce recognised the need for a visible flagship institution in the city of Derry alongside complementary developments in the local area. The Taskforce is keen that such wider developments are not seen to be in competition with the growth of an expanded Derry-Londonderry campus. Again, the Taskforce is keen to avoid any contention between higher education providers in the North West of the island. The Taskforce supports collaboration to achieve an expansion of higher education provision in the wider area. Consideration of wider cross-border co-operation is expanded on later in this report.

“one of the key reasons for supporting expansion in Derry-Londonderry is to extend provision of third level education to a disadvantaged community that has been denied equal access for decades.”

International Students

The Taskforce is concerned with the impact of recent UK-policy decisions on the demand for, and recruitment of, international students. International students are of significant importance, bringing tangible economic benefits, broadening the experiences of local students, and offering further opportunities for partnerships in areas such as global research initiatives and development projects.

In January 2024, changes to the UK Student Visa system were implemented which mean that international students are no longer able to bring their dependant partner or children to the UK, unless the student is enrolled in a PhD or postgraduate research programme.

Ulster University has seen an immediate impact of this change in policy, as follows:

- In 2023/24, new international student enrolments have decreased by over 35%, mainly driven by a drop in new enrolments in January 2024 entry, the first main intake since the change was implemented.
- The changes have resulted in a 55% reduction in international applications for September 2024 entry. This is in line with the level of reduction in applications being witnessed in Britain.
- The University's current modelling suggests that this could lead to a further 34% decrease in new international enrolments for 2024/25.
- This is having a detrimental impact on the Derry-Londonderry campus, where 75% of the University's postgraduate population is made up of international students.
- From 2024/25 it is expected that GB universities will try to increase their share of NI domiciled students to replace lost income from international students.

The Taskforce understands the University's concern about this and why the University is encouraging the new UK government to reverse the policy. Whilst responsibility for this policy sits firmly at Westminster, the Taskforce recommends that the Department for the Economy should assess the implications more generally for higher education provision across NI and how it might intervene to address the negative impacts of the recent change. In particular, the Taskforce expects the Department to acknowledge the specific consequences for efforts to expand enrolment at Magee while total enrolments face a reduction based on the policy change initiated at Westminster.

As a party to the NDNA, the Westminster government must also bear responsibility for impacts its policies have on the attainability of the goal. Limiting international students' attendance or imposing more challenging conditions reduces the potential intake for all colleges but this has had a higher proportionate impact at Magee. The Taskforce will raise this matter, and its consequence for expansion at Magee, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

ASK 5: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should consider the implications of the policy on International Student Visas for higher education in NI and in particular for expansion of student numbers at Derry-Londonderry. The Department for the Economy should assess the financial consequences, that have arisen from this policy change, for higher education in NI.



Role of Ulster University

The NDNA commitment was made, alongside other commitments, by the political parties as the basis for restoring devolved government in January 2020. Whilst it does not give any explicit responsibility to the University for growth in student numbers, the Taskforce has been reassured of the University's commitment to the NDNA agreement by growing the campus.

The University had already been clear in stating publicly that within the (then) 'current operating environment' it could achieve growth of student numbers at the campus to 6,500 students and has now further committed to achieve 7,000 students on the basis of the recent⁷ additional Maximum Student Number (MaSN) allocation from DfE and the parallel announcement on capital grant allocation. The University has outlined to the Taskforce its plans to achieve these numbers. However, these considerations are not provided in this report, due to the commercially sensitive nature of the information, which the Taskforce recognises and accepts. The Taskforce welcomes this progress and recognises the challenges many of which are external to the University that could inhibit further expansion.

7 Ibid.

Is there a natural ceiling?

The University has presented to the Taskforce that intake in Derry-Londonderry will find a natural market-share limit at around 7,200 students, which takes account of demographic growth and the University's actions to maximise recruitment to that campus. This has been calculated by multiplying current market share by the projected uplift of potential students, as the population of school leavers increases up until 2029. Importantly, the University's 7,200 figure assumes, and requires, a change in public policy that sees an uplift of the MaSN cap which provides for the campus in Derry-Londonderry in order to fully utilise an increased pipeline of potential students. The Taskforce does not accept the inevitability of a ceiling. Indeed, in its discussions it recognises that growth beyond 10,000 students is a legitimate longer-term aspiration, even if it postdates the work to which it is committed. However, the Taskforce does accept that current demand levels will need to rise substantially to underpin further growth. The delivery of a 'destination campus in a destination city' will be vital in moving beyond current market-share projections through successful competition with other HE providers.

The University has continued to increase numbers on the Magee campus despite the conditions in the wider environment including a proactive reduction in their enrolments in Belfast.

Changing the operating environment

The University reported that an increase beyond its forecast 6,500 (now 7,000 following the DfE additional funding) will require a change in the operating environment.

Broadly, this reflects the need for a higher education funding model that delivers sufficient capital and recurrent funding to underpin the desired growth. Higher education funding in Northern Ireland has lagged behind the other parts of the U.K. since 2011, and although near-parity of funding with England has now been reached, there has been a cumulative deficit of around £150m of per-student income to the University since the 2011 point of divergence.

Furthermore, the University is not funded additionally to deliver its multi-campus model, and this was calculated by PA Consulting to be an additional cost burden to the University of £15m per year in 2017. The costs in 2024 are estimated by the University to be around double that figure. The University is currently in the process of securing updated analysis. The Taskforce believes that any MaSN figure to promote growth at Magee would carry additional recurring financial costs. Any multi-campus university incurs costs which are not faced by unitary institutions. Such costs could be found by:

- Direct, recurring financial support from the Department beginning at >£4m and rising to approximately £15m per annum, OR
- Up to £15m per annum (as above) from a combination of Department for the Economy, Department of Health (recognising the importance of Magee's provision to Western Health and Social Care Trust's (WHSC) workforce stability) and the Irish Government to support undergraduate medical school growth.
- Removing students from the Republic of Ireland from the MaSN count at Magee, thereby releasing c1,000 MaSN places for NI students.
- Reducing the number of students who leave NI for study, thereby driving demand locally and releasing funds for increased student population in NI.

ASK 6: The Minister for the Economy is invited to confirm the Department's preferred approach to funding growth in student numbers.

ASK 7: The Department for the Economy should consider how it might additionally fund the multi-campus model to reflect the benefits to the whole community, deliver on the Minister's regional balance pledge including particularly plans for expansion at Magee.

How to move forward?

The Taskforce heard from the University that the growth it has delivered has been necessarily incremental, given the nature of higher education recruitment and associated dependencies. Consequently, to enable a more rapid increase in university provision, infrastructure within the city will have to evolve more quickly than previously to accommodate a quicker influx of students (and the anticipated economic growth that will accompany it) than is currently planned. Indeed, the University argues that the paucity of student accommodation is already having a detrimental impact on the University's new growth rate in the city. The Taskforce recognises limitations on the University's ability and the reluctance to date of the private sector to respond at scale to this need but will seek to address this, including by assuring potential private sector investors of the commitment to growth that should encourage commercial investment in affordable student accommodation. From whatever source, additional affordable accommodation, appropriately sited alongside wider housing developments, is an essential requirement to support campus growth. This will be an immediate focus for the Taskforce in the coming months.

For its part, the University has articulated to the Taskforce the steps it has taken to achieve growth delivered to date and how it now expects to reach 7,000 students (just below the University's stated 7,200 market-share ceiling). The Taskforce noted that there is no University imposed cap on numbers in subjects not controlled by Department of Health and that every applicant who applies to study at Ulster University in Derry-Londonderry currently receives an offer and will get a place if they achieve the required grades. Ulster University has increased staff capacity to accommodate associated growth. The growth delivered in the most recent academic years has been achieved through enhanced and targeted marketing activity, relocating the School of Health Sciences and re-directing student applicants to the Derry-Londonderry campus who may otherwise have chosen to enrol at the Belfast campus of Ulster University based on preferred location, course selection and admission requirements. The University has confirmed that in order to continue on this growth trajectory and reach 7,000 students at the Derry-Londonderry campus by 2027, it will deliver an expansion of programmes (existing and new) in Business and Finance, Life & Health Sciences, Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment and Arts & Humanities.

Beyond the University's projected market share, the University has indicated that a step-change will be needed across a range of interdependencies, many of which are outside its control, direct or sole remit, and is likely to include displacement of students from other provision locally and across Britain and Ireland. Whatever operational constraints may be faced by the University; the Taskforce is determined that it will deliver a plan to achieve 10,000 students on campus as soon as possible. The Taskforce recognises the significant impact that this could have within the University itself (or the wider tertiary sector in NI) but it is resolved to work with the University to overcome whatever difficulties may arise, internally or externally.

Identification of Challenges

The University has articulated firmly the challenges it faces to deliver growth at Magee without addressing public policy and infrastructure challenges. The University suggests these changes are necessary to achieve growth that is sustainable and delivers the required economic benefits for Derry-Londonderry.

The Taskforce understands that the University sees the reasons for this limit on growth as three-fold:

- a revised public policy and appropriate funding model are required to achieve growth in a way that is sustainable for the University;
- a wider package to attract students to Ulster University in Derry-Londonderry is a pre-requisite for student recruitment in a highly, and increasingly, competitive market. The preceding paragraphs discuss demand for higher education in more detail, outlining that the number of 18-year-olds in NI and ROI will increase in coming years, though not in itself in sufficient numbers to bridge the current demand-gap. The University has emphasised that in the context of the different operating environment for universities in GB in particular, and specifically the lack of any number control measures for NI students, means that there will be significant competition from GB institutions seeking to attract these students, particularly given the significant drop in university income from a collapsing international market. This needs to be offset by the quality of the offering from Derry-Londonderry. The most recent UCAS data (2023) on NI domiciled students studying in GB indicates that 3430 students in that application cycle chose a university not in NI.
- that growth at Ulster University's Derry-Londonderry campus does not have a disproportionate or destabilising impact on its other campuses, particularly Coleraine, given the University's important economic and social contribution across the region.

Specifically, the University argues for a change in the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) allocation to support growth at Magee (discussed more fully below). Other changes could include some or all of: sustainable recurrent funding, considerable capital funding for teaching accommodation, a significant increase in student living accommodation, enhanced transport links, and a range of city infrastructural preparations, including the provision of adequate social services locally.

The Maximum Student Number (MaSN) restricts the total number of full-time undergraduate students from the island of Ireland that NI higher education institutions can recruit in order to manage the level of public investment in higher education. The Taskforce noted that although demand may continue to increase, efforts to expand supply in Derry-Londonderry will be constrained by the MaSN policy without specific investment to support expansion at Magee which would, on current restrictions, have a direct impact on other university provision in NI while not expanding the skills pipeline across the region as a whole.

The University has demonstrated that it has already accepted reduced numbers at the Belfast campus to facilitate growth in Derry-Londonderry and plans to continue to do so as it seeks to achieve 7,000 students in Derry within the existing context (which includes the new supplementary MaSN allocation and capital grant). The University has also submitted that it cannot go beyond this figure simply by further moving supply from another campus to Derry-Londonderry for a variety of reasons, including legal requirements regarding staff/trade union consultations, constraints on the location of provision imposed by the Competitions and Markets Authority, as well as the financial implications of such changes.

Displacement of course provision carries considerable cost, with, currently, no more income to cover those additional costs. Additionally, such an approach delivers no greater overall skills to the regional economy nor higher education opportunities in Northern Ireland for potential students.

The Taskforce does not support a notion that increases at Derry-Londonderry should only happen with reductions in other university provision. Education is not a zero-sum product. It should not be argued that the only way to increase education provision in one area is to deny it elsewhere. The Taskforce supports the University's commitment on campus balance across its provision and believes that additional numbers are a crucial aspect, among other options, to providing full value for any additional investment.

“Whatever operational constraints may be faced by the University; the Taskforce is determined that it will deliver a plan to achieve 10,000 students on campus as soon as possible.”

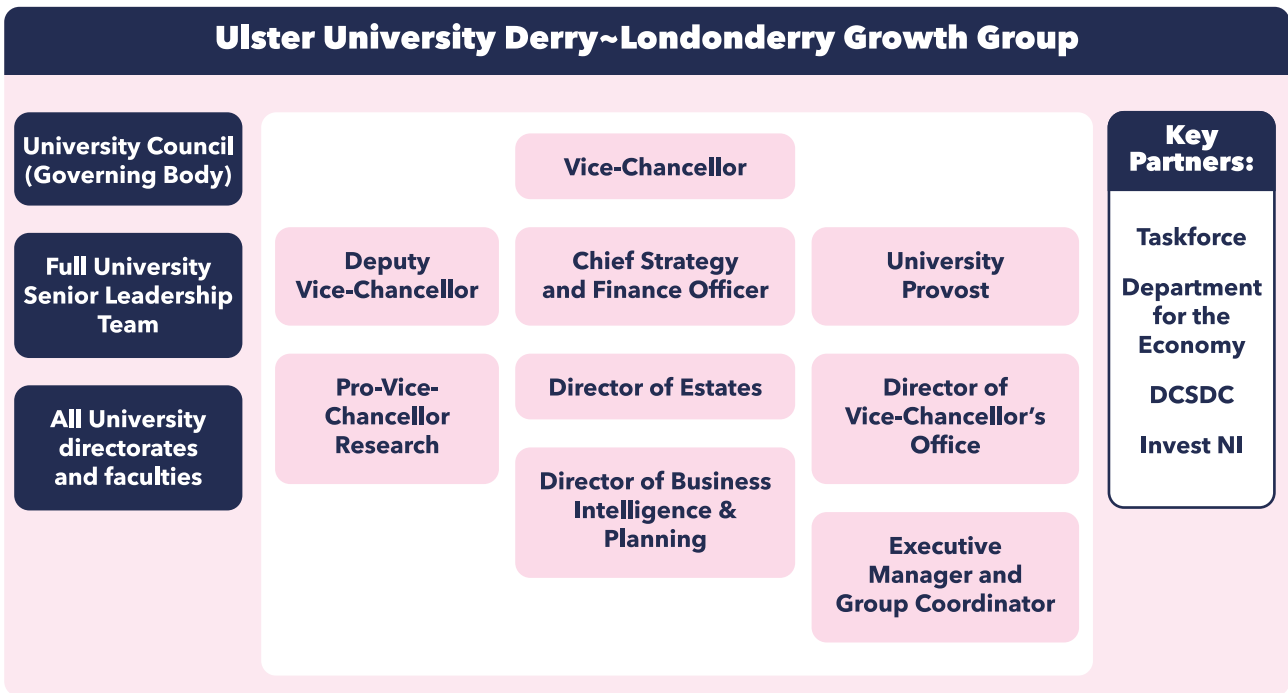
Resources

The Taskforce welcomed announcements during the period of its deliberations of an additional £2.5m of funding for an initial increase of up to an additional 500 undergraduate and postgraduate places including 16 doctoral students. The Taskforce understands this funding will support students already recruited over and above the MaSN cap by Ulster University, as well as additional students starting in September 2024. The draft 2024-25 budget for the Department for the Economy also includes an initial £14.7m of capital allocations for Magee expansion activities. These announcements helped to underscore the incremental growth in student numbers reported above and, as stated above, offered greater confidence about sustaining these numbers.



The University's Organisational Response

The University has a specific role to play in providing the specialist expertise on higher education that will help inform our work and recommendations. The Taskforce recognises and welcomes that the Vice-Chancellor has committed to leading on this work personally and has established a senior team to coordinate liaison with the Taskforce, the Department and DCSDC. Members of the University's team include the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University Provost, Chief Strategy and Finance Officer, Director of Estates, Director of Business Intelligence and Planning and the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research. The Taskforce recognises that growth of the campus in Derry-Londonderry has been a key strategic focus for the Vice-Chancellor since his tenure began in 2020, and the institutional priority placed on the campus has been reflected in the inclusion of better campus balance within the University's Strategic Plan.

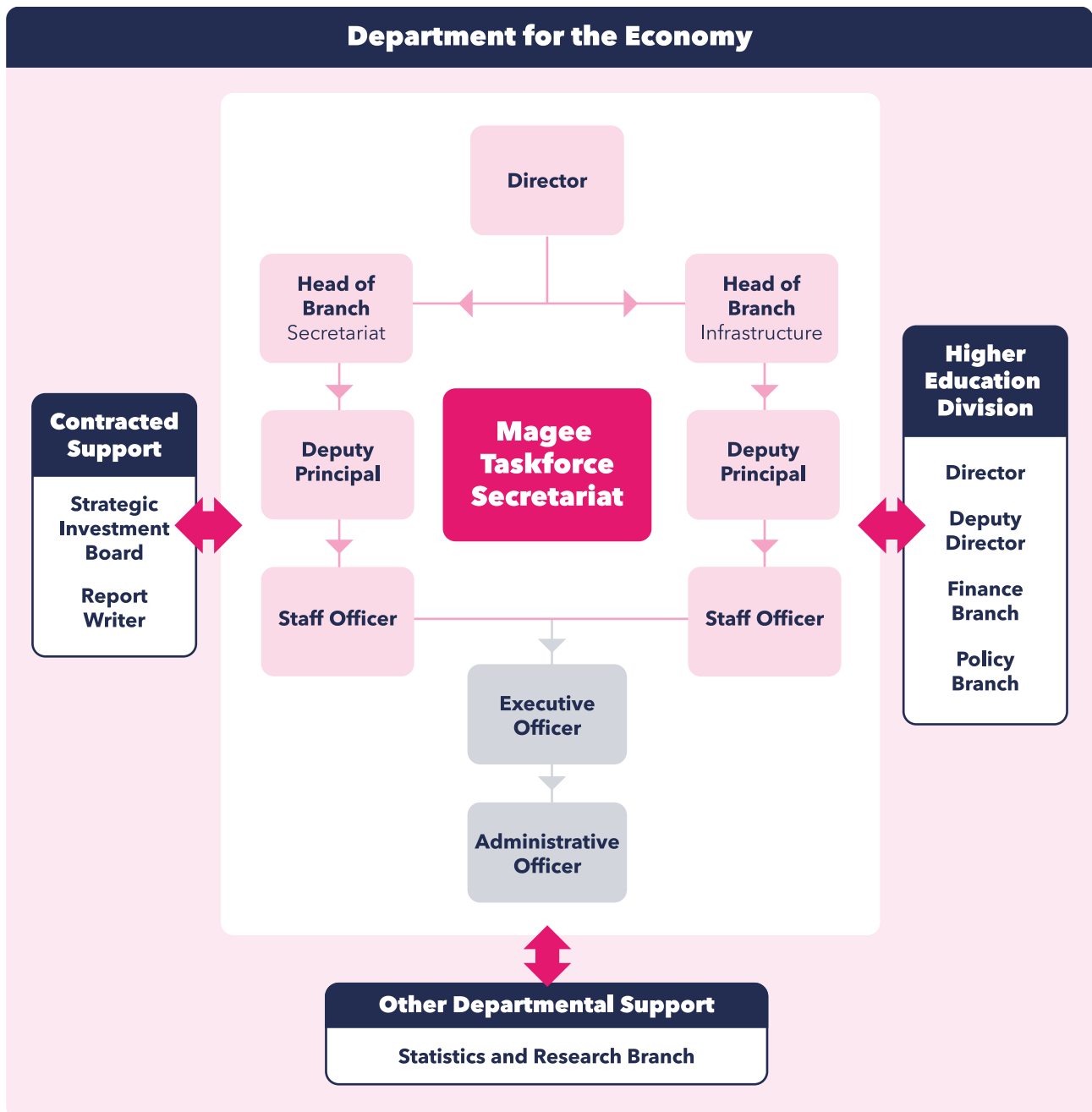


The University has also implemented a number of operational changes to further support the focus on campus growth, for example through the repositioning of its previously titled 'Academic Planning' group. This group had been focused on planning student numbers by faculty, but is now the University's 'Campus Balance' group, and takes a campus-focused (rather than faculty-focused) approach to planning student numbers, allowing for a specific focus on campus growth in Derry-Londonderry.

The Chair of the University Council and the Chairs of key Council committees receive weekly written updates on this work, and Taskforce activity is a standing item on the substantive report provided to full Council on the work of the University's Executive Team for each of their meetings.

Other Authorities

The Taskforce also welcomes that the Department for the Economy has established a bespoke project team and the ongoing pro-active engagement and support of Council at both senior leadership level and across its relevant established teams.



The delivery of the NDNA commitment will take several years and the Taskforce is reassured that systems, governance and teams are now in place to take this forward.



Medical Sciences

Edited by
Jeannette Naish
Denise Syndercombe Court

3rd Edition

With a new chapter on
Genetics and the impact of
genetics on the individual and population

Funding of Higher Education

The cost of additional provision is a significant factor in shaping supply. The Executive supports each student place to a significant extent (circa £4,900 per fundable FTE undergraduate student per annum). If the total number of students is to continue to increase, it will need clarity about the source of funding. The obvious sources, government and/or students themselves, would need to understand and commit to the financial input required. The Taskforce has noted that the Minister has already ruled out increasing the funding burden on students. In planning future provision, the Taskforce seeks to understand the underlying demand forces. Currently Executive funding of local students in higher education in NI is constrained, as mentioned above, by the funding available for Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN).

MaSN is the annual limit on the number of DfE-funded full-time local undergraduate students that can be enrolled by higher education providers in Northern Ireland. It is intended to control two costs:

- **student support**, comprising tuition fee loans, maintenance loans and maintenance/special support grants; and
- **teaching grant**, government's direct contribution towards the institutional costs of teaching based on the number and type of full-time equivalent (FTE) fundable students.

The University, in common with other higher education providers in Northern Ireland, has outlined that to ensure that it remains within its contract range with the Department for the Economy, it applies entry conditions in the form of required A-Level (or equivalent) grades. In the context of high and increasing demand, the University has to increase the grade profile for entry, and it has expressed significant concerns that this, in turn, either drives prospective students away from higher education or to higher education institutions in GB.

The Taskforce noted that this model of funding is significantly different to that applied in England and Wales, where there is no cap on the number of students that universities are able to recruit. Additionally, NI students are outside the Scottish student number cap. As a consequence, in addition to the students who choose to leave NI to study, other students who are unable to secure a place due to the limits placed on numbers by the current funding model in NI, are leaving to study in GB, and there is no restriction at all on the number of NI students these GB institutions can take.

On the basis of evidence presented by both the University itself and the Department for the Economy, the Taskforce expects:

- demand for higher education to continue to grow, based on population projections, for at least another decade;
- demand for places at local universities to continue to rise throughout the same period;
- the majority of local students will continue to express a net preference to remain locally for their tertiary education;
- significant numbers may not be able to exercise their preference to study locally and, contrary to their preference, will leave to take up places in GB universities;
- demand from RoI-domiciled students for university places will continue to rise reflecting the international standing of local institutions and rising living costs in university cities south of the border;
- international student numbers will continue to fall, unless there is a change in UK government policy; and
- the benefit of a higher number of graduates will grow the economy locally contributing to increased productivity, greater innovation and a growing contribution to local employment and income levels.
- student demand for Derry will need to increase beyond the current market share to achieve a 10,000-student population. This will be dependent on an expanded offering in terms of available programmes at the campus, social facilities and affordable student accommodation. The University is already pursuing commercial partnerships to support such accommodation developments.

The Taskforce, therefore, believes that full consideration should be given by the Department for the Economy to the model of funding for higher education to ensure the long-term sustainability of Higher Education, including how this could contribute to the further growth of the Magee campus after the current target has been reached.

ASK 8: The Department for the Economy is asked to review the extant policy on Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) to consider how it could be revised to support growth in enrolments at the Magee campus beyond 10,000 students.

However, much sooner, the Taskforce will also be keen to see evidence of financial planning by the Executive for expansion which will be many hundreds of millions of pounds in the next decade.

Doing nothing would have meant a timeline that would not achieve 10,000 students, even in decades. However, based on our initial considerations, the Taskforce now estimates that the delivery of 10,000 students will require a capital investment for teaching, staff and research space and could be delivered, if maximum pace is achieved, in 8 years (i.e. by 2032). Initial modelling for estate to support 10,000 students indicates a need for an estimated £400m of capital spend to provide the requisite teaching, learning and research space, with around £275m additionally required to support student residential accommodation.

This estimate has been developed from Business Cases where they exist, supplemented by high level assumptions around required space per student and cost for refurbishment, and these will require refinement as detail on the programmes to be delivered becomes clear. For example, Medical, Allied Health and Engineering Programmes are more capital intensive than Business and Humanities and if the mix is more skewed towards the former then the capital cost is likely to be higher. Activity has commenced on this programme of work from business case development to procurement, design and planning (the Taskforce will report in greater detail on these actions in the action plan due in December 2024).

Funding has been secured for a number of projects from a range of sources including University reserves, Shared Island Fund, Inclusive Future Fund and City Deals. It is helpful that the expansion of Ulster University in Derry will be included in the Investment Strategy for NI. Its inclusion there places it centrally in the Executive's infrastructural development plans for the next decade.

Any lower levels of funding will extend the time and introduce a level of uncertainty that could significantly undermine the capacity to deliver. Such a reduction would certainly encourage those who doubt the commitment of the Executive to deliver.

For context, whilst this is a large investment, it is a capital requirement over several years and comparable to that which the Executive recently supported to provide a transport hub in Belfast.

Other funding of £275m for purpose-built student accommodation will also be required but is anticipated to come from private funding sources seeking to capitalise on the growth of the University and will probably require some assurance from the University/Government to incentivise the investment. The work of the Taskforce to deliver an action plan will be guided by the likely availability of adequate funding. The Taskforce hopes to be able to send a clear signal to investors that its plans will deliver both university provision and matching investment opportunities.

ASK 9: The Department for the Economy should demonstrate in its financial planning how it will fund expansion at Magee.

Of course, there are other routes by which the University could achieve 10,000 students without simply transferring numbers from another campus; expanding programmes that guaranteed progression between further and higher education could provide an additional supply of students.

Likewise, there are other ways to deliver real estate capacity for 10,000 students than for Ulster University to build new buildings. Capital facilities could be brought forward by other partners. Expansion at Magee could be fast-tracked if existing accommodation could be re-purposed.

North West Regional College has adjacent facilities that could also provide teaching facilities for UU students if the College's needs could be met by other means. Other existing facilities in the city could be acquired and/or re-purposed. Building bespoke new teaching accommodation, with the potential for delays associated with all major construction projects, is not the only way to achieve a campus estate for 10,000 students in Derry-Londonderry.

Similarly, the issue of residential accommodation could lend itself to some innovative solutions. The University is planning to use its space in Duncreggan for a student village with commercial partners contributing to a solution to meet needs. Imaginative planning and financing models which combined 'design and build' principles with long-term leasing or profit-sharing models could provide efficient and effective solutions that need to be explored. The Taskforce welcomes the University's willingness to consider how to optimise developments on the campus and is engaged with potential developers on how they could accelerate delivery of appropriate facilities. The Taskforce is keen to give confidence to potential investors that the demand which will provide a return on their investment will arrive as quickly as any foreseeable construction timetable can permit.

In universities in the UK where a MaSN cap is not in place, major capital projects are funded by the surpluses achieved against teaching activity. At Ulster University, the opportunity to grow student numbers from the island of Ireland is necessarily constrained by the MaSN cap. Even funded-MaSN of an additional 3,000 places would yield less than £30m a year of additional income with an associated surplus of around 4.2% or <£1.3m per year on that additional activity. This surplus, if used as annual payment against an interest-free financial transactions capital loan, may release in the order of £32.5m with a payment period of 25 years.

Using the similar quantum of funding committed by the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund and Ulster University as an example, this amount of capital might provide additional teaching accommodation for 400-500 students of the additional 3000 required (depending on subject mix). Without capital grant support, increasing student numbers would only ever deliver around 15% of the income to support the cost of constructing the accommodation in which to teach them. It is therefore clear that additional capital funding will be required over and above that allocatable through the existing funding models.

However, increasing numbers of school leavers will drive demand for third level education locally which, if met, will benefit the local economy and local standards of living. The Taskforce is confident that investment in higher education at the Derry-Londonderry campus will produce economic and social returns that will far outweigh the financial cost to public funding.

Graduate Entry Medical School (GEMS)

Specifically, the development of a Graduate Entry Medical School has been highlighted as an area for growth that will build on existing strengths whilst also offering significant prospects for stimulating wider benefits to the economy in the North West. And, although the number of medical students is relatively small in relation to other health professions, the Taskforce accepts the University's view that the Medical School offers a 'halo effect' for the campus and is a positive driver of growth across the whole portfolio of provision.

The development of the Graduate Entry Medical School is also a commitment in the NDNA agreement. The Taskforce was briefed on a range of issues that attend specifically to such provision. The number of students, the variety of health and allied health professional courses that complement medical provision and the ability to attract and retain appropriate staff in specialist fields constitute a combination of issues to be addressed. Such provision requires significant and sustained financial support. In developing the case for such provision, it is essential that the Taskforce understands the availability of financial support, especially from those who are likely to benefit most from a steady supply of high quality, appropriately qualified graduates.

In particular, the Taskforce welcomed a presentation from the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust is the largest employer in the area that it serves. The Trust was eager to underscore its view that provision already delivered by Ulster University is critical to the long-term stability of health services in the Western Trust area. There is, therefore, a causal link between sustaining and growing university provision in Derry-Londonderry and health outcomes and life expectancy across the western area and extending into Donegal, Sligo and other border counties.

The availability of third level education enables a steady supply of qualified professionals for a wide range of roles. This provides both routes to graduate employment, particularly for local people and sustains well paid employment in the locality. The Trust therefore argued for expansion of the current provision as an aid to addressing its service delivery challenges. The addition of other health specialisms, for example midwifery and other areas of nursing, to the range of courses on offer would enhance both the standing of the University and the impact on health provision in the area.

The Trust supports:

- the concept of confirming a University Hospital status.
- the appointment of a professorial chair in Health Economics. Ulster University has agreed to consider this possibility from within its own resources.
- a student loan facility extended to postgraduate medicine enrolment to enable graduates to continue with their professional formation whilst recognising the current economic reality from which many students in the North West enter university. In simple terms, such students could not accept university places without access to funding support. Similarly, in the early years of their professional employment, the opportunity to continue their professional education is limited by their financial circumstances. Providing such support would contribute to growing the number of graduate students, higher paid medical professionals in the community as well as contributing to better health outcomes.

On the last point made by the Trust, the Taskforce is of the view that aspirations for growth of the Medical School would not be achievable within the context of students having to self-fund their education.

ASK 10: Department of Health to provide clarity on the future demand for Allied Health Professional (AHP) and nursing graduates as well as future supply needs from local medical schools.

ASK 11: The Department for the Economy to liaise with Department of Health to consider how to provide financial support for GEMS students to reflect the circumstances of potential students and the benefit to the health sector of a steady supply of such graduates.



Capital Requirements

The Taskforce believes that the growth plan for student numbers is inextricably linked to the delivery of the interdependent capital projects. Incremental growth in parallel to the delivery of accommodation (both teaching and residential), as well as the appointment of staff, needs careful planning. In moving forward, it is clear that the Department for the Economy will be leading a major change in higher education provision. It is expected that government programme management discipline will be applied. The Department will want to prepare a Strategic Outline business case at the earliest opportunity.

The Taskforce has been keen to consider the specific capital requirements to support expansion of capacity on campus. It has considered three aspects:

- whether the existing capital provision could be stretched to accommodate further students ('sweating the asset');
- whether planned developments would suffice to meet the needs of 10,000 students;
- whether additional capital provision would be required, and, if so, the issues attached to its delivery including specifically cost and timescale.

Given the scale and complexity of the likely capital requirements to deliver a university of 10,000 students, the Taskforce recommends that the Department leads a cross-departmental oversight group to better co-ordinate the needs of the university expansion in the context of the wider city developments.

ASK 12: The Taskforce considers it vital that the Department establishes a cross-departmental oversight group to ensure the development, delivery and implementation of relevant cross-cutting projects. The delivery of multiple projects will be necessary to secure 10,000 students as promised in NDNA. Individual departments will need to stand up supporting teams that will delivery related projects/programmes. The Taskforce believes that the Department should monitor delivery of such projects and satisfy itself regarding the speed of delivery. A Gateway 0 review should commence without delay. The Minister could demonstrate support for campus growth and its wider impact on the city and region by holding an annual public meeting in the city at which he could report on progress.

There are broadly two areas where investment will be needed: teaching facilities and student accommodation.

Teaching facilities

The Taskforce understands that the current capital provision and plans to deliver the Shared Island Teaching block by summer 2028, with careful and creative management, will be sufficient to accommodate the anticipated growth to 6,500 students. The Taskforce wishes to explore this further and has requested further detail from the University on how it plans to meet the capital requirements to achieve its current projected enrolment. The University has indicated that it will need some further investment in its estate to accommodate the uplift in its projection to 7,000 students and are currently exploring options. This work is in train.

Current pattern of capital plans and commitments (subject to change as subject mix is determined):

Project	Purpose	Estimated Capacity	Estimated cost (£)	Funding Status	Business Case Status
Current Site Capacity	Teaching and Research	6,000			
New Project 1	Teaching	375	12	Identified	In Development
Shared Island Fund Teaching Block	Teaching	625	45	Committed	FBC to be developed
CADRIC City Deal	Research	-	39	Committed	OBC
Sport Facilities at Northland Road	Sport	-	15	Partially Secured	Bid Submitted
CADRIC Development to max site and expand capacity	Teaching	375	27	To be Secured	To be Developed
SOM & Expanded Teaching Block	Teaching	790	87	Partially Secured	Draft OBC
Refurbishment/Development of Existing Campus Facilities	Mixed academic	954	122	To be Secured	To be Developed
New Project 2	Teaching and research	816	58	To be Secured	To be Developed
Teaching, Learning & Research Plan		9,935	406		
Student accommodation (Phase 1 - Duncreggan)	Accommodation	500	55	To be Secured	To be Developed
Student Accommodation - Phase 2	Accommodation	2,000	220	To be Secured	To be Developed
Total			681		

Further plans, already in hand, to include a teaching block which will encompass the School of Medicine will offer much needed additional teaching accommodation. The Taskforce welcomed an update that the Ulster University Outline Business Case (OBC) for the School of Medicine building has successfully completed all University internal approval processes. The Taskforce was advised that the OBC has been formally submitted to the Department at the beginning of August 2024 with plans for a meeting of the Department's Casework Committee in October to consider the proposal.

Although the Taskforce notes that the overall City Deal has moved ahead with the 'minimum' size of Medical School building, the Taskforce supports the call for additional funding to ensure that the optimal provision is made for the longer term, not least to avoid later expense adding to a lower cost but sub-optimal decision. With Ministerial support the Taskforce hopes an 'uprated' or supplementary OBC for an ideal Medical School can be progressed quickly through the approval process to ensure that the resulting capital development reflects both the need and the ambition for the Derry-Londonderry campus. State of the art, rather than merely adequate, facilities in both scale and quality will have a role to play in creating a 'destination campus'.

ASK 13: Department of Finance is asked to prioritise the early consideration and approval of an augmented OBC for a growth-optimised School of Medicine building.

Given the long-term scope of expansion and the aspiration for continuing development, the Taskforce supports the most generous consideration of how to proceed during consideration of the options. As stated elsewhere in this Report, the assessment of value needs to take a wide view of economic and social impact across the region as well as discounting the potential cost of adding capital at later stages as the campus grows with concomitant expense of decanting from relatively new build facilities.

The Taskforce also welcomed confirmation that the development of the teaching block, 85% funded by investment from the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund, remains on track for completion in summer 2028. Ulster University is contributing 15% of the current projected cost.

To enable an assessment of various activities, the Taskforce requires greater clarity about existing plans. The Taskforce will aim to integrate such plans within its overall assessment of how to deliver the target enrolment as soon as possible. The Taskforce needs full and timely co-operation from all parties.

ASK 14: Ulster University to produce a time-lined growth plan for its Derry/Londonderry Campus to deliver on the target 10,000 students by initially setting out:

- (i) the contribution towards the target which can be achieved with full utilisation of existing campus infrastructure and facilities;**
- (ii) the further contribution towards the target achievable on the phased completion of planned new campus capital development to be funded by the City Deal/Inclusive Future fund, the Irish Government and the University itself to include the new School of Medicine, Innovation Centre(s), new Teaching Block etc.**

ASK 15: In order to test its action plan's viability, the Taskforce invites Ulster University to work with Department for the Economy to further develop their plans for growth and to set out in one place all considerations and associated capital and revenue cost requirements associated with delivery of the target 10,000 students.

An indicative schedule of 'onboarding' of capital builds to support the growth of students to (broadly*) 10,000 by 2032 is shown below:

	Current Student capacity	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
New Project 1		300-350					250-300		
Shared Island Fund Teaching Block					600-650				
CADRIC maximisation					350-400				
Vacated Student Services						60			
School of Medicine							700-800		
Block MB reallocation								150-200	
MD Extension Replacement									250-350
New Project 2									1000 - 1100
Cumulative Student Capacity	Approx* 6,000	Approx* 6,500	Approx* 6,500	Approx* 6,500	Approx* 7,500	Approx* 7,600	Approx* 8,400	Approx* 8,600	Approx* 10,000

*Some timetabling efficiencies are achievable and subject mix will introduce some variability.

Student Accommodation

From the University's perspective, the ability to provide managed accommodation for both first year undergraduates and post-graduate (and mature) students contributes significantly to its capacity to convert applications to enrolments and thereby attract and retain viable student numbers. According to the University, the financial challenge of building such facilities, alongside the teaching facilities which are also required, constrains the University's capacity to expand the range of courses and quality of accommodation on offer.

The University outlined to the Taskforce that existing student accommodation was now 100% occupied, with waiting lists in operation during academic year 2023/24, and additional accommodation is already required for the planned 2024/25 growth.

The Taskforce has been reassured that Ulster University has secured and invested in additional accommodation to help relieve pressures. The University has increased the total number of bedspaces available for students from 632 in 2022 to 831 in 2024. This has been achieved by purchasing and refurbishing Mount Royal (25 beds) at a cost of £2m in February 2023, entering into a lease agreement with Inner City Trust for Magazine Street apartments (40 beds) and leasing and guaranteeing a range of properties adjacent to the campus from agents and landlords (134 beds).

The Taskforce also noted that there are currently significant additional pressures for second and third-year students, of which up to 2,000 are likely to be seeking accommodation in the limited private sector which is already overstretched with demand for homeless and migrant accommodation, as well as students. In consideration of planning applications for HMOs, the Taskforce understands the balance the local authority, DCSDC is required to exercise in relation to both private student accommodation demand and the needs and concerns of local residents and communities. As such, the Taskforce welcomes the progress Council has made in the development of a draft HMO policy as part of the local Development Plan Process.

ASK 16: DCSDC is asked to clarify its emerging HMO policy and set out its projected timeframes for implementation.

However, the University cannot fund further accommodation without additional funding from beyond its normal mainstream sources given commitments made to deploy university reserves to support capital projects such as Derry City Deal, School of Medicine and Shared Island. Nor, it says, can the University reasonably be expected to augment the number of course places on offer in the University until the issue of accommodation is addressed - without risking both the creation of places that can't be filled or the understandable concern of the local community which could see its housing stock depleted and its public services further stretched. This argument supports the

reality that there is a necessary sequencing of capital provision before expansion. Simply, to have 10,000 students on site, there must be both teaching and living accommodation for them. Such capital development necessarily leads the timeline. Understandably, the University seeks, responsibly, to warn of the risk (and associated cost) of such provision in advance of guaranteed student numbers. The Taskforce agrees that this risk (and associated costs) should be shared proportionately between the University and the public purse.

The University has reported difficulties in converting applicant interest into student enrolments where accommodation is not available. The Taskforce considers that the commitment to expansion offers a new stimulus that changes the economic calculations. Whether internally or externally, provision will need to be made to house the increased student body and resultant graduates which the city should be seeking to retain through the provision of high-quality jobs.

Ulster University is working on forecasting purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) needs against the student number plan. It has commissioned an external report from Cushman and Wakefield, mapping sectoral norms for purpose-built accommodation and related demand. The interim report in September 2024 will include forecasts that consider planned modes of attendance, historic occupancy and latent demand in order to inform the market and provide capital planning certainty. The University has had advisors refresh modelling on growth to 10,000 students based on sector norms and this forecasts total demand for an increase of 5,580 beds in the city with 10,000 students. 1,545 of these are required for new entrants which are typically served by PBSA provision. However, demand to date within Derry for new entrants has been lower than the 65% sector norm, at 40%, and modelling that as the demand percentage total bedspace required in the city is 3,600 with new entrant demand alone outstripping current total supply by just over 600.

This analysis can be further refined as demand analysis and programme make up for students from 7,000-10,000 is completed, but it is clear that increased accommodation is required to support student growth.

The challenge is to find how best to achieve this provision. The Taskforce does not accept that an insurmountable difficulty arises.

“The University has reported difficulties in converting applicant interest into student enrolments where accommodation is not available”

Private Sector Investment in Student Accommodation

The Taskforce has therefore identified that the availability of, and access to, student accommodation is a major obstacle to achieving the desired growth in student numbers. Whilst difficulties in making public finance available to support such developments are explicable by reference to wider public sector spending norms, the Taskforce would like to explore this further. The prospect of private sector intervention, similar to that seen in Belfast and other cities in recent years, offers both useful experience on which to draw and also lessons for how the outcome for students and indigenous populations, jointly, could be improved. The Taskforce would welcome further engagement with the range of potential accommodation suppliers. It has been clear for some time that the need for additional student accommodation is a current and not just a future problem.

The creation of the Taskforce has stimulated increased investment interest from developers, many of whom have already been engaging with the University to understand management models and indeed with the Taskforce itself. There is significant interest in land acquisition, development proposals and moving projects from ideas to planning but this process requires escalation.

ASK 17: The Taskforce will ask Ulster University to develop a prospectus for developers with the potential to accelerate private sector investment in the required provision of high quality, appropriately sited student accommodation.

ASK 18: The Taskforce would like to better understand how health and social services to a rapidly expanded population could be addressed (particularly in a context where current provision is already sub-optimal).

Other capital development

DCSDC has been a proactive and committed partner over many years in identifying, promoting and securing sites for the expansion of university provision in the city. The most recent example of this is the sale to Ulster University of the site adjacent to the current Council headquarters building on Strand Road for the proposed School of Medicine and Personalised Medicine Innovation Centre of Excellence.

This partnership approach between Council and the University will result in the expansion of the University Campus onto the Riverfront and towards the City Centre.

It is understood that Council has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Ulster University for its future acquisition of the existing Council headquarters building itself to facilitate further university expansion.

This proposal which extends to include Council's intention to relocate to the Foyle Street/Whitaker Street site adjacent to the Guildhall, is an integral part of the wider exciting and transformative Riverfront/Strand Road regeneration project to be delivered through City Deal Funding.

This wider City Deal project comprises the creation of new public spaces and a reconfigured road layout along Queen's Quay/Strand Road extending from the Peace Bridge/Harbour Square to the current roundabout at the existing Council offices, where a new 'University Square' public realm space is proposed.

This integrated and co-ordinated approach to the relocation/development of public sector assets/sites is designed to catalyse both University expansion and further private sector led investment along the Riverfront/Strand Road.

ASK 19: DCSDC and Ulster University to progress the Memorandum of Understanding to develop a timeline and agreed proposals, subject to funding and affordability, for the relocation of Council offices and the acquisition and re-purposing of the existing Council building for University expansion.

ASK 20: Council and Ulster University to consider other Council-owned and/or vacant or underutilised sites in the vicinity of the Riverfront/Strand Road area for acquisition by the University for mixed use University led developments to include teaching, research and student accommodation to further drive and support planned campus growth and investment and compliment Riverfront/Strand Road City Deal regeneration proposals.



Destination City: Destination Campus

The Taskforce recognises the criticality of the Ulster University in Derry-Londonderry being regarded by potential students as a 'destination campus in a destination city' in order to attract the stated goal of 10,000 students. The Taskforce, therefore, seeks to understand the actions required by all stakeholders to identify and take the steps to address these challenges within the action plan.

ASK 21: The Department for the Economy to initiate and lead the scoping and costing of an intensive, targeted and sustained extensive marketing campaign to promote the city and campus as a destination of choice in partnership with Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, Invest NI and locally with DCSDC and Visit Derry.

Having built a campus capable of accommodating 10,000 students and associated staffing, it is important to reflect how it will be attractive to live, study and work in the city. The reported experience of residents, tourist visitors and investors as well as the student and staffing body is very positive. However, this experience needs to be both enhanced and communicated more widely particularly as there is a need to disrupt the current patterns of distribution/migration to institutions elsewhere in NI and to GB.

Considerable marketing effort and investment is being made, particularly by universities in the North West and North East of England, in Scotland and Wales, to attract students to study there. This investment is increasing given the financial pressure on many of these universities since the UK Government policy change on international student visas has made recruiting overseas students (and their associated financial investment) more difficult.

It is important to meet this increased competition head on and a concerted marketing campaign for Destination City, Destination Campus is required.

The Taskforce will consider more fully in its meeting in November strategies and investments required to attract and incentivise students to choose Magee.

Attractiveness and Experience

The Taskforce considered a paper from the Department for the Economy on a range of transport and infrastructure issues. It agreed that improvements to public transport, parking and traffic management will be essential in the plans for additional student numbers on campus. The Taskforce will seek to address these issues with the Department for Infrastructure before finalising its action plan. It is anticipated that there are numerous opportunities to address local community concerns about existing and future issues that will both alleviate potential friction between the university and non-university populations as well as offering complementary benefits for students, staff and the host community. Indeed, there are already opportunities for DCSDC and Department for Infrastructure to recognise the presence of the University in better street signage, in marketing the area and in creating a more visible link between the city and the campus.

There are longstanding concerns about local public transport provision. These concerns have exacerbated other frictions around traffic management and parking. It has taken too long to address legitimate concerns about safety and quality of life arising from poor traffic management. The planned growth of student numbers at the University campus affords an opportunity for the responsible authorities to work with the local community to design solutions in the interests of all concerned parties. Indeed, the opportunity has become an imperative. Considered traffic management, structured and planned parking arrangements and enhanced public transport will support both student and indigenous populations. There is also significant potential to demonstrate alternative transport options that will align with net zero obligations and provide a basis to showcase alternative efficient and effective transport strategies that could pilot innovative approaches for wider public benefit. The Taskforce would expect these plans to include enhanced public transport, safe pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and revised traffic management arrangements including suitable secure parking provision for the anticipated population in the area of the campus. These arrangements should reflect the potential impact on the wider area in the city and beyond as well as in the immediate vicinity of the campus.

ASK 22: The Taskforce asks the Department for Infrastructure to lead in collaboration with DCSDC and PSNI to develop an effective traffic management regime that balances the needs of the university population, the concerns of the wider community and the competing resources needed to deliver and maintain an effective transport regime.

ASK 23: The Taskforce asks that the Strategic Investment Board coordinates relevant Government Departments and Statutory agencies to include the Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities, Translink, NI Water etc, to consider and identify all potential planning and supporting infrastructure requirements to effectively deliver on the campus expansion masterplan and growth.

ASK 24: The Taskforce asks DCSDC to consider how, through its planning and regeneration functions, it can support and expedite university-related planning applications.

ASK 25: As statutory consultees to the planning process, the Department for Infrastructure and other relevant Government Departments and agencies, in support of the Council planning function, are asked to prioritise university-related planning applications, and to expedite response times.

“The planned growth of student numbers at the university campus affords an opportunity for the responsible authorities to work with the local community to design solutions in the interests of all concerned parties.”

Public Transport

The student experience confirms, and future growth in student numbers requires, a sustainable public transport plan to ensure access to the campus for both staff and students. The Department for Infrastructure has initiated consultation on the North West Transportation Plan⁸ and the Taskforce will be stressing to the Department the need to include growth in numbers at Magee in their planning.

Additionally, the Strategic Review of the rail network prioritises certain routes for development. The Taskforce would encourage the NI Executive and Irish Government to prioritise North West accessibility by rail in its programme of build.

The lobby group 'Into the West' campaigns for better rail connectivity in the North West of Ireland and has outlined some suggestions that the Taskforce agrees merit further consideration and implementation to support the growth of numbers and to improve the experience of staff and students at Magee. They include:

- increasing the frequency of trains to/from Derry-Londonderry especially at peak hours;
- improvements to, and increasing the number of, stations to the east of the city to encourage students to use public transport and to connect to other modes of transport including city of Derry airport;
- extending the train timetable at peak travel times for students, late on Friday and Sunday and early on Monday;
- improve links between the North West Transport Hub and the campus, including improved signage;
- providing mass transportation that will mitigate the need for increased parking and vehicular traffic management in the area of the campus.

Separately, Translink has been engaged and submitted initial thoughts on improving both accessibility and visibility of public transport to and from the Magee campus given the currently very low utilisation of public transport by students accessing the campus as evidenced in the student survey (8%). In its simplest form, this could involve clearly branding routes which serve the campus and should have minimal additional cost; to University specific route connecting from the North West Transport Hub which would require modest funding; through to more complex, costly and potential emotive measures around public transport priority routes to the campus which will require significant planning in the context of other public realm and transport considerations.

Alignment

The Taskforce welcomed a presentation by the Chief Executive of Derry City and Strabane District Council (who is also a member of the Taskforce). The Taskforce was grateful for exposition of the City's Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan, details of the City Deal and Inclusive Future Fund and an outline of the Council's initial considerations of how growth at the university campus could align with the local authority's view of future developments. The Taskforce was heartened by the breadth of the Council's considerations and the broad ambition to address social and economic need that resonated with the Taskforce's ambitions for the growth of student numbers. The Taskforce welcomed the broad alignment of objectives between the Council and others who had addressed the Taskforce regarding the potential benefits of growing the University numbers with consequent benefits for the city and the region in economic, infrastructural and social areas.

Valuably, given the responsibilities of the Executive to deliver the NDNA commitment, the Council described how its economic, social and environmental pillars corresponded to the Executive's known Programme for Government priorities. Developing the plan in this way demonstrated how the integrated approach would address local and regional objectives and how financial outlay in any one pillar could lead to related benefits across all areas of local life. Initial projections of 'added value' also reinforced the Taskforce's views about the economy and effectiveness of supporting substantial investment in the Derry-Londonderry campus. Catalyst projects too offered complementary support for the campus development with key projects seeking to improve transport infrastructure, cross-border links and improved broadband capacity. The Council also echoed calls from local enterprise that seek to link enhanced tertiary education provision with increased vocational skills and support for a more qualified labour market.

Helpfully, the Council's substantial plans to develop the physical capital in the city, including reorienting and redesigning traffic and vehicle movement offers promise of addressing some of the issues identified by other consultees. The Council's statutory role in planning matters also provides it with a unique ability to overview how major works could be delivered in an integrated but efficient way over a managed period. Importantly, the Council's understanding and connection to local people provides a vital mechanism to unlock potential misunderstandings and to expedite solutions. The drive from local elected representatives is seen as useful to articulating the urgency of progress that is needed.

In order to ensure alignment between the plans for increased student numbers and the potential benefits to the North West and wider region, it is proposed that the Taskforce will host an open roundtable event during the second phase of its work.

Respondents to this report will be invited to attend the roundtable and present both their concerns and any proposals that would increase the mutual benefits to both the university provision and the wider social and economic community.

Delivery

The Taskforce heard from both Ulster University and the local Council about their ambitious plans to enhance the physical infrastructure in the city. The Taskforce wishes to engage with the Department for Infrastructure to better understand the logistics of multiple large scale and cross-cutting plans.

There is no doubt that the historic and continued backlog in investment in NI Water's drainage and waste water treatment infrastructure are becoming an impediment to development across the Derry and Strabane District Council area. However, to date, in some cases solutions have been found for individual projects when sufficient wastewater analysis, planning and investments have been provided.

At this point it remains to be seen whether any proposed expansion applications (which are in the core economic centre of the city) will be negatively impacted or if NI Water/ Department for Infrastructure are required to intervene with investments or prioritisation as required.

Department for Infrastructure will be invited to make a written and verbal submission to the Taskforce to discuss wide ranging issues including both planning and water.

In the meantime, we are asking that SIB convene key statutory partners (including NI Water) to consider all planning/growth related issues.

Not least, the Taskforce wants to ensure that the current provision of tertiary education in the city is not impacted detrimentally by significant building projects which are themselves intended to support the expansion of university education in the city and the region. Just as importantly, the Taskforce wants to better understand the needs and wishes of the wider local community as it, too, adjusts to accommodate the developments necessary to support the expansion of student numbers. Significantly, delivering on improved infrastructure - creating a destination city - will both assist the achievement of a 10,000-student base and almost certainly create an environment in which further growth will become inevitable. Both the University and its future potential students will see the benefits institutionally and personally of investing further in a project that both addresses past wrongs and opens the potential for greater future returns. Delivering a successful campus integrated within the city and the region will establish its own dynamic impetus to further growth and further mutual success. A destination campus in a destination city is a very attainable goal.



Cross-Border Collaboration

The Taskforce also understands that further proposals for collaboration in cross-border higher education are under consideration by the government in Dublin. The Taskforce would encourage further progress on these applications to underscore the work that it is doing to address the under-provision of tertiary education in the North West generally. The Taskforce supports Ulster University's collaboration with Atlantic Technological University and other university partners across the island, but clarity is required on whether alternative learning modes within partnership agreements would contribute to the overall target student population and how this would address the wider objectives of achieving greater regional balance, increased employment and economic growth in the wider region.

ASK 26: The Irish Government is asked to update its plan to fund the expansion of higher education in the North West generally and specifically to confirm what additional funding could be provided to Ulster University to support growth to 10,000 students at the Derry-Londonderry campus in particular to support the growth of the Graduate Entry Medical School and the provision of a University Hospital similar to that available across the island.

ASK 27: The Irish Government is asked to consider providing supplementary capital and recurrent funding for the medical school at Ulster University to include enhanced undergraduate provision.

Strengthen Cross-Border Collaboration

The recent launch of the Ireland's International Talent and Innovation Strategy - Global Citizens 2030 - emphasises the unique role played by education, research and innovation in strengthening the friendships, collaboration and strategic relationships, both North-South and East-West. Global Citizens 2030, leveraging NDNA, the Shared Island Initiative and PEACEPLUS, sets out to foster purposeful talent and innovation collaborations to underpin enhanced cooperation.

The Taskforce acknowledges the contribution of the Irish Government to the creation of a collaborative tertiary education environment in the North West, leveraging in part the work of the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership. In keeping with the Irish Government commitment in NDNA, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) is working with UU Senior Management on the development of structures to oversee the investment of up to €44.5 million in the new Teaching Block in the Derry-Londonderry Campus. Ulster University is also contributing £7m to this project.

In addition to this investment, the Irish Government, through the Shared Island Initiative, has funded the North-South Research Programme (€37.3 million), which resulted in the development of more than 350 research North-South partnerships, between researchers and higher education institution. Ulster University secured access to an estimated €3 million from this call, which is funding 19 research projects, including two major partnership projects of scale on cancer research and the Atlantic innovation corridor. The Irish Government also provided €1 million to Ulster University to fund mobilities for their students from all campuses. This enabled Ulster University to underpin their relationships with partner institutions, in Ireland and across Europe. DFHERIS also agreed an innovative partnership approach to increase the healthcare workforce talent pipeline on the island of Ireland, through funding places in Allied Healthcare Professions in the Derry-Londonderry campus. This maximised the utilisation of the relocation of the Health Sciences on this campus and bolstered the case for Ulster University in retention of its faculty in the city. This cooperation also affirms Ulster University's capacity to continue its contribution to the social and economic well-being of the people on a cross-border basis in the North-West region of the island.

The recent establishment of Atlantic Technological University, coinciding with the renewal of the North-West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC) through a Memorandum of Understanding places the continued growth of tertiary education in the North-West on a unique trajectory. It points to the huge potential to more effectively grow higher and further education places and enrolments which can better serve the region through coordinated, collaborative cross-border provision. This can be undertaken in a manner which ensures complementarity, rather than competitive actions between Higher and Further Education institutions.

It is important to record that both Administrations are committed to that. Responding to social, economic and skills needs of the North-West region is a common goal and imperative, and the partners in the NWTEC cannot afford to be competitive within the context of the partnership.

ASK 28: The growth path to 10,000 students on the UU Derry~Londonderry Campus should be planned in a manner which harnesses the significant potential of further cross-border cooperation by education institutions and the two Administrations on the island and taking account of the individual and shared ambitions of each of the partners (*Ulster University, Atlantic Technological University, North-West Regional College and Donegal Education and Training Board*) in the NWTEC.

“Responding to social, economic and skills needs of the North-West region is a common goal and imperative”

Future Work of the Taskforce

The Taskforce expects that it will continue to monitor progress by all the key players in the period following its final report in December 2024 and will report publicly accordingly during the remainder of its mandate to March 2027.

The Taskforce is committed to playing its role to deliver the outcome promised by successive government administrations and delayed for too long already.

The Taskforce will submit a final report by the end of 2024 to include an action plan for the delivery of 10,000 students on the Derry-Londonderry campus.



Conclusions

- The overwhelming response to the work of the Taskforce has been positive. The desire and enthusiasm from local people, the local economy and from the education sector itself is supportive of the expansion of student numbers at the Derry-Londonderry campus, notwithstanding ongoing scepticism arising from a legacy of historic failed delivery.
- Addressing the absence of a more substantial university presence in the city will make a significant contribution to a number of wider societal issues, economic and social. The calculations around investment must also take account of the consequent benefits to these issues and to the wider region that will also accrue.
- The Taskforce is committed to developing a plan that recognises the various roles of the University, statutory and non-statutory bodies. It is self-evident that the delivery of 10,000 students in Derry will require action from all these parties.
- Changes to public policy, particularly on student funding, must be accompanied by additional public funding to address the practical issues around essential capital development including residential accommodation and the management of infrastructural issues that arise from a fast-growing population.
- Whilst the management of these cross-cutting issues must be prioritised, they cannot be allowed to delay the growth of the campus simply because of their scale or complexity.
- The Taskforce aims to deliver a plan by the end of 2024 which will clarify its expectations for reaching the target of 10,000 students. It will deliver a realistic plan that takes account of practical realities but injects urgency and expectation reflecting local frustrations balanced only by its understanding of the time already passed since the NDNA commitment was made.
- The quickest delivery will require urgent, significant and sustained financial commitment from the Executive. The Taskforce will seek an early response from potential partners to gauge how quickly delivery can be assured.
- The Taskforce is unanimous in recognising the feasibility and the value of delivering on the NDNA commitment at the earliest practicable date.

MAGEE TASKFORCE

September 2024

“The Taskforce aims to deliver a plan by the end of 2024 which will clarify its expectations for reaching the target of 10,000 students.”

Taskforce Members

Name	Role
Stephen Kelly (Chair)	CEO, Manufacturing NI
Nicola Skelly (Vice-Chair)	Executive Director, Washington Ireland Programme
Prof. Paul Bartholomew	Vice-Chancellor, Ulster University
Prof. Paul Seawright OBE	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Ulster University
Moira Doherty	Deputy Secretary, Skills and Education Group, Department for the Economy
John Kelpie	Chief Executive, Derry City & Strabane District Council
Leo Murphy	Principal and Chief Executive, North West Regional College
Paul Hannigan	Head of College, Atlantic Technological University Donegal
Ian McKenna	Principal Officer, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
Steven Lindsay	Deputy Vice President, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
Dawn McLaughlin	Non-Executive Director, Invest NI
Alison Wallace	Strategy Manager, Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership
Paddy Mackel	Regional Support Official, University and College Union
Ethan Davies	President, Ulster University Students Union
Gavin Killeen MBE	Managing Director, Nuprint Technologies Limited
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Philip Rodgers	Director of Workforce Policy, Department of Health

