

## NEON Awards 2024 Nominations

### Category

NEON Widening Access Partnership Award

### Names of institutions involved in the partnership

Widening Participation Unit & School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast

### Brief Description

Queen's University Reading and Numeracy Together, and Steps to Success initiatives emulate in practice the phrase "It takes a village to raise a child". The programmes use a collaborative approach including research informed guidance from academic staff and management, funding and operational support from the Widening Participation Unit. With partners including; Health and Social Care Trusts and Foster Care Associates nominate programme participants, and most importantly the enthusiastic and committed programme participants and Queen's student mentors who engage in online sessions, supported by guardians and foster families. A unique blend, creating the ongoing success of the widening participation programmes.

### Why has this project been nominated

The Widening Participation Unit (WPU) and School of SSESW have forged a partnership to use research to underpin Widening Participation initiatives to improve the educational outcomes for children in care. Reflecting the principles of the Queen's University Social Charter, the WPU has collaborated with key partners on a consistent and long-term basis to design, pilot and deliver programmes to offer positive literacy and numeracy opportunities.

The Reading Together, Numeracy Together and Steps to Success Programmes are key initiatives supporting younger learners who have had experienced significant disadvantage. Recent DoH/NISRA statistics (2023) indicate the gaps in attainment between children in care and their peers and the significant challenges they face. The outreach programmes included in the nomination aim to address these challenges and have been set up to improve literacy, numeracy and support transition to post-primary school. Paired with Queen's Student Mentors young people complete 12 weeks of one-to-one online sessions.

Central to the success of the initiatives is the collaborative relationships on which they are based. They emulate in practice the phrase "It takes a village to raise a child". The WPU administer the programmes and secure funding; the Health and Social Care Trusts and Foster Care Associates identify appropriate children and liaise with schools regarding their participation; the student mentors give up their time each week to support literacy and numeracy skills with each child; and Queen's academics train the student mentors and offer ongoing research informed guidance and advice in regular drop-in clinics. A partnership necessary for success.