



Belfast
City Council



St Mary's
University College
Belfast
A College of Queen's University

STRANMILLIS
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Dear Principal

We are writing to ask for your help in delivering an important message from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council, Queen's University, Ulster University, Belfast Metropolitan College and the University Colleges to students in your school in advance of St Patrick's Day.

The St Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast give people the chance to enjoy a carnival and family-friendly atmosphere in the city. As in previous years, our message is to invite people to come and enjoy all that Belfast has to offer – but to do so safely.

The PSNI, Belfast City Council, churches, voluntary groups and both universities, as well as Belfast Metropolitan College, St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges, invest significant resources in trying to ensure students and long-term residents can live peacefully together in the Holyland area of south Belfast. However, a popular perception among young people that the area is a key party destination on St Patrick's Day continues to pose significant safety challenges.

On St Patrick's Day last year and in 2016, large crowds of young people, many of whom were intoxicated, gathered in the area. This created serious safety issues for emergency services and local residents. Ambulances called to treat injured people were unable to access streets, and there was significant potential for public disorder, with associated risks for everyone in the area. This level of antisocial behaviour and significant alcohol consumption by crowds of people on residential streets is unacceptable.

While it was previously assumed that the vast majority of people in the area on St Patrick's Day are students from one of the local universities, University Colleges or FE Colleges, it became clear last year and in 2016, that there were also many young people from schools and colleges across Northern Ireland.

Agencies are working to reduce the number of young people in the area this St Patrick's Day. To support this, the higher educational institutions and colleges have agreed the following joint approach:

- Friday, 16th March 2018 has been designated as a study/reading day in the universities. This means that the universities will be open but there will be no scheduled classes taking place on those days.
- There will be a messaging campaign for students in advance of St Patrick's Day.

Our message to students in schools, and in further and higher education institutions, is to celebrate the holiday away from the residential streets of the Holyland area, for their own safety but also to protect local children, older people and other residents who are feeling particularly vulnerable as this St Patrick's Day approaches.

We would very much appreciate you sharing this message with pupils in your school and with their parents. Your support in communicating this out will be invaluable.

Please encourage parents to know where their children are going and if they are planning to celebrate St Patrick's Day in Belfast, that they only attend officially organised events and stay away from the Holyland area.

We are keen to ensure that all young people are aware of the risks associated with antisocial behaviour, for their safety and future educational and career prospects.

Thank you for your support in this matter.

Professor David Jones

Pro-Vice-Chancellor,
Education and Students
Queen's University Belfast

Professor Alastair Adair

Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Ulster University

Jim Woods

Head of Learner Success
Belfast Metropolitan College

Dr Ken Gibson

Director of Student
and Learning Services
Stranmillis University College

Professor Peter Finn

Principal
St Mary's University College

Nigel Grimshaw

Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services
Belfast City Council

Superintendent Robert Murdie

Police Service of Northern Ireland