

# UNION BULLETIN

## STAFF SURVEY

# Demoralisation at Queen's: report on crisis demands urgent response

The partial release of Staff Survey results on Friday afternoon (21 October) has revealed what the University College Union (UCU) is calling 'a widespread crisis of confidence in senior management' at Queen's.

The 2016 Queen's Staff Survey report, a summary of statistics from which was released on Friday, shows that a whopping 71 per cent of staff no longer have confidence in senior management. Although senior management has in the recent past suggested that problems in morale were confined to AHSS, the survey also makes clear that there are serious problems across the entire university.

The UCU is calling for an 'urgent meeting' of Senate to consider immediate action aimed at addressing the deepening crisis in university governance. UCU President at Queen's, Dr Fabian Schuppert, claimed that 'punitive academic standards put in place over recent years have put staff under increasing pressures and impossible demands, bringing morale to an all-time low. This is very serious, and we can't afford a continuation of this deterioration at Queen's.'

	Queen's University Belfast	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	Engineering and Physical Sciences	Medicine, Health and Life Sciences	Professional Services
<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>2479</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>928</b>
<b>EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INDEX</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Leadership and Direction</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Q28.</b> Senior leaders are sufficiently visible in Queen's	<b>39%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Q29.</b> Senior leaders provide effective leadership	<b>29%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Q30.</b> I believe senior leaders have a clear vision for the future of Queen's	<b>42%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Q31.</b> When institutional changes are made they are usually for the better	<b>23%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>Q32.</b> The reasons behind decisions are usually explained to me	<b>31%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Q33.</b> Queen's manages institutional change effectively	<b>21%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>29%</b>

*'This report, which took – tellingly – far too long to release, confirms what we have reported for quite some time now: plummeting staff morale, increasing disenchantment with the university hierarchy, a sense that Queen's leaders are becoming notorious for all the wrong reasons,' Schuppert said. 'This is extremely worrying and it demands an immediate response. Senate can't be found asleep at the wheel.'*

The Staff Survey was completed by 2,479 of Queen's 3616 staff – or 69 per cent of all those eligible to respond – and contains damning findings on management-staff relations. The university has been rocked by a series of controversies since Vice Chancellor Patrick Johnston took office in March 2014, and the survey shows that staff are now no longer confident that he and the university's senior management team are up to the job.

'Even this partial summary, which took far too long to release, confirms what UCU have argued for quite some time now: QUB is suffering from plummeting staff morale, increasing disenchantment with the university hierarchy, and a sense that Queen's leaders are becoming notorious for all the wrong reasons,' Schuppert said. 'This is extremely worrying and it demands an immediate response. Senate can't be found asleep at the wheel.'

The report contains a range of shocking findings. Only 21 per cent of university staff now believe that their leaders are managing a raft of recent institutional changes effectively, with that statistic dropping to a shocking 7 per cent in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, where senior management were compelled to reverse planned cuts to Anthropology and Sociology in the face of an energetic campaign led by students and staff. A mere 43 per cent of staff across the university now believe that Queen's has a high standing internationally, and only 46 per cent believe the university 'cares about my health and wellbeing'. As for the survey itself, only 31 per cent of staff believe that 'action will be taken on the results of this survey.'

Early indications are that senior management's response will only compound the problems identified in the survey. 'Action Plans' conceived and implemented from above, with no meaningful input from staff or their trade union representatives, are bound to deepen problems in morale and reinforce widespread concerns that staff are excluded from any meaningful say in how the university is run. The double standard in senior management's harsh enforcement of performance standards among staff and the lack of accountability for their own failures is on clear display. 'We are constantly under pressure from appraisals,' Schuppert notes, 'yet when management receives a very negative appraisal from thousands of academics they expect to get away with no consequences. Leadership needs to be open, transparent, and above all, accountable.'

'Unless the deep-seated problems at Queen's are effectively addressed by Senate, will see an growing exodus of academics seeking employment elsewhere, and increasing numbers of international experts refusing to take up jobs at Queen's. Nearly half of staff wouldn't even recommend Queen's as a place to work. This isn't just bad for the university. It's terrible for the local economy and for society in Northern Ireland more generally.'

The survey reveals another important feature of academic life at Queen's: QUB could be a great place to work. The results show that with a change of management behavior this could be a really excellent international university. 80 per cent of staff feel that people at Queen's are willing to help each other and 85 per cent find that colleagues treat them with respect. 'Staff are generally very confident in their colleagues and happy with the levels of collaboration and co-operation amongst staff,' Schuppert emphasized. 'But overall the responses show an extremely worrying crisis of confidence in leadership, transparency, communication, performance management, institutional change and fairness across the range of management practices at Queen's.'

'We have been aware of many young staff and senior professors leaving the university in recent years, often with major grants and important research projects. Resourcing is also an issue—only 10 per cent of staff strongly agree that they have the necessary resources to do their job effectively. This bodes badly in terms of retention and recruitment, and has wider repercussions for the local economy.'

The release of the summary results follows a series of requests from Queen's UCU calling upon senior management to release the full survey results, including the extensive staff commentary. 'There was extensive space for commentary and we know anecdotally that many staff used this to express their deep frustrations with the direction the university is going in. Yet Queen's has only presented a three bullet-point summary of reams of commentary from almost 2,500 staff. This would be laughable if it was not so serious. One of the most valuable fields in a survey is the "comment" field—a chance for respondents to feed back their thoughts, criticisms, and to elaborate the nuances of their opinions. Why were these not reported?'

'Senate now needs to act quickly,' Schuppert said. 'Those put in place to ensure the governance of this university is on a solid footing can't waste any more time. If they do, the crisis will deepen. And the implications for staff, students and wider Northern Irish society will be laid at their door.'