

27 June, 2023

Joint Statement from Queen's University, Belfast, and the University and College Union (UCU), Queen's branch

Queen's University, Belfast, and University and College Union (UCU) have today reached an agreement to end the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) – the first settlement of its kind across the UK.

This local outcome is the result of several weeks of intensive work between the two sides and means that those students affected will receive their classification as a matter of urgency. Marking will be completed by 7 August to allow exam boards to finalise all results by the end of the summer.

Both sides were fully aware that students were bearing the brunt of the dispute and were determined to find a resolution.

The agreement includes a cost of living supplement equivalent to 2% of pay and will apply to all staff except those on the Senior Salary Scheme. This will take effect from 1 September 2023. In the event that a further national pay award increase is agreed between UCU and UCEA in the 2023/2024 pay round the University will not be obliged to make any further payments unless it exceeds 7% in total (i.e., equivalent to the current 5% pay award plus a further 2% for grade 6 staff and above).

Other issues included in the agreement are the implementation of proposals around anti-casualisation, as they relate to fixed term contracts by the end of the year and the development of a strategy by the university to address issues in relation to gender, race and disability pay gaps.

Professor Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice Chancellor of Queen's said: **“Clearly this has been a very difficult time for our students, we regret the distress caused at what should be a celebratory time, and we hope that this provides assurance that the issue will now be addressed.**

“We are disappointed that this could not have been resolved ahead of graduations during which around 750 students will receive their degrees without classifications, but we are committed to providing an additional full graduation ceremony for them and further details will be provided in the near future.

“We are working in challenging times with funding for universities and colleges slashed by over 40 per cent since 2011 and we are anticipating cuts this year of around £11 million and it is the funding of universities that is at the heart of this dispute. The Northern Ireland funding model is not sustainable. I am keen to secure a model that will allow the sector to improve staff conditions and which is also fair to students but that can't be resolved quickly.

“In the meantime, this is a UK-wide dispute and while we have resolved it as far as we can locally, we fully support our colleagues right to take industrial action and I am calling on renewed focus to reach an overarching agreement across the board.”

Sean O'Connell, of UCU, said: **“Our members are fully aware of and deeply regret the impact the recent action has had on our students and we are pleased that we have reached an agreement to enable them to receive their exam results.**

“This dispute is not just about pay and we are pleased that the university has also reached agreement with us on making progress in relation to casualisation, stress related work pressures and other issues that will now also be addressed.”

“We welcome the fact that locally, Queen’s had recognised the challenges that we have been raising and we now call on University and Colleges Employers Association to follow the lead and get back around the table to resolve the national dispute.”

Beth Elder, the incoming President of the Students Union at Queen’s said: **“This has been an incredibly stressful and difficult time for students and we have been working hard to ensure both sides understood fully the damage that was being caused to young people looking to start their careers or continue their studies.**

“I now call on the university and staff to ensure there are no further delays in completing the marking process and to find a solution to the dispute nationally so that students do not face any more hardships or distress.