

UCU NEWS Queen's

Joint Higher Education Trade Union (JNCHES) Pay Claim 2019/20

In recent months much attention has been given to senior pay in higher education. This pay and equality claim shifts the focus onto *all* staff in higher education, arguing that all staff in our world-class university system deserve a decent pay rise, which keeps up with the increasing cost of living. Our universities should provide decent pay, and employment practices should reflect the same high standards that are expected of staff working in higher education.

This claim has the support of the three trade unions (UNITE, NIPSA, and the UCU) and is designed to set out a framework for positive dialogue on ways in which a number of employment-related matters can be addressed. The joint unions are now challenging universities to address pay that has significantly fallen behind inflation, to address, the gender pay gap, precarious working practices and the growing divergence between nations. The unions are also calling for a national framework agreement that will deliver parity between institutions to ensure that all staff are on a 35 hour per week contract (for full-time employees).



In this issue:

“Thinking the future for radical social change” event announcement – page 3

QUB’s financial forecast – page 4

Progression and career development for professional services – page 6

Press release on academic freedom – page 7

Universities have, for a long time, relied on the goodwill of all employees to work excessive hours and take on more work without increases in their pay. The claim for 2019/20 re-visits this matter and seeks to address this ongoing problem. We believe that there would be merit in individuals and institutions having a degree of certainty around financial and workforce planning at a time when much else is uncertain.

Continued on page 2

The pay offer in 2018/19 for the majority of HE staff was yet again below inflation. This is against a backdrop of increasing workloads and working hours, increased work-related stress and casualisation. The continued erosion of the value of take home pay in recent years is felt across all grades of staff in higher education covered by the national pay spine and needs to be urgently addressed.

The joint unions are making clear that this year members' pay needs to increase by both a 'keep up' and 'catch up' amount. The claim has two key elements for the majority on the 50 point pay spine – both RPI ('keep up') and an additional amount to start to make good the loss in members pay since 2009.

It is the trade union view that these negotiations should start from the assumption that existing salaries will be increased by at least RPI inflation, and will thus keep up with rising prices.

A summary of The Higher Education trade unions national claim for 2019/20:

- RPI plus 3% or a minimum increase of £3,349 (whichever is greater).
£10 per hour to be the minimum rate of pay for directly employed staff and Foundation Living
- Wage the lowest wage to be paid on campus (i.e. by contractors). Restoration of the 3% differentials between spinal column points.
- To achieve a 35 hour working week for all staff working in universities.
- Action to close the gender pay gap, and to work on closing the ethnic pay gap, taking account of the ways in which intersectionality affects pay and grading.
- Agree a framework to eliminate precarious employment practices by universities. This includes the ending of zero hours contracts and moving hourly paid staff onto fractional contracts; outsourced staff to be brought in-house to direct university employment.
- Nationally-agreed payment to recognise excessive workloads. UCEA to recommend the adoption and implementation of the Stress Management Standards approach (or suitable equivalent system) incorporating collaborative working with recognised trade unions on agreed action plans.
- To establish the Scottish Sub-Committee of New JNCHES as set out under the New JNCHES Agreement. The main purpose of the sub-committee would be to deal with matters not currently being dealt with at the New JNCHES Committee.

Now is the time for employers to invest in their biggest asset when global competition is increasing and the UK's position in relation to potential students and staff from the EU and beyond is uncertain. One certainty is that existing staff will help British universities to maintain their world class status and need to be shown that they are valued for their contribution.

This claim is a reasonable one and an accurate reflection of the key concerns of our members working in universities across the country.

Thinking the Future for Radical Social Change: Dialogues on Theory and Practice

On 27th June 2019, The MAC will host a public event led by the Futurity/Temporality/Time Reading Group entitled “Thinking the Future for Radical Social Change: Dialogues on Theory and Practice”. The Group was established in early 2018 to engage in discussion on the broad theme of futurity and time from an interdisciplinary perspective. Collaborative projects have already emerged from this group including ‘Strange Rhythmic Futures’ and “Dissensual Groves” (involving Professor Paul Stapleton and Dr Ricki O’Rawe) and ‘The Time(s) and Temporality of International Human Rights Law’ (involving Dr Kathryn McNeilly and Dr Tristan Sturm). Building on and extending these past projects, the ‘Thinking the Future’ event aims to develop the work of the Reading Group by extending the discussion to practitioners in a range of settings and contexts.

The event in The MAC will explore the fact that in the contemporary political moment, questions about the present, the future and their link to radical social change are pressing worldwide. What will the future look like? How can we navigate to a better future in troubling presents? What are the possibilities for radical social change in the present? What possibilities does collective action for radical social change hold for the present and future?



*The MAC, on Saint Anne's Square,
Cathedral Quarter.*

“What possibilities does collective action for radical social change hold for the present and future?”

This event will bring together politicians, grassroots political activists, artists, and academics to explore potential answers to these questions. It will also feature two distinguished scholars in performance studies and political theory, Professors Peggy Phelan (Performance Studies, Stanford University) and Isabell Lorey (Queer Studies, European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies), who will engage in dialogue with panel representatives interested in radical social change, the present, and future in Northern Ireland (Clare Bailey, Green Party NI; Emma Campbell, Alliance for Choice; Clare Gormley, The MAC; Alissa Kleist, Household). Uniting theory and practice in this unique way, the event aims to investigate and initiate ways to open up the future in contemporary political contexts in Northern Ireland and farther afield, asking how it might be possible to navigate uncertain presents and unforeseeable futures together in productive and creative ways.

All are very welcome to attend the “Thinking the Future” event on 27th June. Further details will be released by The MAC in the coming weeks. If you are interested in joining the reading group, please contact Dr Kathryn McNeilly (k.mcneilly@qub.ac.uk).

Ricki O’Rawe – General Member

QUB's Financial Forecasts Reveal an Income and Policy Shift

On 9 April Senate approved revised financial estimates for the current financial year. They also approved Financial Forecasts for 2019-20 which will be used for the allocation of budgets for that year and additionally forecasts up to 2021-22.

The revised estimates for 2018-19 now show an Operating Surplus of £9.2M compared to £2.8M forecast in December. Such an improvement during the year is usual. Notable items are: an additional non-recurrent grant from DfE of £2.665M and a reduction in projected income from Research Grants and Contracts of £1M. Although some units have been successful in recruiting staff, the overall vacancy level is 7.6%, which is very high. Estimated total research income (excluding Postgraduate Awards and capital adjustments) is £9.9M lower than the research income target for 2018-19 of £92.7M and this has prompted the University Executive Board (UEB) to re-examine its plans for research income.

As discussed in the January 2019 UCUNews, **QUB is chronically underfunded**. The gap the funding per student is about 15% between NI and England. QUB management decided some years ago that the solution to the financial problem would be increased research earnings. Units and many individual academics were given targets for the Value of Research Contracts. [What was really meant was the Price Charged for Research Contracts. The Value is actually is the contribution to the pool of knowledge, which is unpredictable, usually non-quantifiable, and may not become apparent immediately.] Management did not appear concerned with the additional resources needed for this research and whether the Price Charged covered the true direct costs and made a proper contribution to the cost of overheads. Unfortunately in most cases it did not. I have been a lone voice in publicly proclaiming that **there are many good reasons for undertaking research, but, unless the true cost is covered, solving QUB's financial problems is not one of them**.

There are two indirect ways that good research could improve QUB's finances. Good performance in REF should result in more QR funding to the institution. That is true in a multi-university system as in England. But in Northern Ireland the QR pot is just split $\frac{2}{3}$ QUB and $\frac{1}{3}$ UU. The other is based on this argument: more research leads to a stronger reputation and higher rankings in global league tables which in turn attracts more international students who, by paying higher fees, improve the institution's finances. But this chain of events has never been quantified, and there many other factors which attract international students.

The money obtained on Research Contracts is based on the direct costs and often does not cover overheads. Charities (especially local medical ones) usually refuse to pay overheads. The overheads are the cost of the space used and of the general support structure and are expressed as a percentage of direct costs. The overhead recovery rate has remained stubbornly around 17% since 2012 despite increasing it being a high management priority. It is currently 17.1%, which is much lower than comparable UK universities.

There is strong evidence that most research contracts do not truly reflect the time that academics spend on them, let alone the time spent drawing up research proposals. As in previous years, 'The 2017-18 Transparent Approach to Costing' results (based on the time-sheets that you completed) reveal that **Research in general does not cover its true costs and has to be heavily cross-subsidised by Teaching and Other Activities**. The significant deficit of £25.8M or 15.1% on Research was offset by a surplus on both Teaching (£18.0M) and other Activities (£9.9M). So, to cover the costs fully, the overhead recovery rate needs to be nearly doubled.

The UEB has finally realised that it is not enough to measure performance in relation to research by the value of new awards and has added a second Performance Indicator based upon overheads costed into the new awards. Overheads comprise PI/CI time, indirect costs and estate costs.

Proposed Annual Faculty Targets to be achieved by and sustained from 2020-21

	MHLS	EPS	AHSS	Total
Total Value of New Awards	£56M	£39M	£10M	£105M
Total Value of Overheads costed into New Awards	£10M	£9M	£3M	£22M
Overheads as % of Total Value of New Awards	18%	23%	27%	21%

There are targets for intermediate years and targets will be set for Schools. **Doubtless, academics will be steered towards to applying to funding sources which pay full overheads.**

Note that the Total Value of New Awards is slightly reduced from that in the £110M in the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan involved large growth in Postgraduate and International Students:

Targets in Corporate Plan	Total Students			International Students		
Level	UG	PGT	PGR	UG	PGT	PGR
Target (FTE) 2020-2021	15,637	3,590	1,980	1,939	1,308	664
Growth from 2015-16 Baseline	4%	70%	30%	79%	290%	80%

Progress towards these targets has been slower than planned and UEB has agreed to review and adjust the plan. The financial future of Queen's is dependent on this growth in students and **we would expect people who devise or teach on post-graduate courses to be rewarded in appraisal and promotion.**

In the absence of a NI Executive, the NI Budget has been set for 2019-20 and applies to that year only. Although the money has not yet been shared out within DfE, indications are that the **HE budget will be held in cash terms at the same level as 2018-19, which represents a cut in real terms of about 2.4%.** There is no indication of QUB's Grant for future years but it is likely that the **University's recurrent grant for teaching and research will be reduced by £2.0M by 2021-22, which is a cut of 4%.**

The cut in Government Grant is forcing Queen's to shift to other sources of income as shown in the table below.

	Revised Estimate 2018-19	Projected 2021-22
Government Grant	£100M	£97M
Research	£84M	£81M
DfE PG Awards	£10M	£10M
Tuition Fees	£112M	£140M
Other	£60M	£59M
Total	£366M	£387M
Operating Surplus	£9M	-£15M

The projected increase in Tuition Fees is caused by the planned growth in post-graduate and overseas students **Even if those ambitious targets are met** (and there are many factors influencing overseas students that are beyond our control) **QUB is projected to have an Operating Deficit after 2020.**

We need proper government funding. The disinvestment in HE is wholly incompatible with the Northern Ireland draft Program for Government and the Industrial Strategy. We need the politicians to make decisions on our funding. Please bend the ear of any political party that comes to your door.

Paul Hudson – Pensions advisor the UCU at QUB.

Progression and Career Development for Professional Services

We are very encouraged to see the proactive approach Senior Management is taking towards reviewing the progression and promotion procedures Queen's has in place for academic staff. At the same time, staff in the professional services find that for many of them there is little recourse for developing their careers and progressing in Queen's. In an effort to address this issue we have conducted consultation meetings with staff across the different Schools and Directorates. Following these consultations, we have composed the following recommendations for addressing what has become for many a pressing concern:

Recognising Seniority

Reflecting gained experience and years in service through developing 'senior' ranks within professional roles. These can be rewarded through discretionary points.

Accreditation of Training

While we are encouraged to see that Queen's is investing in developing and expanding the training opportunities which are available to staff, we would like to suggest that providing accredited training for professional services would allow staff to gain recognition for the training they undertake. This would not only assure the transferability of the professional capacities for staff members across different roles, but would also allow staff to demonstrate these capacities when applying for more senior positions.

Prioritising Internal recruitment

Since applying to a different role at the next grade up is for many staff in the professional services the only way to progress within the ranks, we call on the University to prioritise internal recruitment. We are aware that Queen's have been making strides in this regard and we would like to see this become the common practice across all units.

Advertising Internal Vacancies

We call for a more rigorous review of qualification specifications for internal vacancy posts, to make sure the required qualifications are adequate and appropriate for the post. It should also be the preferred position to encourage internal applications and promotion from within to further support our core values of **Connected, Ambition and Respect**.

Internal Vacancies Panels

To redress concerns relating to the selection process in internal vacancies, we suggest that there should be a greater level of transparency in the composition of selection panels for internal vacancies. Such panels should ensure gender diversity, a mandating of an external representative (from a different unit) on the panel and a representative from People and Culture.

Enhancing Staff's Experience

Staff should be encouraged to gain a more diverse set of expertise through the allocation of tasks. This can be carried out through a more flexible allocation of tasks in different roles. This would not only prevent task-fatigue, but also allow staff to gain a broader range of expertise and experience within their grade, which could prove beneficial if a higher grade post is advertised.

Retention

We call for a review of the retention procedures for professional services staff. We also suggest that these procedures should be made easily accessible to all staff by publishing them on the People and Culture webpage.

Grade Review

Some units have experienced significant shifts in their allotted responsibilities and tasks. This may mean that there is room for performing grade reviews on the unit level, and not only for individuals. We therefore recommend allowing for requests of performing grade reviews for entire units.

Merav Amir (UCU at QUB President), Fiona McGarry (Secretary for Local Issues) Diarmuid Kennedy (Honorary Secretary), Keith Halliday (Representative for Professional Services).

“Growing concern” from UCU at the “on-going and misleading attacks on academic freedom by Northern Irish politicians”

The University College Union (UCU) at Queen’s University Belfast has criticised “wholly unfair and worryingly authoritarian attacks on local academics’ right to voice free opinions”. The union called on Queen’s university to “robustly and unequivocally reject demands by politicians to censure or silence academic staff.”

The calls come following revelations that some unionist politicians have been complaining to the university about views expressed by lecturers. Members of the DUP have complained directly to Queen’s regarding academics, and these private complaints have been accompanied by negative public commentary about specific scholars, on the airwaves and in a number of local newspapers.

“The complaints are part of a concerning pattern,” says a Queen’s UCU spokesperson. “It’s becoming depressingly and predictably familiar: an academic has their say on issues of public interest or political importance—as academics do worldwide—and a local politician petitions the university to have them disciplined or gagged. It’s an outrageous attack on democracy and the values of free speech that our society holds dear.”

In March last year, TUV MLA Jim Allister wrote to Queen’s expressing “strong disquiet” after one of its professors questioned the over-representation of particularly entrenched views on local political issues on BBC Radio Ulster. More recently, complaints have centred on Brexit and the role of Queen’s academics in informing public debates. “Nelson McCausland recently renewed the controversy at a time when there is growing right-wing attacks on academia across the world,” UCU at QUB said. Mr McCausland has repeatedly complained about what he characterises as the “left-wing sympathies” of academics in Queen’s and Ulster University. “Colleagues have been named and denounced as a danger for the future of the region. Politicians who express such views are playing a dangerous game.”

“It is important in a functioning democracy that academics have the right to research, analyse and comment without politicians interfering with their right to do so. And it’s vital that universities defend those rights and ensure that academics doing their job feel secure and supported.”

“Mr McCausland in the *Belfast Telegraph* recently deplored that QUB “does nothing” in response to comments made by one professor on the DUP’s

approach to Brexit. Is Mr McCausland suggesting that this professor should be disciplined for offering an individual opinion?”

McCausland’s complaints in public were accompanied by official complaints to QUB by prominent DUP members, one a councillor and the other an MLA.

“The call for universities to discipline employees for expressing opinions that differ from those of their detractors is a serious misunderstanding of the role of academia. In a democratic society and for the public interest, it is vital that scholars retain the freedom to explore the world they live in, challenge views and engage in intellectual debates, without fear of repression, censorship, or policing to fit the ideology of any political party or private interest.”

The 1988 Education Reform Act established the legal right of academics in the UK “to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or the privileges they may have.”

UCU condemns as “entirely unacceptable” that leading politicians are “urging Queen’s to control academics who are branded as biased when they are, in fact, doing what academics are paid to do: produce robust research that enables us all to understand the world around us.”

“Working in the fields of law and human rights, social and political sciences and beyond, academics like any citizens are entitled to engage and contribute to public debates,” the spokesperson for UCU at QUB said.

“These attacks have become so frequent that the union feels compelled to publicly intervene to remind politicians of the importance of academic freedom in a democratic context. In line with Queen’s Charter, which includes academic freedom as one of its principles, we also request our employer to protect academics by opposing explicitly such intimidations and by supporting publicly our rights to freely express views without fear of recrimination.”

Last June, former Ulster Unionist deputy leader John Taylor called for academics to be publicly named and shamed after they voiced concerns over homophobic and racist comments made by Peter Robinson, who had been offered an honorary professorship in Peace Studies at QUB.

Happy International Workers' Day from the UCU at QUB!

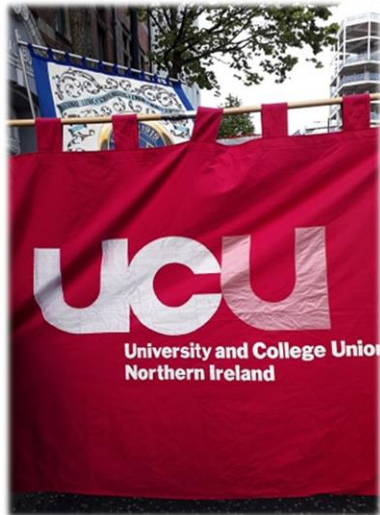


Photo credit:
Morris Brodie.

An update on USS

The good news is that the employers and UCU, both nationally and locally, want a 2028 valuation based on the report of the Joint Experts Panel. Although neither side believe that Contingent Contributions are necessary, the employers made a proposal to USS which included Contingent Contributions in order to allay the concerns of the USS Trustee and the Pension Regulator. Contingent Contributions are higher payments into the USS fund which would be required only if the USS finances became significantly worse than predicted. The bad news is that the USS Trustee is not satisfied with this proposal and wants further study of the implications. Additionally the Pension Regulator wants an update on the employers' ability to support scheme risk.

The Trustee Board met recently. I understand that they were not satisfied with the employers' proposal and are going to make a proposal themselves. Under the default conditions members' USS contributions went up to 8.8% and employers' to 19.5% in April 2019. These are due to go up to 10.4% and 22.5% in October and, finally, to 11.7% and 24.9% in April 2020. I can assure you that both UCU and the Employers are determined such high figures are not reached.

Paul Hudson – Pensions Advisor to the UCU at QUB.

We have launched a new email address for contacting your Officer for Local Issues. As of April 2019, the best way to contact us is at ucublocalissues@gmail.com.

This inbox is monitored by our current Officer for Local Issues, Fiona McGarry. Since taking over in September 2018, Fiona has met with members from across the university, giving advice about many things around QUB policies, supporting members in grievance and/or bullying and harassment proceedings, issues around probation and recruitment, and around sickness and disability concerns, among others. If you have any problems or queries you would like to speak to us about, please contact Fiona on ucublocalissues@gmail.com. No issue is too big or too small!