





# QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

**RUSSELL  
GROUP**



# Stakeholder Analysis: a deeper dive



**Staff and Student Strategy Working Group**

October-November 2020

# AIMS

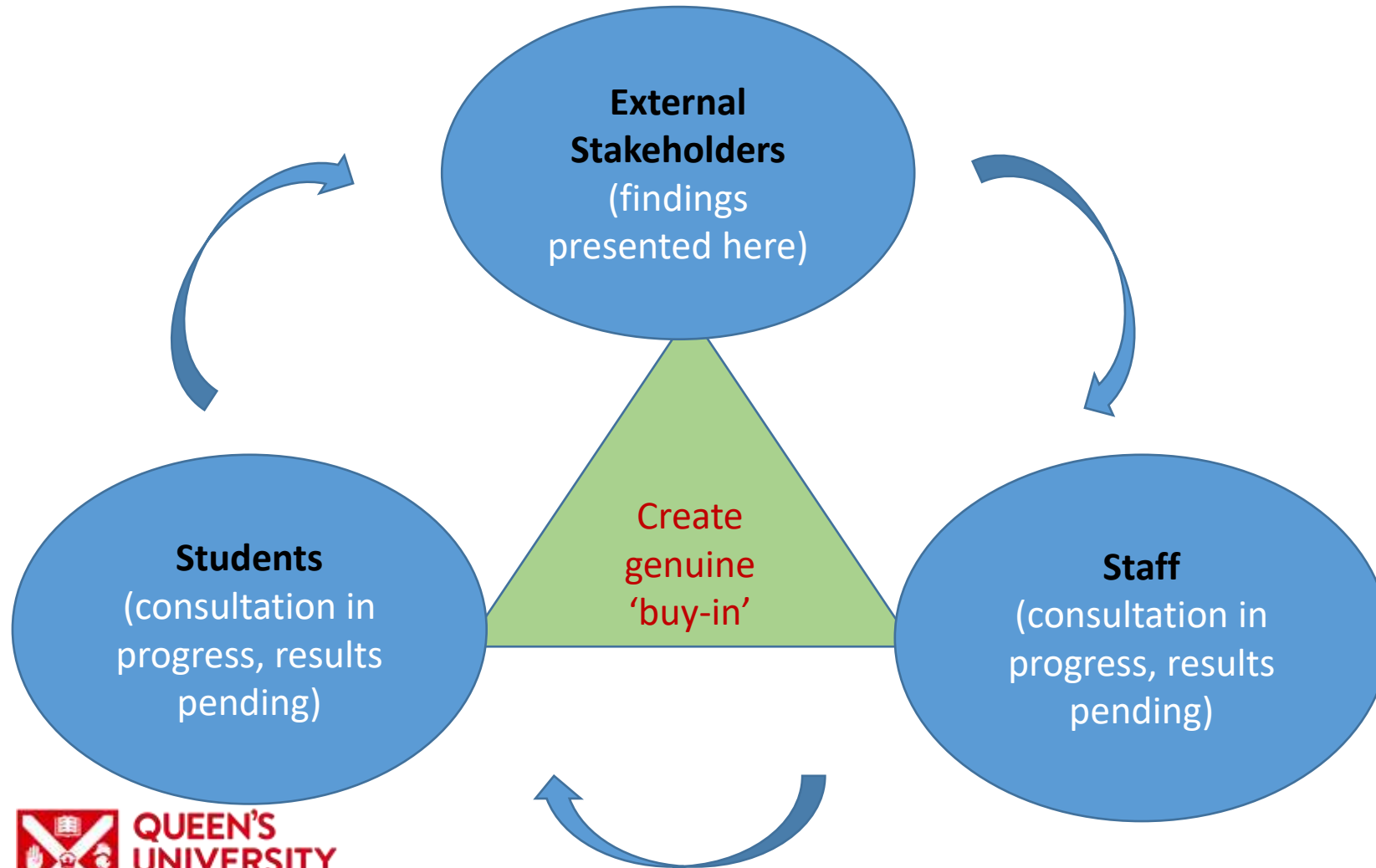
Building on the preliminary stakeholder analysis undertaken by Communications Consultant, Mark Sudbury we aimed to:

- **Interview a complementary range of stakeholders**
- **Interview important categories of stakeholder who were absent in the preliminary analysis**
- **Conduct consultation with staff and students - two missing categories of stakeholder in the preliminary analysis**
- **Take a deeper dive into the way Queen's is viewed by its local communities**

# OBJECTIVES

- **Understand Queen's reputation with present and future stakeholders**
- **Inform the new strategy development process**
- **Propose specific priorities for the new strategy**
- **Propose improvements to long-term engagement with communities in this city, region and beyond.**

# CONSULTATION DESIGN



# PROJECT PHASES

- **September 2020:** Senate Staff Representatives learned of the fast pace of the Leadership Team's plans to implement a new, long-term strategic plan
- **September 2020:** Formation of a Working Group to conduct stakeholder analysis, staff and student consultation to build on preliminary analysis
- **October-November 2020:** Rapid project design and data collection (x30 interviews to date, data collection ongoing)
- **November 2020:** Analysis of first tranche of interviews
- **Staff and student survey data is pending, conclusions are provisional until this is integrated into analysis**

# INTERVIEWEES

Education  
(teachers,  
schools, FE)

Politics/  
Government

Media/  
journalism

Legal / Trade  
Union

Community/  
Third sector

Arts / Cultural  
sector

Staff/students  
(past, present,  
future)

Faith Groups

# INTERVIEW TOPICS

Who are key stakeholders\*

Engagement with external groups

Perceptions of Queen's

Existing strengths / weaknesses

Teaching and Research

Priorities for future changes / improvements

Handling of COVID-19

Media and Comms



\* Iterative interviewee recruitment strategy, responsive to feedback from interviewees.



# OBSERVATIONS

- Interviewees were keen to contribute
- This was the first time that most of these stakeholders had been asked to help shape the future of Queen's
- Stakeholders were keen to propose changes for the future in terms of priorities and operation
- The interviews revealed how knowledgeable local communities are about the University, even when they have experienced exclusion
- Interviewees would welcome further engagement and becoming partners with Queen's

# KEY FINDINGS

- There is respect for Queen's among stakeholders and a thirst for intellectual leadership, innovation and education.
- Queen's has a critical role in NI society and on the island of Ireland, but misses this opportunity because it:
  - Ignores local communities, especially deprived communities
  - Has lost sight of its core mission – to create, co-create and disseminate knowledge in an engaged way
  - Focuses narrowly on a model of HE that is hegemonic in England but ill-suited to NI and which is struggling other places in the world
  - Has insufficiently understood its potential as an economic 'anchor' institution for NI, and the need to have a critical role and responsibility in informing public and political discussion on key economic, social and environmental issues.

# EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT – who are Queen’s stakeholders?

Our stakeholder interviews sought to balance out the emphasis on commercial impact over other forms of impact in the preliminary stakeholder analysis and offer insight into other dimensions of this important question.

Our interviewees were concerned that strategy planning would rely on the ‘usual suspects’ – local policy, political and economic elites, economically successful alumni – and they considered this to be a mistake.

Widespread ‘buy-in’ to the strategic direction of Queen’s is considered a critical factor for future success.

# EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT – who are Queen’s stakeholders?

“The University should do more to communicate and engage with the wider community...and invite key local stakeholders to get involved in university work”

Faith Leader

“Ulster University has it written into its Charter about nominees from NICVA, trades unions and so on, in terms of its Court and decision-making... Queen’s is still a bit ‘Victorian’ in that respect”

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

“A great cross section of civil society ... from working-class people, people who live near Queen’s but who might never think that they could get there, right up to... your lords and ladies and people like that... you can still have that but you have to have the local buy-in too”

Charity Sector, Communications.

“Sometimes these big sort of things just effectively engage with the business community and almost forget about equality duties. Not consulting protected groups would break the Equality Scheme and Section 75 duties”

Legal Sector

# PERCEPTIONS OF QUEEN'S

There is a positive perception of the academically excellent work Queen's is doing.

Individual academic engagement within local communities and on issues is appreciated, but a lack of social engagement is identified at the top management level.

Similarly to the preliminary stakeholder analysis, there is an impression that Queen's struggles to find its role and identity in a changing social context.

Queen's is viewed as aloof, elitist and divorced from its local communities, to its own cost.

At an institutional level, Queen's is viewed as lacking interest in solving local socio-economic problems, such as poverty or the Holylands, or contributing to economic policy.

Queen's has a responsibility to inform public debates and policy discussions within Northern Ireland – especially political and economic strategy, jobs, tackling poverty and sectarianism.



# PERCEPTIONS OF QUEEN'S

"Queen's is struggling to find its identity in... a very, very, quickly changing island of Ireland, and a very quickly changing University intake"

Political Representative

"The word that comes to mind when I think of Queens is 'Victorian'...elite, above, aloof, and separate from the wider community in Northern Ireland...Queen's could learn from US universities in linking to local communities... the University is not well embedded within wider society".

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

"One word when I think of Queen's... 'out of date'...I think as an alumnus...It's a strength and a weakness...and sits too comfortably in its own historical landscape"

Energy Sector professional

"A 'mixed perception': we work a lot with academics from Queen's, and students... all of that's positive. But at the corporate level it does seem to be somewhat stuck in the past and that's an issue we have to engage on as well"

Legal Sector

"Queen's and Belfast don't go hand-in-hand"  
Media Production professional



# PERCEPTIONS OF QUEEN'S: a complex picture

The interviews were rich with ideas about how Queen's could address current perceived failings and it is worth looking at these in more detail here. They can be categorised as follows:

- Struggling with diversity and inclusion
- Abandoning those who need access to higher education the most
- A conflict between the priority of generating income and the need to serve the community
- Long-term issues concerning leadership at Queen's, which affect its reputation in the here and now and shape responses to its future plans

# PERCEPTIONS:

## Struggling with Diversity and Inclusivity

“The Students Union has a strong nationalist/republican voice and there is a need to create an environment where unionist students feel comfortable”

Local Politician

“Queen’s is a foreign land to many working-class folks... people feel it has no connection with them”  
“From a unionist point of view, it is increasingly viewed as a nationalist university...its feels like a ‘cold house’”

Local Politician

“Queen’s seems to be resisting the Good Friday Agreement and is stuck very much in the last century, perhaps even the century before in terms of the way it deals with linguistic diversity with reference to indigenous languages”  
Legal Sector

“The fact that they're reluctant to put any sort of emphasis on the Irish language, it's not really inclusive”.

UG student who chose to go to Trinity, Dublin.

Undergraduate culture at Queens is slightly less diverse than it is in other universities and that might be something for the University to think about.

Political Representative



# PERCEPTIONS: Abandoning those who need access to higher education the most

“It’s turned its back on the working-class communities that are right on their doorstep and it’s been doing so for years... Places like Sandy Row you know, a stone’s throw from Queen’s, what do they really do to get the kids from Sandy Row to their doorstep?”

Journalist

“It seems to be more interested in overseas students coming in with the cash that could afford a Queen's University education to the detriment of the local kids, from backgrounds that maybe can't afford the education that is being offered at Queen’s and yet it seems to be there's a shift from concentrating and serving as best as they can the local community and to look for money. That's my perception and the perception of a lot of people that come from the same community background as mine.”

Arts and Community Centre

# PERCEPTIONS: Generating income or serving the community?

“It's no longer something that is embedded in the fabric of Belfast, and the community of Belfast, it's as if the ownership or management of it, the strategy developed by it, has been put in place by people that don't have an interest in the city or the surrounding communities.”

Arts and Community Sector

There is a balance to be struck between being attuned to that economic necessity but also preserving and enhancing that role as a meeting place for ideas ... humanities and arts research that lead those debates, it's absolutely critical.

Political Representative

“‘Expansive’ would be a word I would use to describe the University, in terms of the size and diversity of work that goes on...”

Faith Leader

I have negative perceptions of Queen's as becoming more and more corporate in its outlook and not valuing the individual areas of research and talent that are already held within the institution. There appears to be much emphasis on the medical and engineering side of the University, which though very valuable do not make up all of the incredible research, teaching and activity that is contained within Queen's. The University needs to make money, but not to the detriment of the individuals within it.”

Community Engagement professional

# PERCEPTIONS: Quality of leadership

“Where is the social conscience? Where is the community ethics, within the structure and strategy of Queen's University? Education was not for profit or gain, it was for the development, personally and at a community level of the wider, society... This profit driven policy adopted by universities like Queen's is a disgrace and it is doing people in the local community a great disservice”

Arts and Community Centre

“The ideas are great, but the ‘rubber does not hit the road’ and getting academics involved in community events does not materialise”

Faith Leader

“Our universities can and should be a beacon of change and light, and all that, which young people and academics bring together, the energy that comes out of that, and I think it is missing in our universities across the board”

Political Representative

“It seemed to be a University that's never really ever up on its feet, able to take on a role in which other universities and other parts of the world seemed to be able to do, to become like a really important organ in the centre of, not only just at city, but regional life”

Media Production

# EXISTING STRENGTHS

Queen's has an excellent academic reputation both for teaching and research.

Viewed as physically welcoming and accessible.

Collaboration with academics and students is valued locally, especially as it attends to social needs and intellectual leadership – regional economy, Brexit, environmental issues, communities and inequalities, education.

# EXISTING STRENGTHS

“We work a lot with academics from Queen’s, and students, the University’s Human Rights centre, all of that, students as well as the University’s venues, all of that's positive”

Legal Sector

“We get interns and around the world people go and study at the Mitchell Institute (...) That’s very good internationally”

Charity Sector

“Queen’s does a lot of excellent work, especially around STEM subjects”

Local Politician

“We’ve become the first sustainable and green art centre ... and it all came about through the University and the staff and their expertise and her skills, and brought in the community centre”

Arts and Community Sector

# EXISTING WEAKNESSES

Queen's is considered to be disengaged from Belfast and its local communities, especially working-class communities and reactive rather than proactive in working with those communities.

Queen's is viewed as pursuing financial gain to the detriment of education and knowledge creation.

Queen's is not viewed as inclusive, for students from a variety of backgrounds (including Protestant Unionist Loyalist and Irish speakers).

The handling of the pandemic, especially as regards requiring large-scale movement of students into and across the region, received criticism.

Interviewees identified a lack of intellectual leadership and confidence in what Queen's stands for.

## EXISTING WEAKNESSES

“The University should do more to communicate and engage with the wider community...and invite key local stakeholders to get involved in university work”

Faith Leader

“It was a surprise to me that so many students came back for this term given the pandemic...I just assumed all lectures were online.. safety should have been first...its seemed crazy to me that large numbers of people were being brought back into Belfast”

Energy Sector professional

“The wider community needs to see the University delivering, and this would begin to break down the perception of Queen’s as elitist and that Ulster University is more welcoming for working-class students”.

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

“Queen’s should be more linked to emerging industries and moving away from the old established industries”

Energy Sector professional

# TEACHING AND RESEARCH

More emphasis on jobs and employment for local communities

Teaching and research could involve more outreach

Greater emphasis on widening participation in education

Diversify the curriculum, rather than reducing the diversity of courses

Promote intellectual freedom and creativity – University's civic role as a forum of ideas => significance of social sciences, arts and humanities

Preserving and enhancing knowledge as a key role of the University

"I am always dismayed when I hear another department or school is closing, the wider and broader the range of subjects in the university, the better it is for the city."

Documentary film-maker



Make the University more inclusive



# TEACHING AND RESEARCH

“Community activists have had the University make promises about working together but very little has happened... the University has over promised and under delivered”

Local politician

“The University needs to focus its assets on the political economy of Northern Ireland...and the environment is a critical issue too”  
Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

“I want Queens to be ambitious, absolutely, and I want it to be out there and as a part of societal life in Belfast in a very diverse way. But I think that it seems to be trying to sell something that it's not”

Media Production

“What we tend to see is individual academics working with community and voluntary organisations. Never the institution... it tries – such as the Science Shop – but it never quite delivers...but there is a fragmented corporate-institutional relationship between the University and wider society”

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

# MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Holylands issue is a persistent negative media story, damaging the University's reputation.

Uneven contribution to media discussion on big issues.

Shying away from asserting academic freedom.

Could publicise better both staff and student achievements.

# MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

“The Queen’s communications team is simply about spinning good news stories and it doesn’t give us a sense of what Queen’s is actually about ... It's the institution’s impression of itself rather than giving us a sense of the diversity of Queen’s.

Media Production

It needs to improve protection of academic freedom and stand by its academics when they are invariably attacked.... More collegial and employer-employee solidarity with its staff.

Legal sector

“They used to do profiles of graduates at graduation times, for example someone who overcome their disability and had a 2:1 or, someone from foster care or, but you don’t see any of that now” Journalist

“The Holylands is the main thing I think about in terms of Queen’s media profile, and the perception is that Queen’s is an absentee landlord...a laissez faire attitude that is not good enough...and you cannot blame individual students for a systemic issue”

Energy Sector professional

The workings of the Senate are not always as transparent as we would want it to be, we obviously understand the University is autonomous, but it seems to be really a current theme”

Political Representative

# POTENTIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

“All the links in the chain of a publicly funded body should be scrupulously looked at ... Queen’s has the opportunity to set standards because of its size and influence and the position that it holds”

Trade Union official

“The big thing that is missing is how do we use the corporate intelligence of the University for the good of society and policy making... the University has a responsibility to ensure people are not taking policy positions based on ideology and ignorance”

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

“I’d like to see the University be more vocal and unapologetic about advocating for young people... to have a future...it should see itself as having some skin in the game about how society is run and organised”

Trade Union official

“The University should establish a multidisciplinary team of top-end academics to address and provide solutions to a local social problem”

Community Voluntary Sector Leader

“My thought for Queens is how do you balance preserving and enhancing your role as a civic space for discourse and debate, particularly when you move through a particularly complicated period”.

Political Representative

# POTENTIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

“The university should consider breaking up large tenders to enable local firms to have a better chance to bid for them”

Community and Voluntary Sector Leader

“Procurement should be broadened out to include a charter that only reputable businesses with a focus on unionised labour and apprenticeships etc.”

Trade Union official

“Housing is definitely something the University can do something about, particularly for young students”

Trade Union official

“There is a space around the climate agenda to influence policy, and there is a need for good, independent academic research on Brexit”

Energy Sector professional

“Climate change x 10000. Also the financial inequality of life in the UK”  
Documentary film-maker

Northern Ireland has an abysmal track record in economic policy-making and I would say Queens is strangely slightly under represented in that debate than it could be ... All of these things are even more important because of the inevitably shifting context in Northern Ireland in the next 5 to 10 years.

Political Representative

“mental health issues should be more prominent in what the university does and contributes to the community”.

Faith leader

# POTENTIAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Structured community involvement in strategic development.
- Queen's to become a 'civic anchor institution' for Belfast and Northern Ireland.
- Belfast and NI to be promoted and considered by Queen's as a 'living lab'.
- Teaching and research should be supported and prioritised to include and become embedded within local communities.

# CONCLUSIONS

The emerging findings in this ongoing stakeholder analysis point to a range of exciting future pathways that could find substantial support within our local communities and among staff and students.

However, the finalising of any Strategic Plan needs to be postponed until such a time as the findings of this ongoing and growing body of research, alongside meaningful consultation with staff and students, can be included.

This Working Group agrees with other consultants that Queen's could play a transformative role in its local environment but we also think that any Strategic Plan will need strong buy-in from staff, students and local communities to be able to achieve its goals.