



QUBUCU Newsletter

In this newsletter:

Covid Dispute- State of Play	2
What will Queen's Look Like in 2030? It is up to us to decide	3
Money and People in Queens 2019-20	4
General Meeting: Wednesday 09 December at 2pm via Teams	9
Staff and Students United	10
Intellectual Property Agreement	10
Officer and Committee Positions available	11
Holidays and Discretionary Days	11

Covid Dispute- State of Play

We end the year as we started- in dispute with our employer. The USS and Four Fights national dispute is still ongoing, albeit shadowed and paradoxically, in the case of the Four Fights, amplified by the Covid crisis. Our local dispute was borne out of Queen's University continuing to hold face to face lectures and compel Professional Services staff to work on campus when it was entirely unnecessary. The rhetoric of the safety of the campus has not gone away, and it will not go away in upcoming months. Colleagues in Professional Services are still being forced to work on campus, and the plans for teaching in semester 2 are not yet clear. The question therefore remains, why? The six months from March to September showed that our work can be done effectively (sometimes more effectively) from home and the PHA guidance remains that if you can work from home, you should work from home. Mercifully, we appear to be on the last stretch of the hunt for a vaccine so we should be doing everything possible to ensure the spread of this virus is as minimal as possible for the time-being. We know students don't like connected learning. We shouldn't be encouraging staff and students to come to campus when queries can be solved remotely. We should be looking after ourselves and each other in the wider community as if it is a matter of life or death. Because, for a some of us, it is.

In terms of the Four Fights, I don't need to explain how the pandemic has caused additional pressures in terms of pay, workloads, inequality and casualisation. Many of us have had vast decreases in our household incomes due to loss of income from industries like entertainment or hospitality. Our workloads have sky-rocketed be it through the preparation for connected learning, supporting our students who are struggling with the new way of life, recruiting and enrolling our freshers, supporting staff and colleagues whose mental health is suffering, preparing campus for the return of staff and students...the list goes on. Many of us have been doing this with children at home, partners who are working on the front line, while worrying about parents or other vulnerable friends and family, with fear over what the future holds. Working what would be considered 'normal hours' was impossible for a lot of us. 4am emails have been a common occurrence. We saw how Covid disproportionately affected some groups in our society and had implications for our colleagues. Some of us who are working on campus have had established flexible working patterns changed, without consultation, to meet a non-existent demand for in-person service. Our most precarious of members are facing a disproportionate impact on their careers, with fixed-term contracts being made redundant at an alarming rate, and lesser recruitment for Teaching Assistants and some of those who were offered work have had to decline as there was no option to teach remotely at the start of the semester. It has been a tough road for everyone this semester.

The plans for next semester are, at the time of writing, still unclear. The worst case scenario is that we start January as we did in September. I know that many of you felt that we should have been taking harder action back then, however we were still deep in negotiation with university management and were confident that constructive dialogue was the best strategy. When it became clear that this was not getting us anywhere, we declared our dispute. The formal conciliation process we entered into concluded without agreement and our fortnightly meetings with senior management were cancelled. We now understand that good faith can be taken for granted and sometimes more is needed. The dispute remains live, and we are ready to escalate at any time, should this be required.

What will Queen's Look Like in 2030? It is up to us to decide...

As the deeply divisive 'Vision 2020' draws to a close, a new future awaits Queen's University – the question is what will that look like?

Over the summer, the Vice-Chancellor and his leadership team gathered external consultancy designed to help shape a new Strategic Plan and this information was presented to Senate in September. You can find out more about how this strategic planning is shaping up [here](#). But nothing is yet set in stone, and that is just as well because the consultation documents made mention of potential cost-cutting: highlighting small and therefore non-lucrative programmes, the possibility of 'right-sizing' courses, and an increase in work 'flexibility'.

Staff Reps on Senate and the UCU Officers were also worried that management's stakeholder analysis failed to offer a fully cross-community consultation, with some sectors of Northern Irish society entirely missing. There was also an absence of the voices of staff, students and graduates.

In response, we mobilised a team of staff and students, who conducted their own alternative consultation of stakeholders - drawing on some of the same sectors as those already targeted in the initial consultation, but adding those who were either under-represented or completely absent. Interviews were conducted with individuals from law, media and communication, the arts, community organisations, trade unions, political parties and more. And the results were really fascinating.

The [findings](#) offer a powerful narrative about what happens to a University that undertakes the marketisation of higher education. Our stakeholders often found Queen's to be disconnected with its social environment, disengaged with the community and failing in its role of offering access to higher education for the working classes. They were dismayed by the reduction of course diversity over the years; some mentioned the difficulty Queen's found in defining its identity, identifying an inability to spell out what it stood for. Many perceived Queen's as an exclusive place unable to fully embrace diversity and inclusion. We used this work to show the importance of a wider consultation and a meaningful process of staff and students participation ([see more here](#)). The team also completed a staff survey on their priorities for the future of the University and is in the process of gathering the views of students on the same subject. Preliminary results show that staff would like to see much greater democracy and transparency in institutional decision-making and regard mountainous workloads and a lack of trust in their expertise and professionalism as major concerns in their working lives.

When we told the Vice-Chancellor about our findings, he and the Registrar arranged to meet with us to discuss their plans for the University's future and our findings. This was a very positive conversation and we are delighted to be able to tell you that **the Vice-Chancellor has committed to a process of co-creation with staff and students** to ensure that the Strategic Plan is something everyone can embrace. However, the current schedule for the development of the Plan is tight and the format for effective, participatory co-creation remains unclear.

We consider it vital that staff, students and community stakeholders take an active role in the design and development of this new Strategy. To this end, **a campaign has been launched, called *We Are the University!*** In the coming days, the [We Our the University](#) crowd-sourcing initiative will go live. This will be an online space that will allow us to develop ideas, and identify priorities that we want to see included in Queen's new strategy, whether it is about workload, sustainability, casualisation, curriculum diversity, academic freedom or the need to be a much more inclusive workplace. So this is

an invitation to bring your ideas to the table and help us shape the future of Queen's! And it is your ideas as staff, students and stakeholders of this University that UCU will advance at the negotiation table. But this process reaches far beyond the board rooms of Queen's, as we intend the campaign to engage with people outside of this institution – creating a real conversation in our society about our future direction.

What happens next cannot be a re-play of Vision 2020, a top-down affair with little buy-in from those who were tasked with achieving its goals. It is time to make Queen's University's strategic planning reflect the needs and aspirations of staff, students and local communities. For the first time in a long time, we are excited about what the future might hold but we need your help to turn ideas into action.

Money and People in Queens 2019-20

In November Senate approved the Annual Report 2019-20. This combined the Financial Statements and the V-C's Annual Report. This 134 page report contains not only the financial accounts and the accompanying explanatory notes but also a description of the achievements of the Queens community.

The Report is a public document and you should be able to read it on the QUB website. It is a mine of information and this article is based upon it. The financial figures are from the Consolidated Accounts (the University and its associated companies).

Higher Education Funding in NI

The HE funding gap is ~9% between NI and England. These funding shortfalls create a competitive disadvantage for QUB against its comparative UK universities. This chronic underfunding is the underlying cause of many of the problems facing staff in Queen's.

The imposition of a succession of budget reductions since 2010/1 has resulted in a 'structural deficit' in HE funding which the Department for Enterprise acknowledged was of the order of £34M based upon 1917-18 data. For 2019-20 core government funding for teaching and research was held at 2018/9 levels representing a further real term reduction of 2%. The situation will continue to get worse until politicians take action.

In addition the NI government is not funding sufficient HE places locally. Only 60% of demand for university places from students from NI is being met locally, and therefore over 13,000 Northern Ireland Students are pursuing their studies in other parts of the UK. And when they graduate, few of these students return to work in Northern Ireland. This net outflow of talent will inevitably undermine the delivery of the priorities in the Executive's draft Program for Government (PfG) and Industrial Strategy. The growth of a sustainable knowledge economy requires an investment in graduates, skills, research and innovation. **Further disinvestment in HE is wholly incompatible with the draft PfG and the Industrial Strategy. There are many benefits that a good university confers on the community, and QUB's economic impact has recently been analysed by London Economics. We contribute £1.9 billion to the UK economy. See: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/corporate-plan/innovation-impact/News/QueensUniversitycontributes19billiontoUKeconomy.html>.**

Local politicians are preoccupied with Covid-19 and the local impact of Brexit so it may be some time before they turn their attention to the funding of Higher Education. The First Minister has floated the idea of higher student fees. While urging the need for more funding, UCU is opposed to increasing student fees because of the impact on accessibility.

QUB has an Operational Surplus of £4.9M

Despite the chronic NI Government underfunding, QUB had an operational surplus on day-to-day activities of £4.9M for 2019-20, which is 1.2% of income. This is down from £8.8M for the previous year. The Annual Report states that: “Whilst the University achieved a satisfactory financial performance in 2019-20, significant elements of the operational surplus position were of a non-recurrent nature and earmarked for specific purposes. The underlying position is therefore, an operational deficit from our core activities of education and research.”

Summary Position – Statement of Comprehensive Income (SOI)

Consolidated finances of Queens University and its subsidiary companies and its share of joint ventures	2019-20 £M	2018-19 £M
Income	377.0	372.3
Expenditure	(372.1)	(363.5)
Operational Surplus before USS provision & gains & losses	4.9	8.8
USS Provision	50.0	(72.9)
Gains on the disposal of fixed assets and investments	8.5	0.1
Surplus/(Deficit)	63.4	(64.0)
Fair value gain on investment	58.9	35.0
Actuarial adjustment in respect of Retirements Benefit Plan (RBP)	(20.1)	(9.3)
Total Comprehensive Surplus/(Deficit) Position for the Year	102.2	(38.3)

The items below Operational Surplus in the table are beyond the direct control of QUB management and are very variable from year to year. When taken into account they result in the Total Comprehensive Deficit or Surplus. QUB management state that the Operational Surplus is a better measure of financial sustainability as it is less susceptible to the movements in the actuarial valuations of pension schemes and market conditions prevailing at the financial year end.

The Total Comprehensive Surplus meant that QUB Reserves increased by £102.2M to £629.7M (of which £564.2M is Unrestricted Reserves). The main reason for the change is the USS Provision. The USS Deficit has to be paid off over a few years by the employers. The USS Provision is the extra money that has to be set aside to meet QUB’s share of this obligation. Due to a new USS Valuation and Deficit Recovery Plan the Provision has been reduced by £50M. However it is likely to rise again next year when the latest valuation is finalised.

The Retirements Benefit Plan is a pension scheme for QUB’s non-USS staff. As QUB is the sole employer any actuarial changes enter into the accounts in a different way. RBP’s deficit had increased to £62.2M at 31 July 2020.

Fair Value Gain on Investments – which is the change in the market value of our investments held – is only a sum of money on paper and may be very different if, and when, they are turned into actual cash. This year it was due to a gain in non-current investment with slight losses in other investments and property.

Total Government Grants decreased 2% in cash compared to last year. The main parts of the £99.3M of Government Grants are: Teaching £50.4M (an increase of 1.1% in cash on the previous year), and Research £32.5M (a decrease of 7.8% in cash). 26% of QUB’s income was Government Grants, 34% Tuition Fees & Educational Contracts, and 24% Research Grants & Contracts. **Income from non-governmental sources was £267.9M, an increase of 2%. There is a target of £296M by 2021.**

The contribution to indirect costs from research grants and contracts remained at 18% despite a high priority being to increase it to 20% by 2020/1. The target for International tuition fee income for the year was £46.2M, but only £43.8M was achieved. However, this was an increase of £8.0M or 22% on last year. International tuition fee income was 12% of QUB’s total income. **47% of QUB’s**

income is connected to teaching (up from 44% last year) and 32% to research (down from 35%). This is a significant shift in the sources of funding, so why is Teaching still the poor relation of Research in the minds of some managers?

Other income, which includes income from Queen's Sport, the Students' Union, Eventus, Culture and Arts, Campus Food and Drink, commercial rental properties and VAT recovery, decreased by £3.8M from 2018-19. The total also includes £1.0M from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Expenditure on the core Estate is 2.3% of the Insurable Replacement Value. This is down from 3.7 % last year and even higher figures in previous years, and represents a better balance of expenditure between buildings and people.

Staff costs were £230.6M, which was 61% of income and a 7.9% increase on last year. **This included an increase of £5.3M in pension and National Insurance payments. Most staff lost take-home pay for similar reasons. Total salaries increased by 6.9% but, as average staff numbers increased 4.5%, average gross pay increased by only 2.3%**

Because of the Total Comprehensive Income gain, **QUB's Consolidated Reserves stood at £629.7M at 31 July 2020.** Of this, £64.8M has restrictions on how the money could be spent. Of the £564.9M unrestricted reserves, £360.4M is unrealised and relates to the revaluation of fixed assets and investments. The value may be very different if, and when, they are turned into actual cash. The realised reserves are £204.5M much of which is ring-fenced to support the Capital Programme and Faculties and Professional Services in executing their priorities and plans.

The Financial Impact of Covid-19

There was a reduction in research income of £2.0M due to the constraints on our ability to carry out research during the period of lockdown.

As a consequence of Covid-19, and off campus working, other operating expenditure which includes utilities, consumables and laboratory expenditure, travel and hospitality reduced in the final quarter of the financial year.

All of the commercial activities within the Student Plus Directorate were impacted by Covid-19, and the financial outturn reflects the refund of student accommodation charges for those students who as a consequence of Covid19 cancelled their contract in the final semester of 2019-20.

The coronavirus pandemic caused an initial shock to financial markets and global economy reducing the valuation of QUB's investments in the year by £6.9M or 5%.

QUB's holdings of cash and short-term deposits increased due to the reduced operational and capital expenditure as a consequence of Covid-19.

Detailed financial estimates for 2020-21 are being prepared for Senate. After reviewing cash flow forecasts for the next 12 months Senate is of the opinion that, taking account of the severe but plausible downsides, including the anticipated ongoing impact of Covid-19, QUB will have sufficient funds to meet their liabilities as the fall due. So QUB remains a Going Concern for next year, and hopefully for many to come.

QUB's long-term external borrowing is 7% of income. This enables us to withstand the financial shocks of Covid-19 and Brexit better than our peer group of universities which averaged 40% for 2018-19.

How USS Affects QUB'S Accounts

As USS is a multi-employer pension scheme it is impossible to assign assets and liabilities to an individual institution. Accounting principles mean that the cost of USS appears in QUB's accounts in

two parts. The first is the employer's part of the pension contribution paid into USS for each relevant member of staff. In 2019-20 this totalled £24.8M and it appears as part of staff costs.

But the employers are also required to pay off in a planned way over a few years any Deficit in USS funds declared by the Trustees. This obligation appears in the Balance Sheet as a Provision (*i.e.* money that has to be set aside). Any change in the Provision appears in the annual accounts as an Expenditure.

There is fierce arguments going on about the assumption to be used in the March 2020 USS valuation. In the worse cases there would be large increases in the contributions paid by QUB and members and in the Provision required.

Staff Vacancies and Pay Inequality Remain High

The QUB accounts contain data on average staff numbers by major category:

Average staff	2014/5	2015/6	2016/7	2017/8	2018/9	2019/20
Academic	1,145	1,098	1,053	1,100	1,196	1,256
Research	572	559	572	642	669	694
Acad. Related	628	704	726	795	833	901
Technical	293	898	906	960	1,008	1025
Clerical	667					
Other	446	430	453	452	481	499
Total	3,753	3,689	3,710	3,949	4,187	4,375

This year the vacancy level (proportion of posts unfilled) averaged over all staff was: 5.7% against a target level of 5% and both are high compared to other universities and other industries. The reduction of the vacancy level has been a high priority of management for several years. So far they have not achieved the target. **This level of vacancies throws crippling extra work on the remaining staff and causes low morale, but I estimate that it saves QUB about £13M p.a. compared to fully filled posts.** QUB management blamed the cuts in HE funding in NI for the poor staff/student ratio. This is only partially true: **underfunding causes fewer posts, but the fact that so many of them are vacant is squarely the fault of management. When are they going to grasp the fact that staff recruitment is strongly influenced by pay net of pension contributions, workload and security of employment?**

The number of Research staff increased by 25. While this is welcome, virtually all these posts are fixed-term so that **the number of staff in insecure employment is increasing. Even more insecure are the teaching assistants, temporary lecturers and other temporary staff.** They are not included in the table, but the variation in their number is indicated by the expenditure on them: 2015, £6,446K; 2016, £5,533K; 2017, £4,547K; 2018, £4,716K; 2019, £5,222K; 2020, £4,669K

By law the accounts must show the number of staff being paid £100,000 or more excluding employer's pension contributions, NHS merit payments and the NHS share of clinical Joint Appointments.

Pay	2020	2019
c	6	3
£105K to <£110K	6	3
£110K to <£115K	5	9
£115K to <£120K	6	5
£120K to <£125K	3	2
£125K to <£130K	1	3
£130K to <£135K	2	-

£135K to <£140K	4	3
£140K to <£145K		-
£145K to <£150K	1	-
£150K to <£155K		-
£155K to <£160K		-
£160K to <£165K		-
£165K to <£170K		1
£170K to < £175K	1	
£210K to <£215K		-
£295K to <£300K		1
£305K to < 310K	1	
Total:	35	30

The people in the table would be the VC, Registrar, Administrative Directors, Pro-V-Cs, and many Heads of School. **A few very distinguished professors (grades 3 and 4) are in the lower pay bands; otherwise no non-clinical academic would get into this table unless they were given a substantial payment for a management role.**

What about the very top-paid managers? By law the QUB accounts contain a figure for the total compensation paid to Key Personnel (having authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the University). We understand this was taken to be the University Executive Board (V-C, Pro-V-Cs, Registrar, Director of Finance, Director of Marketing, Recruitment, Communications and Internationalisation, Director of People and Culture). There were 11 people in this group in 2019-20 and 2018/9 and 9.3 FTE in 2017/8. The total compensation for the group was £1.563M in 2014/5, £1.642M in 2015/6, £1.818M in 2016/7, £1.697M in 2017/8, £2.135M in 2018/9 and was £2.354M in 2019-20. **The total has risen 50% in 5 years! Over the same time period the total cost of all QUB staff rose 32% and the average cost of each person rose 12%! We see that, when it comes to pay and other benefits, there continues to be one rule for top managers and another for the rest of the staff.**

In 2019-20 the Vice Chancellor was paid £306K and cost a further £6K in contributions to USS. The V-C has to occupy the VC's Lodge, and his personal use of it was evaluated as a non-taxable benefit of £15K. The VC's basic salary is 8.4 times the median pay of staff and his total remuneration is 6.9 times the total remuneration of staff. In these ratios staff does not include workers who are not employed under contract by the University (*i.e.* insecure worker).

Paul Hudson

General Meeting: Wednesday 09 December at 2pm via Teams

Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996

For those of us that are working on campus, or are expected to return to working on campus in the coming months, we wish to draw your attention to your rights in relation to health and safety at work.

As a staff member you are entitled to be provided with a copy of the university risk assessment, and any risk assessment for your work location.

The statutory right for individuals regarding health and safety can be found in the relevant clauses of Section 68 of The Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996:

68.—(1) An employee has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that—

(c) being an employee at a place where—

(i) there was no such representative or safety committee, or

(ii) there was such a representative or safety committee but it was not reasonably practicable for the employee to raise the matter by those means,

he brought to his employer's attention, by reasonable means, circumstances connected with his work which he reasonably believed were harmful or potentially harmful to health or safety,

(d) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent and which he could not reasonably have been expected to avert, he left (or proposed to leave) or (while the danger persisted) refused to return to, his place of work or any dangerous part of his place of work, or

(e) in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent, he took (or proposed to take) appropriate steps to protect himself or other persons from the danger.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(e) whether steps which an employee took (or proposed to take) were appropriate is to be judged by reference to all the circumstances including, in particular, his knowledge and the facilities and advice available to him at the time.

As this legislation is designed to protect the individual, trade unions are unable to use it collectively, therefore it is for members to exercise their own judgement whether to utilise the statutory right should you believe you are being placed in serious and imminent danger.

If you have any individual queries regarding this, please contact us. Alternatively, Belfast District and Trade Council (BDTC) are presenting a webinar relating to health and safety at work legislation. 'Your Rights, Their Wrongs' will take place on Zoom on Wednesday 09 December at 7pm. Please register if you are interested in hearing more from the experts.



Staff and Students United

At our October committee meeting, it was unanimously agreed that we should direct some branch funds to support an initiative from a local business to support our students who were self-isolating or quarantining. This business had sourced food and necessities from local suppliers who were willing to donate their products to keep our students fed and comfortable while they were confined to accommodation. Some of the stories we heard from students at the start of the semester were tough to listen to. It is not the time or the place to explore this in any greater detail, other than to say that they should have never been put in that position in the first place, but we were glad to have an opportunity to help.



Intellectual Property Agreement

Despite what you may have been told, we are yet to formally agree the IP Agreement that has been outstanding since June. When we started our discussions any and all materials posted online were to be deemed property of the university to do with as they pleased. We have been able to move to a space whereby lecturers have to give consent to the university to use their materials, however we are still awaiting agreement around how student misconduct relating to recorded materials will be dealt with. We will confirm when this is agreed under separate cover.

Officer and Committee Positions available

We have some vacancies on our Officers team and our Staff Reps team. Having different voices and experiences involved in setting the agenda for our branch going forward with strengthen us and ensure we are representative of our membership. If you are interested in getting more involved, please contact with us for a no-pressure chat!

Holidays and Discretionary Days

The Officer's team welcomed the news that staff are permitted to carry forward a maximum of 15 days if untaken from this year's annual leave allowance. It was one of the very first requests we made back in April, so we were very happy to see it get over the line in October. We were surprised by the awarding of the two discretionary days on 21 and 22 December. Then we discovered some of the other Russell Group institutions had already implemented this... Anyway, enjoy your very well-deserved time off over the holidays. We will see you in 2021!