

6 December 2022

Eilish McGoldrick
Democratic Services Officer
Belfast City Council
Via-Email: McGoldrickE@belfastcity.gov.uk

Dear Eilish,

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 November 2022 in relation to my appearance at the special meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee held on 26 October 2022.

You have asked for further information in relation our Widening Participation Programme, our cost-of-living assistance and in relation to student intake and the potential funding costs might have on future admissions. Please find the requested information below:

Widening Participation Programmes

The University has a range of Widening Participation programmes aimed at both primary and post-primary age pupils. These programmes are designed to introduce the concept of continuing in education, assist them in making qualification choices that will assist their entry to further or higher education, study techniques and academic mentoring.

This link provides information on all of our Widening Participation activities:
<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/wpu/>

Some 30% of Queen's University students come from the most disadvantaged quintiles. The University's Pathway Opportunity Programme provides direct assistance to students who have the ability to succeed at Queen's but are unlikely to gain admission due their circumstances.

Participation in the programme provides the chance to:

- Receive a reduced grade conditional offer or a guaranteed interview (where applicable).
- Receive a £1,000 Kilwaughter Minerals Bursary to help with their studies at Queen's.
- Meet like-minded students and get to know a range of Academics and staff.
- Attend a completely free Summer School that gives them the chance to study as a Queen's student.
- Improve and build a range of skills such as study skills, confidence, and knowledge.
- Get support and help with applications and transitioning into University life.

A total of 300 students started the Pathway Opportunity Programme in January 2022 and they are currently applying on UCAS for a September 2023 entry. Our target is for 50% of those to gain admission to Queen's. We have 371 Pathway students currently in their undergraduate degrees.

Table 1 provides the most recent data for Pathway Opportunity Programme participants.

Table 1 Pathway Opportunity Programme participants

Cohort year Jan-Dec	Pathways	No of participants	Year entered Queen's	No entered Queen's
2017	3 pathways: Computer Science, Food Microbiology & Environment, Law	60	Sep-18	12
2018	6 pathways: Archaeology & Palaeoecology, Business, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Food Microbiology & Environment, Law	112	Sep-19	35
2019	7 pathways: AHSS, Archaeology & Palaeoecology, Business, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Food Microbiology & Environment, Law	187	Sep-20	104
2020	8 pathways: AHSS, BioSci, Business, Computer Science, Engineering, Law, Medicine Dentistry & Biomedical Science, Natural & Built Environment	245	Sep-21	135
2021	10 pathways: AHSS, BioSci, Business, Computer Science, Engineering, Law, Medicine Dentistry & Biomedical Science, Natural & Built Environment, Pharmacy, Psychology	255	Sep-22	132
2022	13 pathways: AHSS, BioSci, Business, Computer Science, Engineering, Law, Mathematics & Physical Sciences, Medicine Dentistry & Biomedical Science, Natural & Built Environment, Nursing & Midwifery, Pharmacy, Psychology, Social Work	300	Sep-23	applying on UCAS now (Target 150)
2023	13 pathways: AHSS, BioSci, Business, Computer Science, Engineering, Law, Mathematics & Physical Sciences, Medicine Dentistry & Biomedical Science, Natural & Built Environment, Nursing & Midwifery, Pharmacy, Psychology, Social Work	300 planned (recruiting participants October/ November 2022)	Sep-24	(Target 150)

Cost of Living Assistance

You will be aware that the University recently announced a support package of £7.69m for the following interventions to assist students and staff:

- A total of 3,600 students who come from families earning under £25,000 will each receive a one-off payment of £400.
- All other students will receive a one-off payment of £150.
- University staff, excluding senior management, will receive payments of between £500 and £750 dependent on salary. This does not include individuals engaged through a recruitment agency as they are employed and paid by the recruitment agency, not the University.
- The University will also allocate £600,000 into a student support fund for international students. In addition to this, DfE have increased the funding allocation for student hardship funds with an additional £2.8m, bringing the total allocation to £5.6m for this year.

- The University provides a range of support and advice for students, including:
 - a daily drop in from 11am – 3pm.
 - Students' Union advice on budgeting, welfare entitlement, housing, and consumer rights, dealing with debt.
 - Budget calculator and financial advice and support.
 - Free period products.
 - The University is providing free breakfast for students.
 - In addition to the above, the University has suspended fees for late returns to the library and reduced by 50% the fines applicable for breaches of conduct regulations.

Student Numbers and Admissions

In relation to student numbers, we have approximately 25,000 students, of whom around 4,600 are international students. It is important to point out that international students do not and cannot displace students from the island of Ireland.

On your query regarding the impact of potential funding cuts, Queen's would have no option but to reduce places for Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland students at a rate of around 525 students per five percent cut – for example this would result in 1,050 or 1,575 less places respectively in the case of 10% and 15% funding reduction.

As explained at Committee, we also face a demographic surge of 18-year-olds and, between Queen's and Ulster University, we will need to provide around 5,000 extra places by the end of this decade just to stay still in terms of meeting demand.

You will be aware that the Westminster House of Commons Northern Ireland Select Committee recently produced a report on the current economic challenges they faced and made the following point in relation to Higher Education, with which we fully concur:

“The university cap leads many Northern Ireland students to leave to obtain high level qualifications, which they then take into employment elsewhere in the UK or overseas. This places a handbrake on the Northern Ireland economy, with international and other firms either less willing to invest in the first place or unable to fill job vacancies and increase their existing investments. We recognise that the cap is an Executive responsibility. However, we urge the Government to explore with the Executive, including through the NI Department for Economy's review of higher education funding, how the cap on university numbers might be raised to enable the retention of home-grown talent in Northern Ireland and an expansion of the high skilled sectors of its economy. (Paragraph 55)

Full report at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/120/northern-ireland-affairs-committee/news/174199/focus-on-skills-to-attract-investment-to-northern-ireland-mps-tell-government/>

Finally, my colleague Caroline Young, Director of Queen's University's Student Plus, is attending Committee on 7 December 2022 to speak on student accommodation alongside representatives from Ulster University and will be happy to address any issues you may wish to raise in relation to student numbers.

If you have any further queries regarding any of the issues above or on any matter pertaining to Queen's University, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Ryan Feeney
Director of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility