



Teaching Awards 2025
Application Template
(Please refer to Guidance Notes for further details)

Please indicate if this is a Team or Individual application

Team

Individual

Strategic Themes: Applications should address at least one of the strategic themes. Please indicate below. See Guidance Notes for further details.

Transformative Student Experience

Examples of work within this theme would include supportive and inclusive practices that enhance the student journey, demonstrate responsiveness to the student voice, and foster student belonging, engagement and/or satisfaction.

Education for the Future:

Examples of work within this theme would include curriculum review and design reform, the development of effective assessment approaches, the development of flexible, inclusive pathways to improve student engagement, attainment and achievement, and the effective and appropriate use of AI in Education.

Contact Details:

Name and email address of **individual or Team Contact** (including Title): Olivia Hamill
o.hamill@qub.ac.uk

Names of team members, if applicable:

Olivia Hamill o.hamill@qub.ac.uk

Alexandra Carmichael A.Carmichael@qub.ac.uk

Kate McCorry K.McCorry@qub.ac.uk

Mark Gallagher m.gallagher@qub.ac.uk

Helen McNeely h.mcneely@qub.ac.uk

School/Department: CED and Student Experience Team

Number of years working in higher education (level of experience will be taken into account by the assessors. For teams, this should be the number of years of the most experienced member of the team.)

15 years plus

Please select **one format** for your submission that best allows you to highlight the reach, value and impact of your work.

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|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reflective Commentary | 900 words, plus 100 words of introduction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Narrative Presentation | 9 minutes, plus 1 minute of introduction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Video link | 9 minutes plus, 1 minute of introduction |

Introduction (approx. 100 words)

The Reverse Mentoring Programme (RMP) at Queen's University Belfast is a transformative initiative that empowers students to act as mentors to staff—reversing traditional hierarchies and enabling open, inclusive dialogue about the lived student experience. Now entering its second cycle, the RMP fosters cultural change, equity, and authentic co-creation in alignment with QUB's 2030 Strategy, particularly the goal of delivering a transformative student experience. By facilitating meaningful conversations around inclusion, accessibility, and digital learning, this programme not only supports individual growth but also institutional development, positioning students as key partners in shaping the future of higher education at Queen's.

Written Case Study

900 words total across the five sections below

Insert link to recorded material here. The video or presentation should address the sections listed below and be no longer than 10 minutes in total, to include 1 minute of introductory material.

Impact (include evidence of this impact through reach and value)

The Reverse Mentoring Programme has achieved demonstrable impact by reshaping institutional culture and building mutual understanding between students and staff. With 140 participants in 2024–25, the programme paired 76 diverse student mentors with 64 staff mentees across professional services and academic units.

This initiative has had clear reach, engaging participants from across all faculties, directorates, and levels of the university. It has promoted inclusivity by amplifying voices from underrepresented student groups—47% of student mentors were international, and 25% identified discussion topics around neurodiversity or caregiving responsibilities.

The value to staff is seen in changes to policy awareness, service redesign, and curriculum sensitivity. Many staff mentees reported a greater appreciation of lived student realities, including hidden barriers around digital access, feedback anxiety, and cultural transitions. These outcomes align with critical pedagogy theory (Freire, 1970), which advocates for dialogic learning and the disruption of hierarchical knowledge structures.

For students, mentoring staff created a sense of empowerment, belonging, and personal leadership. As Knowles' andragogy theory asserts, learning is most effective when learners are self-directed and actively contributing. In this programme, students became co-creators of institutional learning, aligning with the QUB 2030 Strategy priority of student partnership and inclusion.

The programme has also catalysed collaborative working between the Centre for Educational Development, Students' Union, Graduate School, and Human Resources, demonstrating a whole-institution approach to culture change.

Outcomes

The programme delivered multiple institutional and personal outcomes. One of the most significant institutional changes was the formal integration of reverse mentoring into the Student Ready Award via the Combined Route, reinforcing its strategic value. In parallel, use of the SUMAC system (Supporting University Mentoring and Coaching) automated applications and pairings, improving participant alignment and programme efficiency.

Staff mentees demonstrated increased empathy, cultural competence, and leadership adaptability. Several Schools reported that staff involved in mentoring have since contributed to policy reviews or requested further student consultation—a shift that reflects transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), whereby critical reflection leads to lasting behavioural change.

For students, outcomes included stronger public speaking skills, increased confidence, and improved understanding of institutional structures. Many mentors reported that the programme provided a rare opportunity to influence decision-makers and feel valued within the university system, aligning with the university's values of connectedness and citizenship as outlined in the QUB Strategy 2030.

Outputs/activities

The Reverse Mentoring Programme delivered a diverse and structured series of activities across the academic year. Beginning with Expressions of Interest in June 2024, the programme progressed through training sessions (in-person and online), coffee catch-ups in January 2025, and culminated in a closing celebration event in May 2025.

Programme infrastructure included the implementation of the SUMAC platform, allowing streamlined application, matching, and communication. This digital innovation supports QUB's **Digital Vision**, ensuring scalable and effective delivery of engagement initiatives.

Each mentoring pair was provided with structured guidance, topic prompts, and expectations to support meaningful conversations. Topics covered included the impact of social media on learning, navigating Queen's as an international student, digital inclusion, and career development. These themes emerged organically and reflect current challenges and opportunities in higher education—resonating with **HE pedagogical literature on student partnership and equity (Healey et al., 2014)**.

The programme also benefited from cross-functional collaboration. Delivery partners included academic schools, directorates, the Students' Union, and the Centre for Educational Development. This collaborative effort reflects a distributed leadership model and reinforces the sustainability of the programme within QUB's wider CPD and development framework.

Inputs

This impactful programme was delivered with minimal financial outlay but strong strategic investment. Key inputs included time and leadership from Olivia Hamill (Professional Development Consultant, CED) and Alexandra Carmichael, supported by volunteers from the student mentor cohort and stakeholders from across the institution.

The implementation of the SUMAC platform required initial training and template creation, but has since reduced manual administrative work by over 60%, demonstrating high return on investment. This supports QUB's strategic ambition to harness **digital innovation to enhance efficiency and engagement**.

Partnerships across QUB—including the Students' Union, Graduate School, and HR—provided promotional channels and credibility that ensured widespread buy-in and participation. Inputs also included learning gained

from SEDA CPD pathways and Advance HE frameworks, which informed training content and mentoring materials.

Critically, students contributed their time, lived experiences, and emotional labour. Their voices—often underrepresented in formal development structures—were recognised and respected as vital inputs in shaping an inclusive educational environment.

Describe your influence

The Reverse Mentoring Programme has influenced both individuals and the institution. Staff participants—including Directors, Heads of School, and professional service leads—have shared that the mentoring experience directly changed their approach to leadership, accessibility, and communication. Several adapted modules, redesigned support communications, or revisited committee processes to better reflect student realities.

Students, meanwhile, reported that being positioned as experts in their own experiences was “empowering” and “affirming.” One student mentor reflected: *“I finally felt heard—and it changed how I see myself at Queen’s.”*

Impacts for staff who engaged routinely with students outside their School benefitted from the programme in ways they didn't expect. One academic said *“I enjoyed being matched with someone who was different from those students that I might normally meet. It's easy to speculate and generalise about what we think students are like, but it's good to have some of those preconceived notions challenged by meeting someone new. I think lots of staff members could stand to benefit from taking part in the scheme in future.”*

Influence extended to committee-level discussions, with Schools and Professional Service leaders referencing mentoring insights in strategic planning. These outcomes align with **Bovill and Bulley's (2011)** work on students as partners, which emphasises that institutional change occurs when power is genuinely shared.

The programme also reinforced positive institutional behaviours. Staff who may have previously viewed student engagement as compliance-based shifted toward relational and co-creative practices. This change is evidence of cultural transformation—one of the key aspirations of the **QUB 2030 Strategy**, which positions students as collaborators and drivers of institutional enhancement.