



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

**FACULTY OF  
ARTS, HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES**

# MAKING THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR



## Welcome to Queen's University Belfast and welcome also to the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

As you start your university degree, you are likely to be feeling a mixture of emotions. No doubt you are excited about this new beginning but equally you are likely to feel slightly daunted. Be assured that you are not alone! Fellow students and staff at Queen's are here to support and guide you.

You are certainly beginning your university education at a difficult yet exciting time. Living with a global pandemic is likely to have changed your vision of what university life would look like. At the same time, the challenges facing society today are multi-dimensional and complex with unprecedented consequences. Across the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, social, political and economic factors are forcing us to critically evaluate existing assumptions and develop innovative solutions. Our goal is that your degree will equip you with both subject expertise and the skills to evaluate information, to debate and critique assumptions and beliefs and to contribute to creative solutions for the advancement of an ethical and sustainable society.


At Queen's our desire is for you to have an excellent learning experience and this is reflected in our Campus Commitment (<https://www.qub.ac.uk/our-campus-commitment/>) consistent with public health guidelines. Academics have developed a blend of online and face-to-face lectures, seminars and tutorials to ensure that you are fully engaged and supported in your learning. This may vary across modules and we will continue to evolve and adapt teaching as regulations permit.

As a new undergraduate student, you will almost certainly find some very significant differences between the experience of studying at university and the learning formats you knew at school or in college. We hope that the information provided here will answer some of the initial questions you might have about these differences and equip you with some valuable practical advice to support your transition to life at Queen's. We recommend that you keep this booklet handy – and refer to it regularly during your time at Queen's and as new challenges arise and you progress through the course of your studies. In addition, don't forget that you will find lots more useful information on the My Queen's website (<https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/my-queens/>) and your Personal Tutor will also be happy to discuss with you any issues of concern.

Can I assure you that you will find staff at Queen's, both academic and support staff, are eager to support you and help you make a really effective transition to university-level study.

I wish you all the very best for an intellectually stimulating and personally rewarding time at Queen's. I sincerely hope that you will take advantage of all the opportunities open to you and in the future, you will reflect on this stage of your life as the most exciting, developmental and inspiring time that shaped who you are and your role in society. Be ambitious, be adaptable and be ethical.

**Professor Nola Hewitt-Dundas**  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Arts,  
Humanities and Social Sciences



**A key difference in university is that much of your study will be independent, and this can take some getting used to**

### **Introducing the University**

Queen's is a large university with more than 23,000 students. The majority of our students are undergraduates – that is a student normally taking a first degree. Each student is on a particular degree programme which is overseen by a particular School, which is located in a Faculty.

Queen's has three Faculties: the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, where you are based; the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences; and, the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences.

The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences comprises five Schools:

- School of Arts, English and Languages
- School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics
- School of Law
- Queen's Management School
- School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work

### **Studying as an Undergraduate**

University offers students many opportunities, both academic and personal, to learn, to discover and to engage with others. We are keen to ensure that you can make the most of the opportunities available to you and to make the transition to life as an undergraduate student as smooth as possible for you.

Two really important resources for helping you through the move to university life are:

'My Queen's' (<https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/my-queens>) where you will find a wealth of information and guidance; and the excellent online 'Transition Skills for University' module (<https://go.qub.ac.uk/transition>) which all students are strongly encouraged to complete. University life differs significantly from life at school or college, and the guidance that these resources provide will help you adapt.

One of the first things you will notice about university life is that your timetable will have fewer scheduled classes than at school or college. This is normal but remember that if you are a full-time student you should be engaged with your studies for around 40 hours per week. The 40 hours is made up of: your scheduled classes (initially, given the COVID-19 situation, in most cases a combination of face-to-face 'on campus' and online classes) – this includes attendance at lectures, seminars, tutorials and other timetabled activities; preparation for your attendance at and participation in each of these classes; engagement with additional 'connected learning' activities provided on Canvas, the University's virtual learning environment (e.g. recorded mini-lectures); further independent study which might involve finding and reading relevant materials; where required, group work with peers; preparatory work for and the writing of assignments (e.g. essays, reviews, reports, presentations); and, reflection on feedback and advice.

In certain weeks and for certain modules there may be lectures by invited speakers

or other research-led seminars, meetings with your Personal Tutor, opportunities to attend development sessions around careers and employability or study skills, as well as student society activities.

In some weeks you might find that you have little or no timetabled teaching. These are likely to be assessment weeks when assignments may be due or examinations held, or they might be Development Weeks when the University offers a range of opportunities for you to participate in activities that complement your studies, allow you to gain skills beyond your degree subject(s) or allow you to explore and experiment with new subject areas.

### **What you can be sure is that each week will be different!**

As you begin the semester you should initially allocate time fairly equally to each of your modules. As a rough guide, you may have no more than three contact hours per module (e.g. two one-hour lectures and one one-hour tutorial). You will need to allocate an additional 10 hours per week of independent study for each module. Some of this time will involve directed reading and other preparatory work (e.g. via Canvas) for tutorials or other types of class, other time will be for further or wider reading, research for assessed work, completion of other tasks set by the module convenor, discussions with other students, and the drafting and writing of assignments. Whilst these timings are just

a rough guide to get you going, remember that there will always be something to do and there will always be something new to learn.

### **Independent Study**

A lot of the learning that you will have to do whilst at university will be independent and this can take some getting used to. For each of your modules, there will be a schedule of classes, directed learning activities (e.g. required reading, set exercises), and assessment requirements. Details will be available on Canvas. You will be required to manage this work on your own. This means organising your time, making sure you understand module requirements, sourcing your own reading materials based on reading lists and advice from academic staff and, essentially, planning how you make the most of the opportunities that life at university offers.

Motivation is the key to becoming a successful learner. Of course you will need to put the time in, but as you begin your university career it is also important that you think about the quality of that time. You should try to work out quickly what pattern of work suits you best. Schedule your day and week in a way that works for you. Take breaks at the times that are right for you. And remember that independent study isn't just about working on your own. Schedule sessions with your peers to discuss issues raised in each of your modules, to reflect on challenges and to get the most from your







**In order to get the most out of your university experience, academically and personally, you need to engage fully in university life.**



feedback. This can help you get far more out of the reading, writing and other studying you do than you would on your own.

An important element of your studies will be your effective engagement with learning resources, particularly the Library and Canvas. Sometimes that will involve physically visiting the McClay Library and sometimes it will mean accessing materials on-line. Your School will make arrangements for you to familiarise yourself with the McClay Library. This will ensure you are aware of the ways in which the library's resources can be accessed and the support available from librarians. Library staff can assist you greatly in making the most of the available resources, so don't be afraid to ask!

Colleagues have produced a very useful interactive guide for students new to university life: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/elearning/transition-skills/>. It looks at expectations, understanding key academic resources, searching the web, plagiarism and referencing, social media and email, and revision. In addition, there is the 'Transition Skills for University' module (<https://go.qub.ac.uk/transition>) which, as already noted, all students are strongly encouraged to complete. And for further guidance, particularly regarding digital resources

available to help you in your studies, do explore the 'Digital Skills Discovery Hub' (<http://go.qub.ac.uk/StudentDigitalSkillsHub>) which has valuable resources and courses to help students to unlock their digital skills and support them to learn in an ever-changing and sometimes demanding digital environment.

And remember that your Personal Tutor will be able to provide more advice as you settle into a productive work pattern, and as you develop further your independence as a student.

### **Personal Tutor**

You have been allocated a Personal Tutor. Your Personal Tutor will be a member of academic staff and will be a key point of contact for all academic issues, and sometimes other challenges, during your time as an undergraduate. You will be invited to meet – this may be virtually or face-to-face – with your Personal Tutor regularly throughout the year to discuss day-to-day issues about university life and study, as well as specific issues such as feedback on your studies.

If and when you are seeking employment or applying for future study, your Personal Tutor might be someone you will want to write a

reference for you, so it is important that they get to know you.

Personal Tutors are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and available to support your learning. No query is too trivial or too great, so do not hesitate to contact your Personal Tutor. And remember that, if your Personal Tutor cannot assist you directly, they will be able to point you in the direction of someone who can. However, it is up to you to keep your Personal Tutor and, as appropriate, other staff, such as your module convenors or tutors, the School Office, informed of any particular difficulties you may be facing. If you don't let them know that you have an issue that needs to be addressed, they won't be able to help!

### **Staying Connected**

In order to get the most out of your university experience, academically and personally, you should engage as much as possible in university life. To assist you, Queen's has developed its 'My Queen's' webpages: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/my-queens/>

In terms of your studies, effective engagement means that you need to attend lectures and other classes, whether these are 'face-to-face' on campus or on-line, be prepared for these, be willing to participate fully in tutorials and seminars, engage in group work, and contribute effectively to discussions. You will also need to ensure that you meet deadlines and keep on top of your work, and this is where your time management skills are important. Make sure you know your timetable, assessment deadlines and arrangements for submission: this information will be included on Canvas or in module guides. If in any doubt ask the module convenor.

And getting involved socially is an important element of university life too, so make sure you take advantage of the wealth of opportunities available, including sports, clubs and societies, or even just catching up with friends over coffee. Spending time on campus, and in the area around Queen's, is the best way to make sure you develop friendships and stay connected.

### **Handbooks and Guides**

All Schools in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences produce a School handbook for their undergraduate students. This will be shared with you electronically at least. The handbook will provide you with useful information about your School and your degree programme, and will include essential information such as key staff contacts, School procedures, student representation, rules for classifying degrees and sources of student support. If you are studying on a joint degree which involves a subject in another School, you should also obtain a copy of that School's handbook. It will contain important information relating to teaching and assessment in that School.

Do keep this information to hand and refer to your handbook(s) regularly during the academic year.

You will also receive module guides, generally in electronic form via Canvas, for the modules you take each semester. Take the time to read these thoroughly at the outset of the module and refer back to them regularly during the semester. They will give you details of the topics to be covered, the assignments to be completed, deadlines, reading lists, and information on the learning outcomes and key skills to be gained from successful completion of the module. If you have any questions about a module, raise those questions with the module convenor.

### **Assignments**

For each module you take, you will be required to complete a number of assignments. Most of these will involve 'summative' assessment, i.e. they will be graded against marking criteria and contribute to your overall mark for the module. Other assignments will be formative and are designed to provide you with the opportunity to complete work on which you will receive feedback before you are required to complete an assignment involving summative assessment. You can expect feedback to be provided on all coursework assignments. Schools indicate the normal turnaround time for providing feedback on coursework assignments.

As for the type of assignments you will be required to complete, these will vary from module to module. Essays are a common form of assignment; and some modules, particularly in the second semester, have examinations. Other modules are coursework only and can involve presentations, reports, briefings, reviews, portfolios. The range of assignments used is extensive. The requirements for each module will be contained in the module guide. If you have any questions about what is required of you, do speak with your module tutor or the module convenor.

### Marking

Each assignment that is summatively assessed will be awarded a mark, normally out of 100 and so in accordance with the 'conceptual equivalents' scale used at Queen's. Details of this will be provided in your School handbook.

The pass mark for an assignment is 40. Most marks awarded fall within either the 50s - a 2.2 mark - or the 60s - a 2.1 mark. Excellent work will receive a 'first class' mark in the 70s or above. This marking scale - widely used in universities - is likely to be unfamiliar to you. Adjusting to it can take time. A mark in the 60s should not be met with disappointment; it is a very good mark at university level. A mark above 70 is excellent.

### Feedback

Feedback is a key element of your academic progress. Staff throughout the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences will provide you with constructive and helpful feedback to assist you in enhancing and improving your academic work. It is important that you familiarise yourself with your School's policy on assessment and feedback (and that of any other School in which you are taking a module). This information can be found in the School handbook.

Feedback takes a variety of forms.

The most obvious accompanies each assignment that has been submitted for assessment. In addition to a mark, you will receive an explanation of the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment as well as what



can be done to improve on the work in future assignments.

Other forms of feedback include: general advice to all students on a module on preparing assignments; individual meetings with academic staff; discussions and other oral feedback on class contributions and presentations; dedicated sessions with tutors to discuss assignments; and some subjects will be able to share sample answers showing the standards for which you should be aiming.

The people who will give this wide range of feedback include lecturers and tutors, module convenors, Personal Tutors and even fellow students. Be open to any offer of feedback, especially from academic staff, and pay attention not just to the marks you receive but importantly to the comments. Feedback is a crucially valuable tool in your learning experience - with the key objective being to take forward any previous feedback into future assignments and learning.

Again, your Personal Tutor, as well as other academic staff, can assist you in understanding the feedback you receive and using it constructively in future assessed work. For example, your Personal Tutor will also be able to guide you on making best use of the feedback you receive so as to help you to identify any patterns in your learning. The Learning Development Service in the Student Guidance Centre can also assist with advice on using feedback, as well as providing support in other areas of your academic work.

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