



Queen's University Belfast Social Charter Newsletter

AUGUST 2020. VOL 8

Welcome to this edition of the Queen's University Belfast Social Charter Newsletter. In this volume: QU assist StopCOVID NI app development; developments in male cancer research; free online learning courses; research into stress related aging and asthma; Widening Participation Unit reaches almost 300 pupils; Minister Sharma visits Queen's; BSc Arch 9th in the UK; QFT Reopens and Graduation News.

Queen's academics part of advisory group on StopCOVID NI app development

Researchers from Queen's University Belfast have provided independent oversight and expert advice in the development of the new StopCOVID NI app.

Professor Máire O'Neill, Director of the Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology (ECIT) and Dr David Wilson, Director of Engineering, ECIT, led the multidisciplinary working group from Queen's, alongside colleagues from Ulster University, the Department of Health and app developer Nearform, to provide independent oversight and assurance on areas such as cyber security, wireless and software engineering as the app has been readied for deployment across Northern Ireland.

A vital aspect of building public confidence in the app is that, when the COVID-19 pandemic is declared officially ended, the Expert Advisory Group should provide guidance and assurance that the project has been decommissioned, with appropriate deletion of any remaining data

"From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic I have articulated the need for a contact tracing app that has been developed transparently, is easy to use and has been implemented in a way which assures end user privacy. Only then can it garner public confidence and maximise voluntary uptake and efficacy. We welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues from Ulster University, the Department of Health and Nearform to provide an additional layer of independent oversight to the StopCOVID NI app."

Professor Máire O'Neill, Director of ECIT, Queen's University Belfast

Research with Impact:

Scientists discover three new genetic variants linked to male breast cancer

A team of researchers from Queen's and The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), London have discovered three new genetic changes that increase the risk of breast cancer in men, in the world's largest genetic study of the causes of male breast cancer.

While breast cancer in men is very rare, around 370 men are diagnosed with the disease every year in the UK (compared to 55,000 women who are diagnosed) and around 80 men lose their lives each year. Men with a strong family history of breast cancer among female relatives are known to be at greater risk, and around 10% of male cases are caused by mutations in the BRCA2 gene.

"There has been much debate about whether breast cancers which occur in women and men are distinct from one another. Our study has shown, for the first time, that the genetic factors influencing susceptibility to male breast cancer and the most common type of female breast cancer are much more alike than they are different. "This suggests that the underlying biological processes which affect breast cancer initiation and progression are probably similar in men and women, so that advances in prevention and treatment for the disease may be of benefit to all patients, irrespective of their gender."

Dr Nick Orr, The Patrick G. Johnston Centre for Cancer Research at Queen's University Belfast

Education with Social Purpose:

Open for Learning offer set of five free online taster classes

Open for Learning is all about new growth, new skills and new knowledge and if you are interested in creative writing, literature, languages and theology this could be just the opportunity for you!

The set of five short online taster classes which are completely free, have been created by tutors from Queen's University's Open Learning Programme. The idea behind making these online classes is to tackle the isolation that many people are experiencing because of the Coronavirus, especially older people.

The project has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through the University. The classes cover a range of subjects taught in the Open learning programme and you can choose to watch just one course or all five.

The courses will be available until **August 30th at 5pm.**



CREATIVE WRITING
CREATING CHARACTER IN THE SHORT STORY
[Creative Writing >](#)



LITERATURE
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON - KIDNAPPED
[Literature >](#)



ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS
ITALIAN PRONUNCIATION AT THE RESTAURANT
[Italian For Beginners >](#)

Breaking Boundaries to Produce New Knowledge: Large study finds link between stress-related ageing and asthma

A team of researchers from Queen's University Belfast has found signs of faster ageing related to stress among people with asthma.

Most people will experience a chronic disease, such as asthma, in their lifetime. In the UK approximately a quarter of people aged over 18 years are currently being treated for multiple chronic diseases. Chronic stress has been identified as a risk factor in the development or worsening of many of these conditions. "Allostatic load" is the concept used to measure early ageing or "wear and tear" on the body which accumulates when an individual is exposed to chronic stress in everyday life.

To conduct their study, the researchers compared allostatic load in adults with and without asthma and found higher allostatic load - early ageing - among even the mildest asthma group (those with doctor diagnosed asthma but not requiring corticosteroids). They found a person with mild asthma had an allostatic load equivalent to a person without asthma who is eight years older.

"This study provides objective measures of a relationship between stress and asthma. Understanding this stress-disease link is important for the management of asthma and in potentially reducing its lifetime burden." Our aim with this research is to encourage clinicians to consider stress resilience as part of an individual's healthcare plan or treatment."

Luke Barry, Research Fellow from the Centre for Public Health at Queen's University Belfast

Civic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue: Covid-19 and Education in Northern Ireland - Pivotal Podcast

Queen's University and the independent public policy think tank Pivotal have together launched a series of podcasts on the impact of Covid-19 on key aspects of life in Northern Ireland.

In this third episode, the panel discusses the impact of Covid-19 on education in Northern Ireland. School closures because of Covid-19 have transformed the lives of children, parent and teachers in recent months. How have schools in Northern Ireland and elsewhere handled lockdown? How has learning happened during this time? What do we know about the impact on children and young people's wellbeing and learning?

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST PIVOTAL PODCAST 3

ANN WATT, DIRECTOR PIVOTAL PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

PROFESSOR TONY GALLAGHER QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

DR BRONAGH MCKEE STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

PROFESSOR SIOBHAN O'NEILL ULSTER UNIVERSITY

COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

Equality and Excellence:

Queen's University Belfast's Widening Participation Unit Reaches Nearly 300 Pupils

The Widening Participation Unit (WPU) at Queen's has, since Spring 2020, reached nearly 300 pupils across Northern Ireland through its Pathway Opportunity and Senior Academy Programmes.

In spite of lockdown and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the programmes were successfully delivered online by the WPU team and a number of academic Schools. Between the Pathway Opportunity and Senior Academy Programmes, Queen's WPU is currently engaging with over 286 young people.

WPU is committed to ensuring that those most able but least likely to participate in Higher Education should have an equal opportunity to do so.



Sustainability:

Minister Sharma meets with sustainability researchers at Queen's

Minister Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was hosted at Queen's University this week. Mr Sharma met with sustainability researchers to hear and see how our experts are moving towards a Circular Economy, utilising plastic waste and creating clean energy from renewable sources.

Mr Sharma, who is the President of COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, heard from staff at The Bryden Centre and CASE and lent his support to the aims of working towards sustainable and healthy futures.



Recognising and Rewarding Contributions from Staff and Students: Queen's BSc Architecture programme 9th in the UK

We are delighted to announce that our BSc Architecture programme has been ranked 9th in the UK according to the Complete University Guide for 2020/1. Well done to all!



Architecture

SUBJECT LEAGUE TABLE 2021

QFT Reopens!

We're so excited to update that the QFT reopened on Friday 7 August. Closed for almost 5 months, the reopening and keeping QFT COVID-secure has been a team effort. Visitor wellbeing remains the number one priority. Tied, of course, with brilliant films!

Coming to QFT from Friday 14 August is the exhilarating and emotional astronaut drama Proxima, the fiery & powerful Papicha, Matteo Garrone's magical realist take on Pinocchio and more.

Click on the door below to find out more and **'What's On'**.



Catch up on the latest news from summer graduations

