

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Belfast Agenda Response

1. Introduction

At Queen's our Vision is to be '*a world-class international University that supports outstanding students and staff, working in world-class facilities, conducting leading-edge education and research, focused on the needs of society*'. This Vision aligns to the ambition set out in the Belfast Agenda which seeks to raise aspirations within Belfast and is committed to growing the economy and tackling disadvantage.

Queen's University promotes global thinking locally in order to make Belfast a city of skills, innovation and economic prosperity. We play a leading role in preparing tomorrow's leaders, public servants and entrepreneurs and are central to Belfast's growing global reputation, whilst delivering significant local impact. We are a global driver of innovation and talent that is committed to improving Belfast, Northern Ireland and the lives of our people.

With some 24,000 students, Queen's University is one of Belfast's largest employers with over 3,700 staff. Additionally, we contribute £1 billion to the local economy and support over 9,250 full-time jobs. These achievements are built on a foundation of academic excellence and advanced through a commitment to inspire participation and make a positive impact on society. As a magnet for talent, Queen's encourages the brightest and best amongst our young people to stay in Belfast, whilst attracting talented people from across the world to study and work here.

The University is committed to widening participation and delivers student retention levels above the national average. At present, 32% of our young first-degree entrants are from lower socio-economic groups, which places Queen's first amongst the UK's leading universities for widening access. We are proud of this achievement and remain committed to providing an opportunity for all.

Entrepreneurship and employability skills are key attributes of the Queen's student experience and are embedded in the curriculum across the University – 94% of Queen's graduates are in employment or further study six months after graduation. Our graduates now occupy senior leadership positions in 80 of Northern Ireland's top 100 companies and lead nine of the Ministerial portfolios in the former Executive. We are proud of these figures which demonstrate the importance of skills and education in the creation of a successful and sustainable knowledge economy.

We are at the forefront of developing new technologies and thinking in key areas such as Health, Information Technology, Food Security, Energy, Reconciliation, Peace and Justice. We are committed to inspiring, supporting and equipping our young people, who are our future leaders, with the skills required to develop their full potential and play their part in building a better society. To enhance this work, we have established four interdisciplinary Global Research Institutes (GRIs) and seven Pioneer Research Programmes (PRPs) which bring researchers and industry together to tackle some of the biggest global challenges of our generation.

2. Growing the Economy

2.1 Introduction

The role of higher education in the economy, through innovation and knowledge exchange to the wider society, is regarded as vitally important for economic development and growth. A recent Universities UK¹ report states that:

Higher education makes a fundamentally important difference – to individuals, through improved life chances and opportunities; to the economy, through innovation and skills; and to society, increasing our knowledge through research discoveries and increasing social mobility and cohesion.

The report adds that, in the UK, it is sometimes overlooked that the higher education sector forms a core part of the economic infrastructure, generating employment and output, attracting export earnings and contributing to the gross domestic product (GDP). Universities generate more GDP per unit of expenditure than many other sectors, including health, public administration and construction. In the current economic climate, the strength of the higher education sector and its effectiveness in generating economic activity has become all the more important. Higher education is a major player in supporting and sustaining employment in Belfast. In addition to its direct output and employment, universities' expenditure generated additional output and employment in other sectors of the economy through secondary or 'knock-on' multiplier effects.

Queen's University has a pivotal role to play in achieving the ambitious targets within the Belfast Agenda for growing the economy. Economic growth will depend on growing the knowledge economy, which is driven by research investment and the creation and growth of companies, their capital flows, employment and patent activity and a skills pipeline of highly qualified graduates. Higher education is a key contributor to the economic growth of Belfast as evidenced below.

2.1.1 Attracting Investment

Northern Ireland's competitive position for most sectors is underpinned by the available pool of high-quality graduates and highly competitive cost levels compared to its main West European competitors. Each year, Queen's University produces some 6,500 employment-ready graduates. This highly skilled graduate pool differentiates NI from its main competitors and is a key attractor for inward investors.

Queen's approach to education and research is not just about unlocking our students' academic potential. We also ensure our students are equipped with the employability, innovation and entrepreneurial skills necessary to enable agencies, such as Invest NI, to attract global corporations and high-value jobs to the region. The University's success in educating graduates with these global skills has been a key factor in Belfast becoming the number one destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the UK outside of London.

The Belfast Agenda explicitly seeks to attract £1 billion of private sector FDI. The "Improving the Quality of Foreign Direct Investment in Northern Ireland" Report, produced by FDI Intelligence notes the following:

¹ The impact of universities on the UK economy - Universities UK April 2014

“...a central pillar of FDI policy is to ensure that NI increases the number of high-quality graduate and postgraduate students across disciplines.”

Queen’s University is in the top 1% of global universities, is ranked 8th in the UK for research intensity and 9th in the world for international research collaboration. Our world-leading research reputation has attracted investment from around the globe. For example, with support from Invest NI, California-based CV6 Therapeutics Ltd chose to partner with the University’s Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology on a highly innovative Research and Development project. The project, which aims to develop a new drug with the potential to make chemotherapy more effective, represents a total initial investment of £5.5million.

It is clear that the University is well placed to contribute to the Belfast Agenda FDI target regarding the development of high-quality graduates.

2.1.2 Economic Prosperity

Queen’s has a long established strategy of fostering an entrepreneurial culture and promoting the successful transformation of world leading research into excellent business through innovation and commercial development. In 2014, the University’s venture spin-out company, QUBIS Ltd, celebrated its 30th anniversary. QUBIS companies currently have an annual turnover in excess of £215 million and sustain 1,850 high-value jobs in Northern Ireland. Some 90% of QUBIS companies’ products and services are exported. Companies that were spun out from Queen’s include Andor Technology Ltd based in west Belfast and Kainos based in south Belfast. Both of these companies are now highly successful global enterprises, making an enormous contribution to the local economy.

The Knowledge Transfer Centre was established at Queen’s in 1993 to provide a focal point for the promotion and support of knowledge transfer activities, in particular, to increase the involvement of SMEs with the University, by developing collaborative projects through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs). KTPs allow young graduates to be employed by business, providing a vital bridge between academic research and businesses, facilitating the transfer of expertise from the University to the private sector. Queen’s University is currently ranked first in the UK for its participation in KTP; since 1993, we have supported 100 businesses throughout Belfast, helping them to generate an increase in annual profits of £65 million. Currently, we are supporting 11 businesses through KTPs across the Belfast.

Current KTPs include a project with Arup to develop a tool that will enable planning options to be analysed and evaluated in terms of their impact on a city’s resilience. The KTP will help Arup to remain at the forefront of international resilience development and will provide a unique opportunity to capitalise on an emerging commercial opportunity with growing global demand, using Belfast to test the model.

Queen’s University is a leader in commercial impact and is committed to nurturing new business. In the latest Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey, we were placed first in the UK for intellectual property (IP) commercialisation, with a total of £34.5 million generated from IP and equity - placing us ahead of Oxford, Cambridge, the Institute of Cancer Research and

Imperial College London. Belfast should harness this as a key pillar of the “Learning City” brand.

CSIT Labs is the world’s only incubator programme for cyber security start-ups which provides engineering resource for companies. The incubator is based at Queen’s Centre for Secure Information Technologies (CSIT), the UK’s national Innovation and Knowledge Centre for cyber security. CSIT is an anchor tenant at Catalyst Inc. which supports 2,500 high-value jobs which generate over £100 million annually for the local economy.

It is our contention that IT and cyber security is one of the sectors which Belfast can quickly gain a global reputation for expertise, underpinned by the excellence of our universities.

Research undertaken by the universities also has a critical role to play in inward investment. If Belfast is to be successful in attracting and retaining high-tech, high-value inward investment which is crucial to fostering a knowledge economy, it is essential that a high priority is given, not only to protecting and enhancing the skills base but also to ensuring that Belfast has the internationally recognised research infrastructure it needs. Investment follows excellence, and companies at the cutting edge want to be located close to centres of excellence such as Queen’s University.

Recommendations:

- Investment in higher education is vital to attract, produce and retain high-quality graduates. The Belfast Agenda requires a dedicated workstream focused on supporting a globally competitive higher education sector – this should include seeking to increase the number of student places in higher education and working with the universities to advocate for a sustainable funding model for higher education from the NI Executive in order to deliver the required skills pipeline for sustained economic growth.
- The Belfast Agenda workstreams should prioritise the development of future growth sectors. Queen’s University is investing in areas such as health and life sciences, food security, cyber security, composites and intelligent manufacturing, which will underpin future economic growth. Belfast City Council should work with the city’s universities to build a global reputation based on excellence in these sectors.

3. Living Here

3.1 Introduction

Queen's University is one of Belfast's oldest anchor institutions having been chartered in 1845 and opening in 1849. The University, through our research and education, has made and continues to make significant contributions to Belfast. We have a wealth of academic expertise that can be brought to bear to address some of Belfast's cross-generational challenges. A central aspiration of Queen's University is "Global thinking locally", and our Social Charter commits us to ensuring that our education and research has a lasting impact.

3.2 Queen's Commitment to Living Here

3.2.1 Tackling Inequality through Robust Evidence

Queen's University has a range of world-leading research, focused on the most effective models for addressing inequality that relates directly to the the Belfast Agenda. In particular, we have research excellence in early years, health inequalities, social innovation, and supporting children and young people

The Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation (CESI) seeks to find novel solutions to entrenched social problems. The Centre works in partnership with key agencies, government departments and the voluntary sector, looking at major issues such as drug and alcohol misuse, educational underachievement, public health, and asking – how can we break the cycle?

A focus on evidence is what makes CESI unique. The Centre is using robust evidence, rather than conjecture or political opinion, to understand the nature of problems and arrive at solutions.

The Centre currently runs over 30 externally-funded research projects that are organised around six focused programmes of work:

- Parenting
- Children in Care and Child Protection
- Educational Attainment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Chronic Illness and Palliative Care

This ongoing work has a direct impact on the communities in Belfast and will lead to the emergence of new evidence that will support the development of future interventions. There is considerable scope for Belfast City Council to work in partnership with the Centre in order to use this expertise to design and implement new interventions that are tailor made to provide "Belfast solutions to Belfast issues".

The Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) is one of only four UK 'big data' Centres and constitutes a partnership between Queen's University, Ulster University and NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). ADRN gives trained social and economic researchers access to linked, administrative data in a secure environment. Economic and social research improves our knowledge and understanding of the society we live in. It provides an excellent

base for policy makers to decide how to tackle a range of complex social, economic, environmental and health issues. ADRN is committed to working in partnership with Belfast City Council to bring the statistical evidence to bear in the formulation of new policies that will start to address some of the most intractable intergenerational challenges facing Belfast.

3.2.2 Healthy Citizens

Healthcare touches everyone and is inextricably linked with economic development. Northern Ireland's healthcare budget is under constant pressure, and now absorbs almost 50% of the total revenue budget. A mere 0.3% of the health budget is invested in Research and Development. Simply securing additional funding will not solve the major challenges faced by our health service. Increased investment in healthcare education and research at both universities will ultimately lead to long-term benefits and a more efficient and cost-effective health service.

The newly established Institute of Health Sciences (IHS) was created to drive research excellence and impact, deliver innovative solutions to the specific challenges we have identified in healthcare. The Institute contains the Centre for Public Health, the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology and the Centre for Experimental Medicine.

The Centre for Public Health is committed to high-quality research aimed at improving public health. It does this by examining the epidemiological and genetic risk factors that are important for the health of the individual and of the population, and works to develop screening and interventions to reduce the burden of chronic disease into the future.

The Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology (CCRCB) acts as a hub for research and development in precision medicine, and uses diagnostic tests and data-based insights to understand a patient's illness more precisely and select treatments with more predictable, safer and cost-effective outcomes.

Furthermore, the Centre for Experimental Medicine is working to understand the mechanisms of disease and to use that understanding to develop innovative new treatments and therapies to improve patient outcomes.

Together, these Queen's University Centres will exploit our state of the art technologies and purpose-built research facilities to promote enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration and drive competitive programmatic research in partnership with the health and social care sector and local, national and global pharmaceutical and biotech industries.

These investments will improve Northern Ireland's healthcare provision and have a direct impact on outcomes for local patients, with developments in personalised medicine allowing more targeted patient interventions. Our research in public health will inform and influence future Government policy.

The world leading work carried out within the IHS creates the opportunity for Belfast to build a global reputation in the Health and Life Sciences sector.

3.2.3 Building a Shared City

The University is at the forefront of addressing the global challenge of Peace, Security and Justice through the work of the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute. This Institute leads research into building a peaceful, secure and inclusive world, integrated with teaching on its Master's in Conflict Transformation and Social Justice, and bespoke short courses. Through research, education and civic engagement, the Mitchell Institute aims to make a difference to the lives of ordinary people. It seeks to help those who are struggling with the aftermath of conflict by empowering them to accept fairness, justice and tolerance.

The University's Centre for Shared Education is an applied and inter-disciplinary Centre committed to research, teaching and the facilitation of evidence-based practice in all areas relating to shared education. The Centre is particularly focused on the role of shared education in communities and countries that are divided along religious or ethnic lines.

The work is underpinned by a commitment to the principle that educationalists have a role to play in promoting social harmony, in addition to exploring the role that education systems play in reproducing social, economic and political divisions within society, as well as their potential for challenging these.

The Shared Education Programme (SEP) in Northern Ireland is delivered through the Centre. Since 2007, more than 200 schools and 7,000 pupils have participated. The SEP offers a model for exploring the potential of sharing in a deeply divided society that is seeking to build peace after a long period of violent conflict. The model can be shared globally, and we are currently working with academics, policy makers and practitioners in other divided jurisdictions to develop similar programmes.

3.2.4 An International City

The University currently attracts some 2,000 international students from over 75 countries, a figure which is set to double by 2021. Over 560 University staff are from 78 countries, with 21% of the staff base from EU countries not including the UK.

This cultural fusion contributes to Belfast's attractiveness, where creativity is fostered, and mutual understanding encouraged. The University's international population enriches the experience for home students and facilitates interaction between cultural groups who enjoy a shared space and common vision for the place where they work and live.

There is a significant economic advantage gained through attracting international students and staff. According to Universities UK, international students spend £78 million per annum locally, making a significant contribution to the economy. The social benefits which materialise in the medium to longer term are perhaps of greater value to Belfast's vision for its future. Increased future tourism; a base of advocates to promote Belfast to their home countries; improved international relations; extended networks to support SME export endeavour and increased understanding of cultural and political context all contribute to a modern city with global connections.

If Belfast can replicate the culturally diverse community of the University campus, social, political and economic benefits will emerge enabling the City to take its place among the world's leading cosmopolitan capitals.

Recommendations:

- In order to develop the evidence base required to take forward the workstreams, Belfast City Council should identify the universities as key partners in the delivery of the Living Here goals. Belfast issues require Belfast solutions based on research excellence. Long-term interventions must be evidence-based, and our universities have particular expertise in life inequalities, educational underachievement, health inequalities and dealing with the consequences of conflict.
- Options should be explored to afford Queen's University and Ulster University the same status as statutory community planning partners until a change of legislation from the NI Assembly can formalise the position of the universities.
- International students make a huge contribution to the success of a modern city. Queen's University has in place ambitious plans to double its international student population over the coming years. The City Council should include a stretch goal for the number of international students it intends to attract annually by 2021 in line with the targets set by both universities.
- The City Council should endorse the lobby to secure a robust international student visa and the removal of international students from immigration figures.
- In taking forward the City Council's workstream on a city and neighbourhood community safety programme, the universities will have an important role to play in addressing issues in inner city areas with large student populations such as The Holyland area. The City Council should establish and lead a cross-departmental body that involves all relevant stakeholders to address the ongoing issues.

4. City Development

4.1 Introduction

The University has a tradition of developing world-leading innovations, new knowledge and global thinkers. Through our education and research, we play a leading role in preparing tomorrow's leaders, public servants and entrepreneurs. We are central in contributing to Belfast's growing global reputation, whilst delivering significant local impact. We aspire to promote global thinking locally to make Belfast a global powerhouse of skills, innovation and economic prosperity.

Over the last ten years, the University has invested £350 million in our campus, creating world-class facilities for students and staff. Over the next decade, we plan to invest a further £350 million in our facilities, creating a dynamic 21st Century campus in Belfast.

The University has an ambitious vision for our future: to further enhancing our impact and reputation locally and internationally. There is considerable opportunity for Belfast to harness these and ensure, that as far as possible, planning powers are used to support the ongoing development of the campus. The successful pursuit of the University's goals will further contribute to Belfast's development and global brand.

4.2 Queen's University Commitment to City Development

4.2.1 Belfast's Global Position

The University is supportive of the Belfast Agenda commitments to city development. The international position of Belfast is of particular importance to the University, as we compete for world-leading talent in a global market. An element of the attractiveness of the University's offer is the reputation of Belfast.

Queen's is committed to bringing together world-leading researchers and students to tackle some of the biggest global challenges of our generation. These talented individuals, both local and from across the globe, support world-leading research and development of international best practice. This work is synonymous with Belfast and significantly contributes to its global reputation. We are central in contributing to the City's growing global reputation whilst delivering significant local impact.

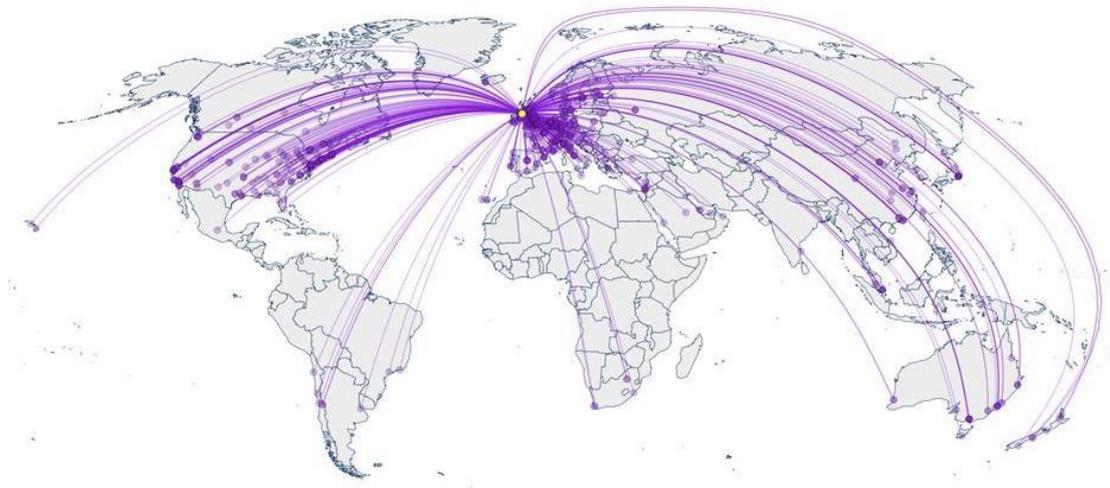
The University has a growing number of strong international networks across the globe and has invested in 10 international in-market staff located in key markets (China, India, SEA, Middle East and the USA). The in-market teams work in partnership with Queen's Global Alumni, the British Council, Invest NI, NI Bureau, Tourism Ireland and the British Tourist Authority to raise the profile of Belfast as an attractive destination.

There is potential for these networks to be further leveraged, to enhance Belfast's global position.

Belfast City Council should harness this reputation and expertise to position Belfast as a centre of world-leading teaching and research, whereby the the City's anchor institutions are at the forefront of tackling global challenges.

Queen's University plays a vital role in collaborations with partners across the world. This work is helping shape global knowledge networks, creating and circulating ideas, opening up opportunities, and fuelling creativity and innovation. The University's Global Connections are set out in Figure 1. These should be leveraged to increase Belfast's global reputation and recognition underpinned by excellence in a number of key sectors, including health and life sciences, food security, cyber security, composites and intelligent manufacturing.

Figure 1: Collaborations between Queen’s University and partner institutions around the world, 2010-2015 (each line represents a collaboration that generated at least 10 publications)²



4.2.2 Transforming the City Centre

The Belfast Agenda specifically calls for an increase in city centre living - Queen’s is one of the primary contributors to this ambition and recognises that regeneration of Belfast will largely be driven by an increased student population. The University is currently the largest provider of student accommodation in the city with over 2,245 places and, following an investment of £72 million in the city centre, is building a further 1,200 student rooms for September 2018.

These significant developments in residential infrastructure represent a total investment in student housing by Queen’s University which is in excess of £140 million since 2000 and will result in 3,500 university students living in Queen’s accommodation in Belfast. Importantly, this is the only University managed accommodation in Belfast and provides a wide range of services on a holistic basis, 24 hours per day, including high-quality pastoral care, safety, security and maintenance and a diverse Residential Life Programme.

The decision to invest so significantly in University owned accommodation has ensured that Queen’s is equipped to attract home and international students to come to study at the University and to live in Belfast, and this ambition is completely aligned to that of the City Council.

The University is committed to working in partnership with Belfast City Council with regard to the Belfast Local Development Plan and will submit a comprehensive response to the Preferred Options Paper (POP) consultation for the Local Development Plan (LDP). It is our view that a number of priorities contained in the University’s Corporate Plan will significantly contribute to the aspirations of the Belfast Agenda and we are committed to working with Belfast City Council to further the aims and ambitions of the City and the University. It is

² Gertler, Meric S. (2017) Universities and Urban Regions: A Partnership for Prosperity, 2017 Eaton Lecture, delivered by the President of the University of Toronto, at Queen’s University Belfast

our view that there is considerable potential for transforming Belfast's international image.

4.2.3 City Revenue Raising

Contrary to public perception that Queen's University is exempt from rates, due to it being a registered charity, it is liable for 100% rates on its operational estate. The University currently pays in excess of £4.5 million per annum in rates, which is projected to rise to £5.6 million under the rates review proposals presented by the former Minister for Finance.

It is clear that policy inconsistencies exist between the rating systems throughout the UK and Ireland. Added to this is a £55 million deficit in Northern Ireland higher education funding when compared to Great Britain.

A significant funding gap already exists, and implementation of these proposals will further exacerbate the problem with significant ramifications for students, the University, Belfast and the wider Northern Ireland economy. The strategy for Belfast should grow its knowledge economy, investing in young people and skills to support investment. The growth in the rates base at the expense of the universities is inequitable when compared with other universities across the rest of the UK and Ireland, particularly in relation to the aspirations to promote Belfast as a "Learning City".

Recommendations:

- Belfast should emphasise the international reputation of Queen's University in its rebranding exercise in order to position Belfast on the world stage as a Learning City and a truly dynamic centre of innovation and development.
- Extend the City Centre boundary to include the Queen's University Quarter.
- Ensure that the Integrated City Transport Plan provides solutions to the unsatisfactory transport links between Catalyst Inc., the City Centre and Queen's University.
- Belfast City Council should work with both universities to secure rate relief from the NI Executive. This could release funds to facilitate investment of approximately 800 new and additional local student places which would, in turn, enhance the skills base and economic growth.

5. Working and Learning

5.1 Introduction

There is considerable potential for Belfast to become a world-leading centre of knowledge-based enterprise, supported by the two universities based in Belfast. A highly-skilled workforce is a foundation for economic growth and prosperity, and this is particularly important in light of recent political developments, not least the decision by the UK to withdraw from the European Union. Increasingly, we see ambitious cities across the globe supporting universities as a catalyst for transformation.

Through our new Corporate Plan, Queen’s University is committed to the creation of a successful and sustainable knowledge economy. The Belfast Agenda ambitions for “working and learning” must be supported by greater investment in higher education, to ensure that our young people have the skills, knowledge and opportunity to support economic growth. Brexit creates uncertainty and significant challenges for Northern Ireland, in particular, Belfast and the higher education sector. We must, therefore, nurture talent so that our students can maximise their potential as global citizens. Investment in research and development by local businesses has never been higher, although there is still more to do; our universities enjoy increasing success in attracting significant EU-funded research and in recruiting world-leading international staff and students from the EU. It is clear that there is an opportunity for Belfast to cast itself as a global centre for excellence, underpinned by the work of the universities.

In 2015-16 Queen’s produced an output of some 6,500 skilled graduates, across the disciplines, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Queen’s Output of skilled graduates 2015-16

Subject Area	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Subjects allied to medicine	730	205	935
Social Studies	480	230	710
Business and Administrative Studies	375	210	585
Medicine and Dentistry	295	205	500
Biological Sciences	300	200	500
Law	205	260	465
Engineering and Technology	370	100	470
Computer Science	285	105	390
Education		345	345
Historical and Philosophical Studies	250	65	315
Languages	215	70	285
Physical Sciences	180	65	245
Architecture, Building and Planning	75	155	230
Creative Arts and Design	160	60	220
Agriculture and related subjects	80	65	145
Mathematical Sciences	100	5	105
Film Studies	10	15	25
Total	4,110	2,360	6,470

5.2 Queen's Commitment to Working and Learning

5.2.1 Address Educational Inequalities

Queen's is committed to providing a world-class educational experience to students from all backgrounds. We believe that the key to widening access is ensuring that Belfast has a world-class research-intensive university, accessible to all. Our track record in this area is strong – with 32% of young, full-time, first degree entrants from the lower socio-economic groups (SEC 4-7), exceeding our benchmark of 26%. This success in providing fair access is strengthened by our success in achieving a high student retention rate.

Queen's annually invests some £3.8 million through a comprehensive Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP). The plan includes a wide range of outreach initiatives designed to raise the aspirations and attainment level of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, predominantly in the greater Belfast area. The WAPP provides a number of programmes which aim to encourage local young people who are 'most able but least likely' to come to the University. The University's Junior and Senior Academies engage with school children from Year 9 until Year 14 on a range of initiatives aimed at encouraging our talented young people to engage in further or higher education pathways.

In 2017, we have launched the "Pathway to Opportunity" programme, one of the first of its kind in the UK. The programme provides a route for talented young people who have the ability to study at the University but may require additional support and encouragement to reach their full potential. Participants who successfully complete the programme will benefit from a reduced admissions offer to the University, which may be up to two A-Level grades (or equivalent) lower than the standard offer. At present ten schools from Belfast are involved in this groundbreaking programme. We are committed to extending the Pathways Programme to encompass a broader range of subject choices.

5.2.2 Enhance and Increase Skills

In today's challenging economic climate, regions such as Northern Ireland must identify and build on their strengths – a clear strength of Belfast is our people and their talent. We must, therefore, retain and develop that talent and build on our reputation as a city that values and invests in this most important asset: human capital. Queen's University makes an immense contribution to the skills resource and economic capability of Belfast and Northern Ireland through the education of undergraduates and postgraduates in both vocational and non-vocational subjects. Many of the skills fostered and developed in our students not only underpin and encourage self-development and personal fulfilment but are transferable and relevant to serving the needs of an adaptable, sustainable and global knowledge-based economy.

An enormous strength of Queen's University is our ability to provide highly skilled graduates across a wide range of disciplines. As one of the UK's top 10 research intensive universities, our graduates benefit from learning in a world-class research environment, being constantly exposed to new innovations and developments as part of their degree programme. We continue to work closely with industry in the development of an innovative STEM curriculum which provides our graduates with the necessary skills to meet the demands of a growing knowledge economy. There is also increasing demand from inward

investors for graduates in the arts and social sciences, particularly in areas such as law and modern languages. In today's global economy, a multi-lingual workforce is an essential requirement for many companies, and Queen's University plays a vital role in producing a pipeline of highly skilled multi-lingual graduates. Providing high-quality graduates, and ensuring an outstanding student experience, remain key priorities for Queen's University.

Employability is central to the University's strategy. We place a premium on preparing graduates who can serve as leaders and place priority on engagement with employers and society. Our Employability Framework, introduced in 2012-13, is the basis for an extensive programme to equip students with the qualities to thrive in graduate-level employment.

We embed employability in our curriculum in a number of ways, with opportunities for work-related learning and skills development, work placements, engagement with employers and career management workshops. The Employer Engagement team is a central function within the University and offers an Account Management system for employers in Belfast and the wider region, whereby it develops and manages relationships with a wide range of employers such as KPMG, Grant Thornton, Ulster Bank, PwC, First Derivatives and Citi. By adopting this Account Management process, the University has an established process to develop new relationships with employers, understand their business needs and help them to engage with the appropriate Schools across the University.

Securing additional investment in higher education places is a priority for Belfast and for Northern Ireland. Based on a cost per place of £8,200 (including student support, excluding tuition fees) 500 places would require an investment of £4.1 million.

The 2016 Knowledge Economy Report 2016 highlights the importance of postgraduate education, the University's new corporate plan commits to creating a vibrant and ambitious postgraduate and postdoctoral community which will lead to significant increases in postgraduate student numbers, both taught and research. We have also committed to increase our postgraduate student population from 23% to 30%. The University has invested £4 million in our new Graduate School, which opened in 2015 and is ranked number one in the world of its kind. Enhanced funding for postgraduate study will be essential to facilitate people continuing to develop the high-level skills required in a modern, knowledge-based economy.

5.2.3 Linking Skills to Opportunities

The University has an established Employers Forum which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Forum supports the strategic planning and development of employability and employer-led courses at Queen's University. It facilitates dialogue between employers and the University and enables employer perspectives to inform our approach to education, employability and skills development. It advises and assists in the development of new courses and ensures that Queen's University continues to produce students that meet business needs.

5.2.4 Exporting Belfast's Talent

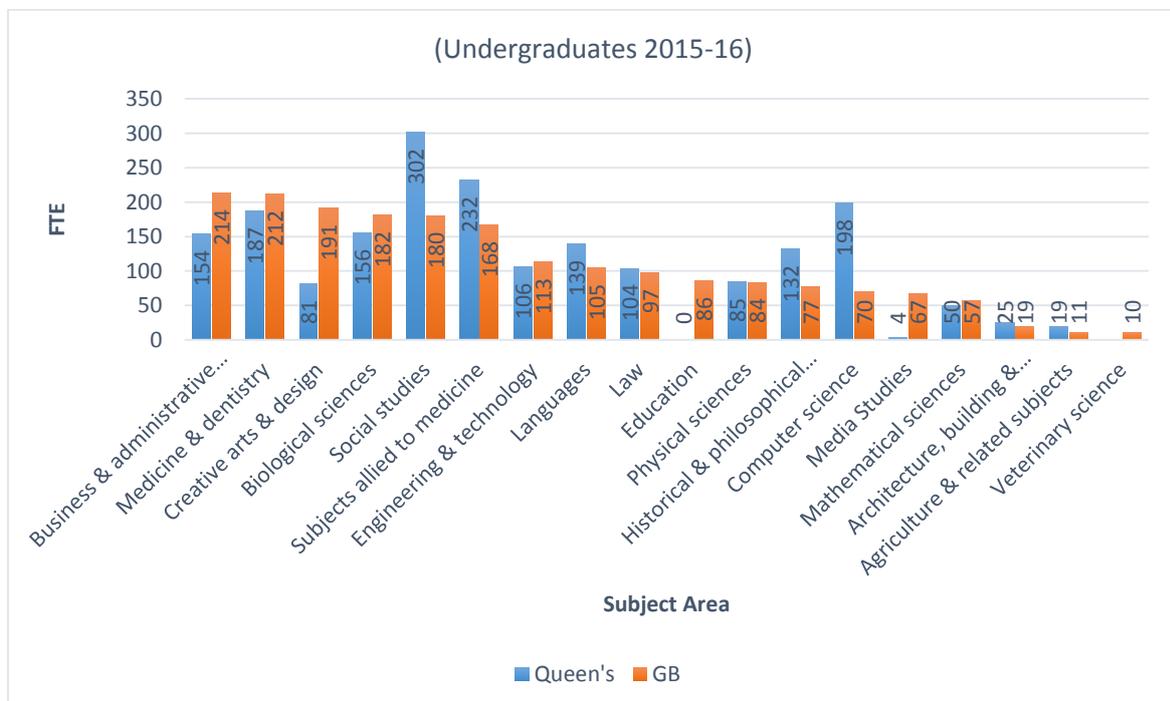
Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK that exports its young people. Overall, we export approximately 35% of our higher education students; of those talented young people that we have invested in for the first 18 years of their lives, the vast majority do not return. We cannot afford to continue exporting our talent.

Northern Ireland is also the only region in the UK which has divested from higher education in recent years. Between 2009-10 and 2014-15, annual block grant allocations from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to the Northern Ireland universities reduced from £214 million to £185 million – this equates to some 24% in real terms. The 2015-16 academic year saw a further 10.8% reduction in the higher education budget, totalling £16.1 million. The impact of this funding reduction has required Queen's University to substantially reduce its undergraduate intake; by 2018-19, we will have over 1,000 fewer places for local school leavers.

Our analysis shows that in 2015-16, there were 1,974 students from Belfast studying at Queen's, with an almost equal number, 1,942 studying in GB. This is an unsustainable loss of talent and incompatible with the objective of becoming a "Learning City", at the heart of a regional knowledge economy.

The figures for Belfast residents studying at Queen's and in GB are set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Belfast Residents Studying at Queen's and GB



Belfast cannot continue to haemorrhage its talent if it truly aspires to achieve the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda. We contend that Belfast City Council should work in partnership with the universities, to secure a sustainable funding model for higher education.

Recommendations:

- The Belfast Agenda should explicitly recognise the essential role of universities in securing the future economic prosperity of Belfast. In particular, the workstreams should fully reflect the vital importance of higher-level skills and the need to reverse the export of our young talent out of Northern Ireland.
- The Council and other key stakeholders should actively pursue the creation of a knowledge economy strategy in partnership with the universities; this will harness the excellent work carried out to date and provide a strategic imperative for investment.
- The University is committed to addressing educational inequalities through both its applied research in the areas of social policy, education and health and its direct Widening Participation activities. The stretch goals for Working and Learning should support the University's widening participation targets.