



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Cuts in the Northern Ireland University Sector

This Briefing Note considers currently available information on cuts made by the Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University to their universities' budgets, following reductions in the allocations they receive from the Department of Employment and Learning.

Introduction

This Briefing Note is prepared at the request of the Committee for Employment and Learning (CEL). It seeks to aid CEL when engaging with the Department of Employment and Learning on currently available information about cuts made by the Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) and Ulster University (Ulster) to their universities' budgets. Such cuts reflect reductions in the allocations that the universities receive from the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL).

Please note, it is not possible to provide application and enrolment figures for QUB and Ulster for 2015-16 entry, as these processes are currently incomplete. As soon as this information becomes available, RaISe will provide it to the CEL.

In addition, due to the time constraints in producing this paper, it has not been possible to include information on St. Mary's University College or Stranmillis University College.

1 Higher Education Budget Reduction

Following budgetary cuts announced in January 2015, the DEL had its Resource budget reduced for 2015-16, from £756.2 million to £694.7 million; a reduction of £61.5 million.¹

As a result of these cuts, Northern Ireland's Higher Education Institutions (NI's HEIs) received a targeted budget reduction of 8.6% or £16,148,060.² However, following the ending of funding from the Economy and Jobs Initiative, this reduction increased to £17,485,023.

The CEL may wish to consider the following:

- **In the DEL's, QUB and Ulster's view, what will be the impact on the number of students that can be taught within the universities, given current staffing reductions arising from the reduced HE budget?**

2 Queen's University Belfast

QUB has had a reduction in its DEL block grant allocation from £98,470,785 (2014-15 opening position), to £90,804,387 (2015-16); a reduction of £7,666,398 or 7.79%.³

As a result, QUB announced that it would be cutting 290 student places for 2015/16 entry, with an overall goal of reducing the number of student places by 1,010 over the next three years.⁴

¹ Northern Ireland Assembly, Assembly Questions, 24 April 2015, AQW 45050/11-15

² Correspondence with DEL, 14 September 2015

³ Ibid

⁴ BBC News, 14 April 2015, QUB cuts jobs and student intake after DEL funding loss, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-32300397>

A review of presently available information (including a media search) was carried out by RaISe, in an attempt to identify how QUB intended to reduce its student numbers. The only reference found was *via the Times Higher Education*, which stated that:⁵

Applicants who have received an offer from Queen's and who achieve their grades will still have a place, but candidates who fall short of expectations are unlikely to be admitted.

In QUB a voluntary redundancy scheme was introduced in April 2015, with the intention of cutting the university's employee head count by 236 by December 2015, with job losses amongst both academic and non-academic staff.

QUB was contacted by RaISe for further information. It provided the following statement:⁶

The University has taken initial high level decisions in response to the further substantial cuts in public funding announced for both 2014-15 and 2015-16. These decisions, relating to reductions in student and staff numbers, have already been communicated to the Department and to the Minister.

The University has also established a Strategic Planning Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, to determine the future size and shape of the institution in the context of Vision 2020. This work is ongoing and it is expected that recommendations will be presented to Senate, the Governing Body, during the course of this academic year.

In light of the above, the CEL may wish to consider the following:

- **The CEL may wish to ask the QUB for clarification on the process it used to reduce its student intake;**
- **Was the DEL informed as to how the reductions in student places were to be taken?**
- **How many students were offered an Under Graduate (UG) entry by the QUB in the last five academic years, including for 2015/16 entry, broken down by domicile?**
- **How many students were offered a clearing place by the QUB in the last five years (including 2015/16 entry), broken down by domicile?**
- **Are there any additional staffing reductions planned at the QUB? What was the university's rationale for its decision.**

⁵ Times Higher Education. Havergal, C, 14 April 2015, Queen's to cut almost 240 jobs and hundreds of student places, <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/queens-to-cut-almost-240-jobs-and-hundreds-of-student-places/2019695.article>

⁶ Correspondence received from QUB, 14 September 2015

3 Ulster University

Ulster has had a reduction in its DEL block grant allocation⁷ from £79,847,774 (2014-15 opening position) to £70,768,688 (2015-16), a reduction of £9,079,086 or 11.37%.⁸

Following the announcement by DEL of reductions in its block grant allocation to NI HEIs, Ulster announced in June 2015 that it would be reducing its student intake by 1,250 places, and would be cutting approximately 210 staff posts over the next three years.⁹

On 2 September Ulster announced how these cuts would be implemented within the university.

The Ulster statement identified six subject areas that will be impacted by its changes:¹⁰

- Interior Design;
- Marine Science;
- Computing;
- Maths;
- Business Management; and,
- Modern Languages/Translation.

Of these, Interior Design and Modern Languages/Translation have been closed in their entirety. The remaining courses are to be rationalised, with some subjects to be transferred between campuses, or provision to be consolidated.¹¹

The *Derry Journal* also reported that the Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice was to be cut from the Magee Campus.¹²

Ulster has stated that these decisions were made by taking into consideration a number of factors, including:¹³

Student demand, attrition rates, student satisfaction, employment statistics and research performance.

In addition:

⁷ Correspondence received from DEL, 14 September 2015

⁸ Please note, each of the HEIs sustained a different percentage reduction for various reasons. The two universities had previously received differing amounts of funding under the EJI with UU receiving over 40% more than QUB. Also the recent results of the REF exercise (Research Excellence Framework) resulted in QUB receiving more research funding from the already reduced funding available

⁹ BBC News, Meredith R, 18 June 2015, Ulster University: Funding reduction sees cuts to jobs and student places, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-33185697>

¹⁰ Ulster University, 2 September 2015, Press Release

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Derry Journal, 4 September, Ulster University cuts: Postgraduate law course at Magee scrapped <http://www.derryjournal.com/news/ulster-university-cuts-postgraduate-law-course-at-magee-scrapped-1-6939763>

¹³ Ulster University, September 2015, Press Release

Consolidation of teaching provision across all faculties will facilitate the necessary reduction of staff numbers without impacting on the quality of teaching which remains paramount.

The CEL may wish to note the Ulster is currently developing a full list of courses to be impacted by the cuts and its rationalisation process. As soon as this list is finalised, it will be published. It is expected that the list will be produced in the coming weeks.¹⁴

The CEL may wish to consider the following:

- **Are there any planned additional reductions to student numbers or staffing at the Ulster in the coming years?**
- **Was the DEL informed as to how the reductions in student places were to be taken?**
- **How many students were offered Undergraduate (UG) entry by the Ulster in the last five academic years, including for 2015/16 entry, broken down by domicile?**
- **How many students were offered a clearing place by the Ulster in the last five years (including 2015/16 entry), broken down by domicile?**
- **Are there any additional staffing reductions planned at the Ulster?**

¹⁴ Discussions with Ulster University official