

20 March 2015

Mr Thomas Buchanan MLA  
Deputy Chairperson  
Committee for Employment and Learning  
Room 375  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Mr Buchanan

Thank you for your letter, dated 5 March 2015. In response to the Committee's request for information on why the numbers of students with hearing loss appear to have decreased over recent years, and the facilities the University provides for students with hearing loss, I am pleased to provide the detailed information below.

1. Apparent Decline in Number of Students with Hearing Loss

The University notes that the numbers provided by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) and recorded in the Report considered by the Committee (Page 38 refers) indicate that the numbers of deaf students at Queen's in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 was 61, 70 and 40 respectively. The authors of the report explain that students are not obliged to officially declare a disability to the University – this can make official year-on-year figures vary and not necessarily reflect the true number of students with disabilities.

Queen's students can declare to Disability Services that they have a disability without this being recorded on the student records system from which the HESA statistics are extracted. There are currently 64 students registered with Disability Services who have declared a hearing impairment. The numbers over the last three years have shown a steady increase in the three academic years 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15 of 49, 54 and 64 students respectively.

The University has seen a year-on-year increase in the number of students registered with disabilities. The University continues to promote access to higher education for all potential applicants. This includes targeted support for students with hearing loss.

2. Pre-entry and Transition Support for Students

Queen's Disability Services staff attend annual events organised by Education and Library Boards' Transitions Officers. These events aim to provide prospective students, with a disability, with information on the range of support available at university and encourage students to consider Queen's as a place of study. Students, their parents and teachers are provided with an opportunity to meet staff from Disability Services on a one-to-one basis to discuss individual needs and ask questions in relation to their disability and the support available.

In order to raise awareness and aspirations of Deaf and Hearing Impaired students, Queen's also organised a 'Discover more about Higher Education' event for the British Deaf Association (BDA) in May 2014. Members of University staff from Marketing and Recruitment, Admissions and Access Service, Disability Services and Students' Union Advice Centre provided information to BDA staff, prospective applicants and their parents on coming to university and the support available.

Prospective students who have declared a disability on their UCAS application, are sent a questionnaire which asks them to provide specific details on the nature of their disability and anticipated support requirements. Students who declare they are Deaf or have a Hearing Impairment through UCAS or on their Postgraduate application, and who receive a conditional/unconditional offer of a place of study at Queen's, are invited to attend a Needs Assessment with a Disability Officer as soon as possible. This will enable the University to start implementing reasonable adjustments in advance of commencing their course of study, eg provisional booking of sign language interpreters.

### 3. Support Available at Queen's University Belfast

During the student's needs assessment, the Disability Officer will consider individual reasonable adjustments within the University environment. In agreement with the student, these will be communicated to specific staff within the University. Support within the University may include:

- Copies of lecture notes;
- Priority seating for lectures, tutorials and during examinations;
- Transcriptions of audio-visual material when required;
- One-to-one announcements during examinations;
- Language modification of examination papers;
- Advice and guidance to teaching staff on deaf awareness and use of personal listening devices;
- Additional time to complete assessed work;
- Extended library loans;
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) - vibrating pagers.
- Vibrating pillows within University accommodation.

The student will also be referred to a Needs Assessor for the purpose of applying for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Funded support through DSA may include:

- Note Takers and Speed Text operators;
- Lip speakers;
- Photocopying allowance;
- Specialist listening devices;
- Other specialised equipment as appropriate;
- Sign language interpreters;
- Proof readers;
- Study skills tutors.

Students are encouraged to contact Disability Services if they experience any difficulties throughout the academic year and are asked to keep in contact with their assigned Disability Officer. At the end of each academic year, students are given the opportunity to review their support and, if appropriate, amend the reasonable adjustments for the following year.

### 4. Further Measures

It is encouraging that during the current academic year, Disability Services has 64 students registered as having varying degrees of deafness/hearing impairment. The University will continue to target and work with the voluntary sector, lobbying groups, young people and parents to raise aspirations and participation of Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students.

I trust that this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Committee requires any further detail in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Professor Patrick G Johnston  
President and Vice-Chancellor