

# Queen's University Belfast Students' Union

## Officer Report

Student Officer Postgraduate

Gift Sotonye-Frank



Period Covered By Report: *1 March 2020 – 30 April 2020*

Hello everyone,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of the way we operate as individuals but even as a Union. Indeed as a Union it has meant that we work from home according to government regulations, but in the midst of this we have been stronger and more unified in our commitment to be there for you. Always ensuring that your voices are heard by the university and beyond during lockdown. Some of the events I have highlighted in March and April have happened online.

The [Students' Union](#) website has information on my role, my plan of Work for the year and how to contact me.

EVENTS / MEETINGS		
Month	Details of Activity (and outcomes for students)	Location
3/3/20	UCU Strikes	QUB
	Officer Team Sweep	QUBSU
	Tuition fee Rally	Stormont Estates
	Meeting with Student Advice	QUBSU
	EMC	QUBSU
04/03/20	Meeting with PVC Education	QUBSU
	Future of Irish Language at Queens	QUBSU
5/3/20	Commercial Service Forum	QUBSU
11/3/20	Suicide Talk training	QUBSU
18/3/20	Planning meeting with Graduate School on Supervisor Student relationship conference.	QUBSU

23/3/20	Committee of Discipline	PFC
	NUS-USI Skype Call	
1/4/20	PGR Induction Talk SMDB	Virtual (Teams)
7/4/20	Course Rep forum (Every week)	Virtual (Teams)
8/04/20	SU Briefing	Virtual
13 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> /4/20	Easter holiday	
21/04/20	Student Safety Net Campaign Launch (NUS)	Skype
23/04/20	Student Officer / SU Voice team meeting (Weekly)	Virtual
24/04/20	EMC	Virtual
24/4/20	PG Student working group meeting	Virtual
28/4/20	NUS-USI Weekly Members meeting	Virtual
28/4/20	Medical Students Graduation.	Virtual
29/04/20	COVID-19 Impact on PGRs discussion	Virtual
29/4/20	PG Forum	Virtual

#### **A. Supporting PGs During COVID-19 Pandemic**

The impact of COVID-19 has had a multifaceted impact on our PG community. I have therefore in the recent months and days since the virus outbreak been supporting postgraduate students' queries. In particular, I conducted a research to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on PGR students. That survey was analysed and the report sent to senior management at Queens. I have now been included in the PGR subgroup to discuss the findings contained in the report. I will provide further updates on the progress of this.

#### **B. 24 hours Study Spaces**

At the beginning of my role and as part of my manifesto promise, I had identified the challenges faced by our postgraduate students in the summer months of dissertation writing, particularly regarding the lack of study spaces as well as the lack of access to buildings after certain hours of the night. Consequently, I lobbied both the Graduate School and the University to increase access to study spaces. After a pilot exercise that extended opening hours last summer, it became more obvious that there is a demand for extended opening hours.

I am pleased to state that approval has now been granted by the university to extend opening hours of the Graduate school as well as an extended opening hour in the Library during the summer months so that postgraduate students can utilise these services during their dissertation writing for 4 weeks in the month of August and September. This means that postgraduate students writing their dissertation no longer have to worry about the lack of accessible study spaces as going forward beyond COVID-19 and social distancing postgraduates students writing their dissertation will be able to work flexibly and with confidence knowing that opening times are extended and buildings are more accessible in the period of these extended opening hours.

### **Postgraduate Representation**

Since COVID-19 outbreak and the government regulations for persons to stay home, it was impossible to continue to meet with the PG reps. Consequently, working with the Education officer, a Course rep forum was created. PG reps have stayed engaged and their voices and those they represented are being heard on a weekly and in some cases daily basis through the chat optioning through this forum and using Microsoft teams.

### **QUBSU Parents and Carers Network**

During COVID-19 outbreak, I was able to give support to the PCN members on how to access laptops to aid them study more effectively rather than be distracted by the impact of home schooling children and sharing laptops with their children.

### **Student-Supervisor Relationship**

A partnership project between the QUBSU led by postgraduate student officer and the Graduate School led by Kara Bailie was developed on the subject of the Student supervisor relationship. As part of this partnership with the Graduate School, a workshop and a conference were planned. The workshop was held in January with over 50 participants in attendance made up of PhD students and academics. The conference initially planned to hold in the month of May 2020, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lock down regulation. Nevertheless, a webinar has now been planned for the same purpose to take place during Research Culture week in the first week in June. During the Research Culture Week, the Supervisor-Student Relationship toolkit which I and a group of postgraduate students have developed will also be launched.



In addition, I have worked closely with QGIS team to improve the interface for recording and/or uploading students record of supervision. This improvement is designed for PGs to have a more user-friendly experience in uploading their record of supervision.

## National Students Union Campaign

I have worked closely with NUS-USI and USI on different campaigns particularly the campaign on “No to Tuition Fee Increase”. More recently, I have joined in several meetings on line to discuss issues of the impact of COVID-19 on the student population and specifically the postgraduate students at QUB.

I have also attended regular meetings of the USI postgraduate working group led by Sara Dowling the USI officer for postgraduate affairs.



## UCU Strikes and QUBSU

QUBSU stood in solidarity with the University College Union (UCU) during periods of industrial action first for 8 days in the period between the 25<sup>th</sup> of November to 4<sup>th</sup> of December, and again for 14 days from the period between 20<sup>th</sup> February to 14<sup>th</sup> March.

During the industrial action, I joined other sabbatical officers and students to stand in solidarity with UCU members. This was important and particularly relevant as I stood to advocate for our postgraduate students on the issue of casualisation.

Committees and Working Groups	<p><b>Committees and Working Groups</b></p> <p>Below is a list of committees and Working groups I sit on. I have been in attendance in most meetings that have been called and always listening and contributing in ways that are beneficial to the study body but in particular to the the postgraduate community that I represent always ensuring you're your interest is well presented, and protected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic Board</li><li>• Academic Council</li><li>• Collaborative Provision Group</li><li>• Courses and Regulations Group</li><li>• Education Committee</li><li>• Research and Postgraduate Committee</li><li>• Executive Management Committee</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Management Board</li><li>• MHLS Postgraduate Education Sub-Group</li><li>• Postgraduate Advisory Board</li><li>• Postgraduate Forum</li><li>• Student Partnership Project Group</li><li>• Supporting Student Attainment Action Group</li><li>• Internationalisation of the Curriculum</li></ul>
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