

February 26, 2024

Dear Principal Deane and Provost Evans,

**RE: Open Letter to Queen's Senior Administration Regarding Budget Austerity Measures**

We are writing to you both to express our view of how budget austerity measures have been promulgated over the past few months. We are sharing this letter broadly with our Members because it is important that they understand the perspective of QUFA's Executive.

It is our view that the Queen's-QUFA Collective Agreement (CA) is very clear about how University resources are meant to be deployed in support of the core academic mission. The following paragraphs are relevant (emphasis added):

**35 MAINTENANCE OF THE SCHOLARLY AND PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

35.1.1 **Subject to available funding, the University shall**, during the currency of this Agreement, increase the Full-Time Equivalent of tenure and tenure-track faculty sufficient to decrease the weighted student/faculty ratio (including bridging appointments) as calculated in the Annual Budget Report prepared for the Senate Budget Review Committee.

**36 WORKING CONDITIONS**

36.1.1 Within the framework of **institutional resources, the University shall** provide facilities and support to enable Members to fulfill their academic responsibilities as defined in Article 15 and in accordance with Article 24.1.3.

**38 FINANCIAL EXIGENCY**

38.1.1 The University and the Association agree that the **first duty of the University is to ensure that its academic priorities remain paramount**, particularly with regard to the quality of instruction and research, and the preservation of academic freedom.

38.2.1 Tenure or Tenure-Track Members, Continuing Adjunct Members, and Librarian/Archivist Members on Continuing or Continuing-track appointments

(b) shall not be laid off **until efforts have been exhausted to alleviate the financial crisis by economies in all other segments of the budget and all reasonable means of improving the University's revenues have been exhausted...**

38.3.1 A state of financial exigency occurs when substantial and recurring financial deficits **threaten the survival of the University as a whole**, or substantial financial losses have been projected by generally accepted accounting principles to persist for more than two (2) years and threaten the continued functioning of the University. The expectation of short-term deficits is not a state of financial exigency and can be dealt with by short-

term deficit financing and/or the sale of real property, wheresoever situated, not essential to the academic function of the University.

The bolded segments of the articles cited above make very clear that the CA envisions the University as a single financial entity where resources are deployed as needed, including by means of unit cross-subsidization, to maintain the academic mission of the institution. That mission is also paramount over all others.

To be clear, there can be no financial exigency at the unit or faculty level. If a sub-faculty unit does not generate sufficient revenues to pay its bills, resources should be shared from across the faculty to ensure that unit's academic programming is maintained. Similarly, if a faculty as a whole is facing budget deficits, other faculties or revenue centres are expected to share surpluses to cover them.

### **39 CLOSURE OF AN ACADEMIC PROGRAM OR UNIT FOR ACADEMIC REASONS**

The CA defines the value of a program or unit in Article 39 as “academic quality, relevance or enrolment”. Academic quality is determined by periodic program/unit reviews and is not based on the subjective view of administrators. Relevance is determined by shifts in the broad disciplinary landscape. Enrolment is indicated by students’ choices to engage with a program of study. If Queen’s administrators force the suspension of enrolments to a program or unit, and then subsequently argue that low or declining enrolment justifies a Senate review (per Article 39) in order to close the unit, QUFA will grieve. The administration cannot manufacture the conditions in Article 39 as a means to trigger a Senate review which could lead to re-assignment or layoff of QUFA Members. If there are actual concerns about program or unit academic quality, relevance or enrolment, the correct path is to raise it through Senate (Article 39.2) first.

What is notable about Articles 38 and 39 of the CA is that they both outline processes that give appropriate bodies time to assess the situation and come to thoughtful solutions. What has been happening on campus since spring of 2023 is the opposite of timely consultation leading to thoughtful solutions. The “budget crisis” appears to have landed from the clear blue sky and is interpreted to be so dire as to mitigate against careful and consultative reflection on ways forward. Decisions to cut small courses, suspend program enrolments, trim unit budgets, terminate staff, and cancel course offerings taught by Term Adjuncts, have all been top down and applied generally without consideration for unit size, academic quality, or people’s futures. Trust in leadership is a casualty of this poorly managed process.

We urge senior administration to slow down and use existing tools (governance bodies (Senate, faculty boards), the CA) to engage in meaningful conversations with all employee and student groups to address real, long term challenges facing Queen’s. Transparent disclosure of university and faculty finances is a necessary first step to regain the trust of the broader Queen’s community, including many QUFA Members. Re-establishing this relationship will provide the creativity, energy, and commitment to work toward a plan for financial *and academic* sustainability.

No one benefits from continuing with the current pattern of top-down, broad-stroke announcements of cuts and freezes that have disproportionate impact across units, unions, and student interests. We implore Queen's leadership to re-imagine a university that is united by its academic mission and its collective use of available resources to further that mission. We ask that you take responsibility for decisions that have negative impacts, rather than blaming the artifice of the activity-based budget model, and that you exercise leadership in redistributing resources as needed to preserve Queen's mission, vision, and reputation as a sector leader.

Please know that QUFA will not allow the budget *model* to trump the CA. We will not allow the process for unit or program closure to be subverted by decisions that make closure a foregone conclusion. We will defend our Members' rights to the extent of our capacities if an alternate path of change management is not taken.

We are, as always, available to discuss these matters further.

On behalf of the QUFA Executive committee,

Mary Olmstead

Karen Rudie

President

Vice President

Copy: QUFA Membership, Dan McKeown (AVP Faculty Relations)