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PRESIDENT'S VOICE

False Divides

A university should not be a collection of airtight compartments, but a place where units and departments coordinate and collaborate with each other in ways that advance the overall academic mission

By Karen Rudie
President, QUFA

I started my undergraduate degree in Arts and Science. I couldn't decide between majoring in Math or English, so I took both and figured I'd know better by the end of the year. By June, I still didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew nothing about Engineering, but it seemed like the program required you to take a breadth of science courses together with complementary studies. So, paradoxically, I saw Engineering as the equivalent of a liberal arts degree but something like a liberal sciences degree that wouldn't cut me off from the humanities. I hoped that through this path I would then figure out which particular science I wanted to take. It didn't entirely work out that way.

I mention all this because I want to point out that there is a much closer connection between Engineering and Arts and Science than you might

QUFA IMAGES

Fair Employment Week



Robert G. May

QUFA Vice President Melissa Houghtaling (Gender Studies) was among the volunteers who helped spread the word during Fair Employment Week, which ran from 20 to 24 October 2025. Fair Employment Week is an annual campaign by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) that advocates for fairer working conditions for contract academic staff. QUFA hosted an information table in Mackintosh-Corry Hall to help raise awareness about this important issue. Find out more on p. 6 of this issue of QUFA Voices.

think. More generally, I want to talk about how we as academics at

Queen's have a greater interconnection than you might think.

ANNOUNCEMENT

University Pension Plan Update

Service issues and using the pension calculator tool

Only 55% of UPP members have signed up for the online service. If you haven't registered to use this feature, go to www.myupp.ca and click "Sign In" in the upper right corner of the page. Please make sure to use a personal, non-work, e-mail address to ensure seamless communication with the UPP regardless of employment status.

Quite a few QUFA Members have commented that they are not yet able to use the pension calculator tool. While 85% of all UPP members now have access to this tool, only 82% of Queen's pension members do, and some will never be able to use the tool. UPP staff continue to iron out wrinkles to get more people access. The Queen's Pension Plan was certainly not a simple plan to model, but if you have a very complicated work history (many stops and starts, or lots of roles with different pension rights), or a very complicated personal history (including such elements as multiple marriages), it may be that the tool would never be able to project your future pension accurately enough to be reliable for your planning purposes. If you need pension projections and can't use the tool, please use the online service portal to request a custom projection from UPP staff.

Finally, the UPP continues to grow with the entry of Wilfred Laurier University and their faculty association staff. Trent University joined earlier this year. The UPP is considering creating a second type of plan with lower contribution rates and concomitant smaller pension benefits to attract institutions that are too far away from the 20% contribution rate of the current UPP (10% each from employee and employer). We will keep you posted on that front.

In my early years at Queen's, we had a centralized budget model. Unfortunately, the move to a decentralized budget served to decentralize—and hence divide—our interests. As an example, if there is a pedagogical reason to teach a course in Department X, our budget model may lead to it being taught in Department Y. The decision should be purely about what is in the best interests of students, but our budget

model prevents that because the department that teaches the course gets money for each student registered in that course. In other words, Queen's has created infrastructure that pits one unit against another. This is part of what is playing out in the current spin on the budget crisis at Queen's.

I would bet that most of my colleagues in Engineering feel that we are "subsidizing" Arts and Science—

and if you see it only as "money from X goes into Y," then yes, it is a subsidy of sorts. But that's a terrible way to look at things. For one thing, it imagines the units in the university as separate entities that *should* be funded separately, and if you take that to its conclusion, then entities that aren't *currently* money-makers on their own have no place.

But the point is that there is no "on their own" in a university. A university is a single entity whose *raison d'être* is to teach critical thinking, and to create and disseminate knowledge and ideas. Electrical Engineering depends on mathematics, and medicine depends on psychology, and law depends on philosophy, and so on. Some of the most original and beautiful ideas come from crossing one field with another in unexpected ways. This is almost surely going to play out in how we will incorporate artificial intelligence into our world, where technology meets sociology meets ethics meets law.

Global citizenship is one of the foundations of the Bicentennial Vision, and if we are to be truly global citizens, let's take a global view of our university.

And by the way, the hardest mathematics course I took as a doctoral student was a philosophy course!

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QUFA Voices publishes QUFA-related news and information for QUFA Members and provides QUFA Members with a forum to express their QUFA-related ideas and opinions. We want to hear from you! Please send your QUFA-related story ideas, news items, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photographs, and other submissions to the editor.

QUFA Voices is edited by Robert G. May. He can be reached at mayr@queensu.ca.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S VOICE

More About QUFA's Role and Capacity

QUFA's role is to negotiate Members' terms and conditions of employment, but Members themselves have an important role in shaping their own working lives

By Leslie Jermyn
Executive Director, QUFA

Last month, a number of Members were alarmed by Via Rail's announcement that it was eliminating some stops in Kingston to create high-speed connections along the Toronto-Montreal corridor. Because this change would affect their ability to do their jobs, some of our Members asked QUFA "to do something about it." It's great that Members think of QUFA first when infrastructure for living we all need falls short. But the episode, like the demand by some Members during the last round of bargaining that QUFA negotiate access to family doctors, indicated some misunderstanding about QUFA's role and capacity, at least under current circumstances.

There are really two overlapping issues here, wrapped up in that single word: *capacity*. The first issue has to do with what QUFA can actually do about a specific issue given its nature as a union, and the second has to do with what it can do more broadly given the context of staffing and workplace dysfunction arising from underfunding and the current administration's priorities.

With respect to the first kind of capacity, recall that QUFA's primary role and power under law is to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment with Queen's, to ensure that Queen's meets the terms and conditions it has agreed to, and represent our Members when it fails to do so. Convenient rail schedules and access to family doctors are crucial to the lives of our Members

ANNOUNCEMENT

Governance Watch

QUFA has created a new Governance Watch Web site to update Members on upcoming Senate and Board of Trustee business pertinent to your work:

<https://qufa.ca/governance-watch/>

just as are decent salaries, but only the last of these is in the power of Queen's to commit to. Queen's cannot control the scheduling of Via trains, nor the supply and location of doctors, so these matters are not within QUFA's scope to negotiate or to compel the university to act on—not because they would be "pie in the sky" asks, but because they lie beyond the employer's scope of action. That said, Queen's is a major employer in Kingston and can join forces with other employers in the city to lobby Via or the province hard for better transportation and medical services. QUFA can *ask* the university to do that, but all it can do is ask. There is much greater nuisance power in multiple Members e-mailing the Vice Principal (University Affairs), the Provost, or the Principal. Should Via resume its plan to cut stops in Kingston, we invite affected Members to pester these people *en masse*.

But this brings us to the second kind of capacity. Why, you might ask, can't QUFA organize such a letter-writing campaign, given the already heavy workload of Members? The short answer is that, right now, QUFA staff and volunteers do not have the capacity. We might, were Queen's a well-funded, stable, and functional workplace, but that is not where we currently are. We have tools like *QUFA Voices* and our social-media channels through which we can advertise Member initiatives to address broader issues affecting Members' working lives. We can

ANNOUNCEMENT

Funding Deadlines

Tuition Support Plan: The fall submission window for the Tuition Support Plan is 1 September 2025 – 1 November 2025. Please See Appendix N of the CA and access the application form here:

<https://queensu.ca.sharepoint.com/sites/HR-employees/SitePages/Tuition-Support-Plan.aspx>

Please note the changes to the process indicated in the HR module. If you have any issues applying, please contact HR at hrbenefit@queensu.ca.

Childcare Support Plan: The application deadline for the Childcare Support Plan is 1 February 2026. Please see Appendix M of the CA and access the application form here:

<https://queensu.ca.sharepoint.com/sites/HR-employees/SitePages/Childcare-Support-Plan.aspx>

provide meeting space. But, on broader political matters, our Members have to do the organizing. And when they do that, that is, in fact what makes a union strong.

Lack of public transportation, like the doctor shortage and the financial crises at Queen's, are part of the broader failure in Ontario and across Canada to support public services. Unions have an important role to play in demanding the conditions for productive life, but to do that they can't function merely as service providers. Their Members have to bring their own capacities.

Leslie Jermyn can be reached at qufaed@queensu.ca.

FINANCES

A Troubling Transition

An update on the university's finances and concerns about the creation of the new "Transition Fund"

By the Finance and Budget Review Committee (FBRC), QUFA

The beginning of the academic year also comes with an opportunity to look backwards on the fiscal performance of the University following the publication of its audited financial statements in September.¹ Unlike budget projections, which rely on assumptions about the future, these statements provide a clear, if backwards-facing, look at what the University's finances actually look like. For this reason, the Finance and Budget Review Committee (FBRC) is providing this analysis of the statements to inform the QUFA Membership of the state of the University's finances and of the trends that the committee is monitoring.

We go into more detail below, but the overall picture is that the University had substantial surpluses last year, driven again by investment income. However, the Administration continues to direct these surpluses towards its priorities in capital investment, and now to a new "Transition Fund," which funds the Senior Leadership Team's remaking of the University.

Overall Budget Picture: Surpluses with Expenses Growing Slightly Faster than Revenues

According to the audited financial records, the University ended the fiscal year with *a total surplus of \$60.1 million and an operating budget surplus of \$20.4 million*. As the Administration points out, this surplus was driven by returns from its substantial investment funds (both from its \$1.72 billion in endowment-

related investments and its \$941 million in cash and non-endowment funds).

Owing to this surplus, the University's financial situation improved last year. The University's internally restricted net assets (e.g., capital reserves, operating contingencies) increased from \$407 million to \$446 million, signalling a strong buffer for any future uncertainty. This included a \$41.9-million transfer of investment income from the Pooled Investment Fund to capital reserves, which resulted in capital reserves growing from \$212 million to \$231 million.² According to the University's financial FAQs,³ these reserves include \$106.2 million in unallocated funds whose use is at the Administration's discretion and will be used for future capital investments.

In terms of trends, the University's revenues rose by \$28.4 million last year (from \$1.128 billion to \$1.156 billion), outmatched by its \$37.8-million increase in expenses (from \$1.127 billion to \$1.165 billion). Meanwhile, Queen's long-term debt remained largely stable with a slight decline from \$370 million to \$365 million. The University's position improved or stayed stable on most of the indicators the provincial government uses to monitor the health of university finances.

A Troubling Development: The "Transition Fund" and the Administration's Centralization of Resources

New in the audited financial statements this year was the renaming of the "Strategic Initiatives Reserve" to the "Transition Fund," and its growth from \$10.9 million in 2022-2023 to \$39.9 million at the end of the 2024-2025 fiscal year. This growth is set to continue with a further allocation of \$18.9 million this year, \$30.8 million in 2026-2027, and \$21.4 million in 2027-2028.⁴ Notably, the \$18.9 million allocated to the

PENSIONS

Turning 71 in 2025?

If you haven't yet activated all pensions (UPP, CPP, etc), you will need to do so by December 2025. This is not optional.

Please reach out to the University Pension Plan through the secure member portal on their Web site as soon as you can so that they can get you set up:

<https://www.myupp.ca>

For the Canada Pension Plan, you will need to set up a "My Service Canada" account and then follow the links to apply for the CPP:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/my-account.html>

If you have other pensions, please contact your previous employers' pension offices for more information.

"Transition Fund" in 2025-2026 is larger than the allocation for the Deficit Mitigation Fund (\$14.5 million) for the same year.⁵

This allocation of resources highlights a process of growing administrative power over the University in pursuit of the restructuring of our Membership's working environment. The Strategic Initiatives Reserve was itself a relatively new fund spent at the discretion of the Senior Leadership Team and thus already represented a centralization of resources. The new "Transition Fund" amplifies this centralization, both in its substantial allocation of resources and through removing all mention of research priorities, such as grants. Instead, the "Transition Fund" is meant to "assist with implementation of the rebalancing initiatives, which

will include a number of technology investments.”⁶ The FBRC has confirmed that this includes using funds to pay for the Queen’s Renew project (as supported by the consulting firm Nous) and that the spending of the fund is at the discretion of the Provost and Vice Principal (Finance). Last year, the largest allocation from this fund was in the Faculty Voluntary Retirement Plan.

That the University has grown this fund by \$29 million over the past two years and plans to invest \$71.1 million more over the next three years while faculties and schools are undertaking widespread cuts is concerning to the FBRC. The fund represents a substantial centralization of scarce resources in the office of the Provost, seemingly to be directed towards consultant-led restructuring processes and unspecified “technology investments.” This allocation of funds coincides with QUFA hearing from Members about reductions in TA allocations and in other supports needed for the University to achieve its academic mission.

Further, going into a bargaining session in which the University is surely going to claim poverty, that the University will spend \$71 million over a three-year period on a fund entirely at the discretion of the Administration is important context for QUFA’s Membership.

Budgeting for Investment Income: Providing a Realistic Picture of the Future

An important reason why audited financial statements consistently outperform the dire forecasts found in reported budget projections in the *Queen’s Gazette* and other sources is the way the University budgets for and allocates income from the Pooled Investment Fund (PIF). The University budgets for a small amount of PIF income, \$5.2 million historically and \$10 million going forwards, to be

allocated to support operations. Any PIF income above the budgeted amount comes as a “surprise” at the end of the fiscal year and is automatically allocated to support “capital investment and other strategic priorities at the University.”⁷

The financial statements defend allocating only \$10 million, owing to the uncertainty of investment income. However, excluding the vast majority of expected PIF income from the budget needlessly distorts budget projections and masks the allocation of funds towards capital expansion by keeping them out of budget planning documents. For example, in the 2024-2025 budget year, the PIF earned approximately \$47.1 million, transferring an additional \$41.9 million to capital reserves, an amount that does not appear on the initial or revised budget projections.

The University has increased the PIF allocation for operations from \$5.2 million to \$10 million starting in 2025-2026. Going forwards, the University should also more accurately model⁸ PIF income 1) to provide an accurate budget projection, and 2) to make explicit the amount of PIF income allocated to capital rather than operations.

All sources of revenue, from tuition to government grants, carry uncertainty. The budgeting process manages these uncertainties with best-informed projections. Investment income should be treated the same, with realistic estimates.

Notes

¹https://www.queensu.ca/financialservices/sites/finswww/files/uploaded_files/Publications/Statements/Queen's%20University%20at%20Kingston%202025.pdf

²Substantial capital spending last year meant that the fund did not grow by the full amount of the transfer.

QUFA VOICES Voice Your Views!

If you have an opinion about anything you read in *QUFA Voices*, send us a letter to the editor!

mayr@queensu.ca



³<https://www.queensu.ca/financialservices/publications/detailed-financial-faqs>

⁴https://www.queensu.ca/financialservices/sites/finswww/files/uploaded_files/Publications/Annual%20Budget%20Reports/Budget%20Report%202025-26.pdf

⁵https://www.queensu.ca/provost/sites/provwww/files/uploaded_files/Budget/Senate%20Budget%20Presentation-Jan17-2024.pdf

⁶https://www.queensu.ca/financialservices/sites/finswww/files/uploaded_files/Publications/Annual%20Budget%20Reports/Budget%20Report%202025-26.pdf

⁷https://www.queensu.ca/financialservices/sites/finswww/files/uploaded_files/Publications/Annual%20Budget%20Reports/Budget%20Report%202025-26.pdf

⁸There are many ways to model potential future returns. A simple back-of-the-envelope projection would just be previous end-of-year assets multiplied by the yearly average return, which would project a \$45-million return. However, there are many more conservative ways to model future returns the University could also consider.

The Finance and Budget Review Committee (FBRC) can be reached at qufa@queensu.ca.

CAMPAIGNS

Fair Employment Week

CAUT's annual campaign raises awareness about employment precarity among contract academic staff

Fair Employment Week (FEW) took place 20-24 October 2025. FEW is an annual campaign sponsored by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) to advocate for fairer working conditions among contract academic staff at Canadian universities. QUFA got involved by hosting an information table at Mackintosh-Corry Hall, and by sharing these graphics across our social-media channels. More information about FEW can be found on CAUT's "Make It Fair" Web site:

<https://makeitfair.caut.ca>



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Time to De-Microsoft?

The planned obsolescence of Windows 10 is an opportunity to switch to Linux

By Ryan D. Martin

Department of Physics, Engineering Physics, and Astronomy

The Editor:

I worry about the University's reliance on Microsoft. For example, we were asked to delete data because Microsoft announced higher storage fees—the “data-hygiene” communications sent last year. Should data-retention decisions not be driven primarily by operational needs rather than by contractual obligations to a foreign company? Surprisingly, it was presented as a sustainable measure¹ while Microsoft is restarting nuclear reactors at Three Mile Island to feed its limitless appetite for energy.²

The latest evidence of the harm of our dependence is the planned obsolescence of Windows 10,³ even as this was touted as the last version of the Windows system that Microsoft would publish.⁴ Many well-functioning computers cannot run Windows 11.⁵ While Queen's is purchasing a one-year extension of security upgrades for Queen's-funded devices on Windows 10, this will not apply to personally owned devices. Once those Windows 10 devices are deemed out of date with respect to security updates, they will lose access to Queen's resources. One year from now, even the Queen's-funded devices that benefited from the one-year extension will be destined for the landfill. On a worldwide scale, consider the amount of electronic waste that this planned obsolescence generates.⁶ Not very sustainable!

I completely de-Microsofted (and de-Google) a few years ago after seeing the roll-out of surveillance tools

ANNOUNCEMENT

Attention Term Adjuncts

General Right of Reappointment or a Continuing Adjunct Appointment

Term Adjuncts who are eligible to apply for General Right of Reappointment (GRoR) or a Continuing Adjunct appointment should have now received notification of their eligibility from their Unit Head. If you are eligible and have not received a notification, please contact your Unit Head.

To become eligible for GRoR application, Term Adjuncts must have:

- a minimum 4 consecutive years of service as a Term Adjunct,
- a Specific Right of Reappointment (SRoR) for a 0.5 course with 100% teaching responsibility,
- a minimum 3 successful annual evaluations (Appendix F), and
- a minimum of 16 points using the eligibility formula (years of service multiplied by cumulative weight of courses taught as a Term Adjunct).

To become eligible for Continuing Adjunct application, Term Adjuncts require:

- a minimum of 6 consecutive years of service as a Term Adjunct,
- a GRoR,
- a minimum of 6 successful annual evaluations (Appendix F), and
- a minimum of 72 points using the eligibility formula (years of service multiplied by cumulative weight of courses taught as a Term Adjunct).

For greater detail on eligibility and application procedures, please see the Queen's-QUFA Collective Agreement Article 32.3 for GRoR and Article 32.5 for Continuing appointment. If you are unsure of your eligibility or have questions about the application processes, please contact QUFA Member Services Officer Doug Nesbitt (d.nesbitt@queensu.ca).

marketed as “intrusion prevention” or “endpoint management.” Can Windows not be secure without purchasing additional endpoint licenses? Don't get me wrong, it's a brilliant business model, but I am disappointed that Queen's is not fighting its way out of it to find a more sustainable solution. In terms of surveillance, I hope that we are relatively safe at a university, all things considered. However, Microsoft designs its tools to give managers finer-grained control over workforces in the private sector.⁷ As decision making appears to become more centralized at Queen's, we are at risk of becoming a test bed for this way of thinking to be applied in our sector. I found our ability to use Microsoft's Business Intelligence to track our graduate students'

responses to the COVID-19 screening a few years ago to be quite a worrisome intrusion. We should resist this dystopian future into which we are rushing!

I have never looked back since leaving Windows for Linux. Linux is an operating system that is free. “Free” as in “freedom” as well as generally costless. You can find a distribution of Linux that suits you. Try Ubuntu, for example: it's one of the most popular versions of Linux and has many online resources to help users. Linux is supported for as long as you want by an extremely active community of computing and security experts worldwide. I run a modern version of Linux on a laptop that I bought in 2010, and it runs just fine! Linux is open source, meaning that it can be

GET INVOLVED

QUFA Caucuses

We are looking for Members to join our Caregivers Caucus, BIPOC Caucus, and New Faculty Caucus.

- **The Caregivers Caucus** connects Members involved in care responsibilities (e.g., young children, seniors, family members with disabilities) to share experiences, concerns, and resources.
- **The BIPOC Caucus** supports and advocates for Members who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, and/or visible minorities. It is organized to collectively discuss workplace matters specific to QUFA's BIPOC Members and to work towards racial equity in our workplace.
- **The New Faculty Caucus** connects recently appointed faculty (up to five years) to share experiences and concerns pertinent to new faculty.

To inquire about joining any of these caucuses, please contact QUFA Political Action and Communications Committee (PACC) Chair Vanessa Thompson (vt25@queensu.ca).

audited for security issues by anyone. It is arguably more secure than Windows by design.⁸ In fact, even Microsoft runs Linux servers for its Azure cloud.⁹ Linux is transparent, secure, and sustainable.

Granted, there is a learning curve to Linux, but these days, most of our work—MS Office, MS Teams, Zoom, Qlicker, etc.—can be done in a browser. It's generally straightforward to get started with Linux, and you will

VOICE YOUR VIEWS

Questions for Members

QUFA would like Members' feedback on the following two questions:

QUFA Members: If you were not hired on a conventional start date (1 July or 1 January), has that complicated your ability to take your initial Academic Leave (Sabbatical) on the conventional start dates (1 July or 1 January)?

Term Adjuncts: Have your contracts ever been extended without a pay increase?

Please contact qufa@queensu.ca with your responses.

figure things out as you need them. You can even try Linux on your computer without installing it, by using a "Live" version that runs from a USB stick.¹⁰ Try it, give it an afternoon! You can install Linux and Windows side by side¹¹ if you are concerned about absolutely needing Windows. You can even install Windows as a Virtual Machine on your Linux desktop for seamless access as you wean yourself off Windows. As you move to completely de-Microsofting your experience, you will find many open-source tools that are equivalent, but free (and cost-less), for most of the software you use. For example, LibreOffice¹² is an open-source MS Office equivalent that even runs in Windows.

So why not take the plunge, or at least dip your toes into the Linux ocean? Maybe it's the time for digital sovereignty before we become the fifty-first state!

Transparent, secure, and sustainable—say it with me!

Notes

¹<https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/digital-stewardship-queen-s-advances-sustainable-cloud-storage-practices>

²<https://www.npr.org/2024/09/20/nx-s1-5120581/three-mile-island-nuclear-power-plant-microsoft-ai>

³<https://www.windowscentral.com/microsoft/windows-10/windows-10-october-shutdown-fueling-programmed-obsolescence-outrage>

⁴<https://www.techbloat.com/microsoft-announces-windows-10-as-its-last-version-of-os.html>

⁵<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/windows-11-specifications>

⁶<https://www.canalys.com/insights/end-of-windows-10-support-could-turn-240-million-pcs-into-e-waste>

⁷<https://umatechnology.org/employee-surveillance-monitoring-on-microsoft-systems-explained/>

⁸<https://umatechnology.org/why-is-linux-security-better-than-windows/>

⁹<https://www.zdnet.com/article/microsoft-developer-reveals-linux-is-now-more-used-on-azure-than-windows-server/>

¹⁰<https://ubuntu.com/tutorials/try-ubuntu-before-you-install#1-getting-started>

¹¹<https://www.tomshardware.com/software/linux/how-to-dual-boot-linux-and-windows-on-any-pc>

¹²<https://www.libreoffice.org/>

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GRIEVANCE CORNER

On Ombudsmen

Independence, impartiality, and confidentiality at the Office of the University Ombudsman

Karen Sisson
Grievance Officer, QUFA

This article has been written with contributions from concerned QUFA Members.

Organizations can be complicated, and conflicts sometimes arise. Despite everyone's best intentions, competing objectives, differing interpretations, human error, and occasionally even biases and power imbalances can result in questionable decisions, deviations from policy, process logjams, and perceived injustices. In such circumstances, aggrieved community members may consider accessing advice and assistance from an "ombudsman" attached to the organization.¹

The role of an ombudsman is to uphold procedural fairness in administrative decision-making. An ombudsman also provides community members with neutral advice about applicable policies and procedures that may assist in addressing a dispute. Given the nature of these responsibilities, it is clearly essential that an ombudsman operates independently from the organization they are intended to oversee. Maintaining an arms-length status ensures advice from the ombudsman will be transparent, impartial, confidential, and credible. This sentiment is echoed on Queen's "Office of the University Ombudsperson" Web site,² which states, "A key principle guiding the role of the Ombudsperson is impartiality." It is also reflected in the Standards of Practice for the Association of Canadian Colleges and University Ombudspersons,³ of which Queen's University is a member. Those standards identify



Queen's University

The University Ombudsperson's Web site states, "A key principle guiding the role of the Ombudsperson is impartiality." In this instalment of Grievance Corner, Karen Sisson makes some observations about the Ombudsperson's role, and raises some potential perceived conflicts of interest.

independence, impartiality, and confidentiality as the top three standards required to uphold the integrity and function of a University Ombudsperson.

With this in mind, QUFA has opted to use this edition of the *QUFA Voices* Grievance Corner to share some important observations about the Office of the University Ombudsperson (OUO) at Queen's. These observations arise following significant changes to that office, including the appointment of a new University Ombudsperson in October 2024 and a change to the office's reporting structure in 2023.

Perceived Conflict of Interest: The University Ombudsperson is Married to a Senior Administrator

Considering the Queen's OUO's purported commitment to impartiality and confidentiality, one may be surprised to know that the newly appointed Ombudsperson at Queen's is married to the Dean of one of Queen's largest faculties. From QUFA's perspective, the existence of close and personal relationship(s)

between an ombudsman and senior administrator(s) of the organization is clearly a problem; there will always be the ongoing risk of, at minimum, a *perceived* conflict of interest (COI).

While the Administration claims that the office's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Management of Conflicts of Interest⁴ addresses any COI concern arising from this relationship, that position is incongruous with the observation that the familial relationship has not been proactively disclosed to QUFA Members during the course of their consultation with the Ombudsperson. The reluctance to proactively identify the relationship suggests little to no attention is directed towards addressing the foreseeable *perceived* COI. Failing to advise Members about the personal relationship before information is disclosed to the office undermines the procedures outlined in the SOP and undermines a community member's right to make informed decisions about what information they wish to disclose to whom.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Access QUFA Online

Members can interact with QUFA in many different ways!

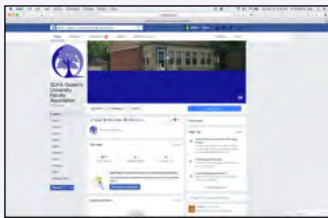
QUFA's online and social-media resources contain a wealth of information about your faculty association, including upcoming events, information about the collective agreement, news items of interest, and more. Follow us!

QUFA Web Site



www.qufa.ca

QUFA on Facebook



www.facebook.com/qufapage

QUFA on Instagram



www.instagram.com/qufagram

QUFA Podcast



<https://qufa.ca/podcast/>

ANNOUNCEMENT

Endpoint Update

QUFA Grievance Officer Karen Sisson is continuing to gather information about the impact of the new Endpoint requirements to the work of QUFA Members.

Karen is especially interested in hearing from faculty members who are compelled to install the MDE version of the Endpoint software on their personal device in order to meet their professional responsibilities (i.e., members who are not provided sufficient funds through Queen's to purchase a device).

If you are in that position, are aware of a colleague in that position, or believe you have other relevant information to share, please e-mail Karen (ks233@queensu.ca) with some details about your experience.

Perceived Conflict of Interest: Reporting Structure

In 2023, the OUO also changed its reporting structure. Where the Ombudsperson previously reported administratively to the University Secretary, the new reporting structure places the operation of the OUO under the portfolio of the Office of the Vice Principal (Culture, Equity, and Inclusion) (VPCEI).⁵ The VPCEI has the responsibility to provide advice and guidance to the OUO regarding day-to-day operations, is the Chair of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee,⁶ and is the Administrator responsible to appoint the Ombudsperson. This means that the Ombudsperson is expected to receive advice and guidance from the same VP responsible for oversight of offices that may be subject to an OUO complaint or enquiry. This also places the OUO directly within the institutional structure, undermining

its capacity to maintain true independence.

QUFA has raised these concerns with the Administration repeatedly, but those objections seem to fall on deaf ears. The VPCEI denies the presumption of any perceived COI and has thus declined QUFA's request that the Administration engage a neutral, external third-party to review and publicly report on the efficacy of the existing SOP and updated reporting structure.

This article is not intended to suggest that the Ombudsperson has acted improperly or that it is impossible for the OUO to maintain the integrity of its operations, notwithstanding these observations. Rather, in the absence of the Administration adopting a proactive and transparent approach to these concerns, QUFA is compelled to use available mechanisms to broadcast these observations to ensure that our Membership is informed about the potential for perceived COI before deciding whether to engage with the OUO at Queen's.

Notes

¹*Ombudsman* is a Swedish word and is gender neutral.

²<https://www.queensu.ca/ombuds/who-we-are/role-of-ombudsperson>

³<https://www.accuo.ca/standards-of-practice>

⁴https://www.queensu.ca/ombuds/sites/ombwww/files/uploaded_files/SOPs/OUO%20SOP%20Conflicts%20of%20Interest.pdf

⁵<https://www.queensu.ca/vpcei/contact>

⁶<https://www.queensu.ca/ombuds/who-we-are/advisory-committee>

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