

LOA#6 Joint Compensation Working Group Report to JCAA

March 25, 2026

Submitted by the LOA#6 Joint Working Group: Valerie Bartlett (Co-Chair), Ian Bearman, Silvia Fernandez, Leslie Jermyn, Jordan Morelli, Lynne Postovit, Lisa Walsh (Co-Chair), Brad Weinberg

With contributions from Michael Villeneuve and Micheline Waring

Introduction & Background

QUFA proposed the joint working group on faculty compensation in the 2022 round of bargaining as a response to two things:

- Members' growing consensus that the merit system was cumbersome, unfair (unpredictable), and demotivating. Changes had been made to it in previous rounds of bargaining, but those did not alleviate workload for heads nor the perception of unfairness.
- The Queen's faculty compensation model (with abatements, increments etc.) was designed for a different pension regime with a different pattern of faculty career timelines.

There was no union appetite to try to review compensation during that round because of the straitjacket imposed by Bill 124 (Bill 124 required 1% compensation caps for three years). By the time the bill was struck down in November 2022, the parties had been bargaining for six months and QUFA had no appetite to float novel proposals on compensation that had not been approved by leadership or membership.

Queen's agreed that the merit system was not functioning as intended and so signed the Letter of Agreement (LOA#6) that established the Joint Working Group. The Parties agreed that Term Adjunct compensation was not under review at this table, and they agreed that any recommendation to JCAA to change compensation had to be "cost neutral". These recommendations were also non-binding with either party having the ability to refer to the recommendations during the next round of bargaining.

The LOA#6 Joint Working Group was slow to get off the ground and suffered significant delays in its first year. From the beginning, QUFA took the position that the whole compensation model was up for discussion whereas Queen's wanted to divide the consultations into two themes, separating discussions around compensation (e.g. progression through ranks) from those related to criteria defining merit in the interest of achieving progress within the established timelines. As we transitioned into the second year of discussions, Queen's acknowledged the potential for revamping senior abatements and separating additional merit from modal merit. However, the scope of work was focused on career development and merit (as further described below) in the interest of achieving progress within the established timelines.

The Working Group did not complete its mandate by 2025, so the Rollover Collective Agreement extended the timeline to a deadline of February 2026 to report to JCAA. The Working Group did not meet that deadline either because of the difficulty of scheduling enough meetings to conclude negotiations on a new system.

In the end, during the 2025-26 period, the LOA#6 Joint Working Group has focused on two parts of the compensation system for regular faculty and librarian and Continuing Adjunct members:

Career Development Increments (CDI): the monetary increases added to base salary each year to reflect career progress. In the current system, this is reflected in the modal score of 10 on the annual performance assessment which reflects a “meets expectations” assessment, or scores of less than 10 that reflect “does not meet expectations”.

Merit: the monetary increases added to base salary for “exceeding expectations”, currently indicated by scores in excess of 10 (e.g. 12, 15 or 20).

Priorities and Principles

QUFA's primary goals, with respect to "merit", have been to negotiate for:

- A system of assessing and applying career development increments (CDI) that is separate from assessment of "meritorious performance";
- A merit award system that is based on objective, discipline-appropriate criteria that are established with collegial input;
- A merit award system that recognizes service as worthy, in and of itself;
- A merit system that is not capricious and relative year to year or across units (e.g., a book is a 15 except if there are two books in the unit, then it's a 12 and a book in a very small unit is never meritorious because there aren't enough points);
- A merit assessment that does not add pressure or work to Heads;
- A merit system that motivates performance because members know what is required to achieve it;
- A merit system that is equitable (e.g. does not amplify gendered differences in earnings over a career).

In addition to sharing the above goals, Queen's primary goals are to create:

- A merit system that motivates performance aligned with University objectives, especially in research where Queen's is moving down in the rankings;
- A CDI system that permits management to indicate a failure to meet expectations if necessary, in the interest of improving performance;
- A simpler and less contentious merit system;

- Budget predictability;
- A compensation model whereby there is the opportunity for salary divergence between higher achieving, “meritorious” members and those who meet (or don’t meet) expectations.

High-Level Agreement

The Joint Working Group reached a high-level agreement on elements of a merit/CDI system that they can recommend to JCAA. The elements of this system are as follows:

1. Promotion to Associate and Full (Professor/Librarian) will be accompanied by a salary increase as part of a compensation model that rewards achievement.
2. CDI will be binary: “meets expectations” or “does not meet expectations”. “Meets” will include a step increase to base salary and requires satisfactory performance in all three areas.
3. Salary breakpoints (Junior Increments, Senior Abatements) will be removed.
4. Meritorious performance, defined by objective criteria, in any of the three main areas (Teaching, Research, Service and commensurate areas in the Library/Archives) can be rewarded in one of two ways:
 - a. An increase to base salary which could be achieved every year; or
 - b. A larger, one-time payment (not to base salary) for exceptional career achievements that could be won more than once but not consistently, year over year.
5. The criteria for achieving awards in #4 will be determined by a process to be set out by the Parties and they shall be transparent, objective and reflective of disciplinary differences.
6. Nominations for Merit awards can be by self, peer, department head or dean and are submitted to the Dean for consideration. The Dean selects nominations to go forward to a central University committee, under the direction of the Provost, that recommends successful candidates to the Provost for final approval.
7. The University agrees with providing a report to QUFA outlining the successful recipients of the meritorious performance awards.
8. The Anomalies Side Table system should be reviewed as it is a significant component of the compensation scheme.

Unresolved Matters

There was some discussion, but no resolution on the following elements of the system:

1. If a member “does not meet expectations”, given timelines for offering managerial support to improve performance, QUFA would support a reduced salary step the first year of “does not meet”, with the possibility of no step increase for subsequent, consecutive “does not meet” assessments.

2. QUFA also supports mandating regular meetings with the Unit Head or delegate for members who do not meet expectations with a view to helping them improve performance.
3. For the not-to-base merit award, the Parties discussed limiting the number of awards and how often a member could win this to once in a five-year period.
4. For the smaller, to-base merit award, Queen's seeks to cap the funds available for this purpose in the interest of truly distinguishing outstanding performance similar with the typical norms of compensation design whereas QUFA is concerned that if the system sees some people who meet the criteria excluded from receiving merit, we are back to square one. There was discussion about pro-rating the award and whether unused money would roll forward but no resolution.
5. QUFA supports mandating regular collegial reviews and updates to the objective criteria.

Conclusion

Some of the advantages of this system are that Heads are absolved of the invidious task of discerning 10s and 12s; members are not demotivated by a system in which the bar seems to move; service is valued on par with other work so that there is no in-built motivation to avoid it; promotions are financially rewarded; and there is collegial input to the criteria for achieving merit. Finally, the big award does not permanently skew earnings which can have a lifetime impact on salary and pension, and which can be biased based on average career trajectory differences between primary caregivers and others.

Our next step is to establish a new joint working group to figure out how objective criteria for merit should be determined. The latter is roughly envisioned to be comprised of three members on each side with the possibility of a fourth staff person from each side.