



## **Outcome Agreements – Aligning with Strategy 2030**

Queen's University Belfast is committed to continuing to play a leading role in the economic and societal development of Northern Ireland, as we have done for the last 180 years. We believe that our success and the success of this region are deeply intertwined. This is why we welcome initiatives such as the Department for the Economy's Outcome Agreements Framework. This will allow us to link our institutional strategies to government priorities in a way that will drive forward progress, whilst maintaining the necessary independence of movement that all Higher Education institutions require to survive, thrive, and prosper.

The Outcome Agreement for 2024/25 which we have agreed with the Department is an important overview of some of our commitments for the next year. In aligning with our institutional Strategy 2030, we will also monitor the following 'linking metrics' over the next year, to see how our Outcome Agreement contributes to its implementation:

- Maintain or improve our 81% overall student positivity in 2024 NSS Survey. The 2024 results saw Queen's maintain its place in the top third of the Russell group, and as the second highest ranking Russell Group University in the Assessment and Feedback category.
- Achieve University of Sanctuary status. Through this crucially important process, the University will welcome people seeking sanctuary through facilitated access to higher education and support to local refugee communities.
- Increase our positive response rate in connecting, enhancing, and strengthening partnerships between the University and the Northern Ireland business sector from our 2023 rating of 73% (Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey).
- Increase our positive response rate in how partners perceive Queen's entrepreneurial contribution to the economy from our 2023 rating of 76% (Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey).
- Increase the draw down of research income from key sources including UKRI and Horizon Europe, including in thematic priority areas in 2024/25.
- Increase our proportion of 'commercially relevant' research in 24/25. Queen's is currently ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Russell Group for Commercial Income as % of research income.



## Queen's University Belfast - Outcome Agreement 2024/25

### **Introductory Statement**

Since 1845 Queen's University has been at the heart of our region.

We are proud of our record in working with local communities, businesses and policy makers to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people who call Northern Ireland home.

Universities are in a unique position to influence all sectors of society. We have a rich heritage of shaping society, a heritage and culture on which we continue to build through our people, our education and skills provision, our research and our facilities.

At all levels, whether driving university strategy, or responding to local need, we understand that universities have a responsibility to serve. We take that responsibility seriously.

Queen's University Belfast welcomes the opportunity to submit our first draft Outcome Agreement submission for the year 2024/25. Through our teaching, research and civic engagement programmes we make a real difference to the people, communities and businesses across Northern Ireland, these islands, and globally. We believe that our priorities and those of the Department for the Economy – good jobs, regional balance, productivity, and net zero – are aligned. As the region's research-intensive university, we believe that we can be a key partner for the Department and the wider Executive in driving forward the rapid progress required in these areas.

The results of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, our best ever, showcase the world leading expertise based at Queen's. Our research was ranked 1st in the UK for Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science, 4th for Health and Biomedical sciences and 8th for Law. Our depth and strength in Engineering is also clear, with 96% of our research rated as world-leading or internationally excellent. These are outstanding achievements of which we should be extremely excited, not only for what they say about Queen's University but also for our current and future contribution to wider society in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Queen's University has been at the heart of driving economic growth in the region for 180 years, we are proud of the stability we bring, the possibilities we create, and the innovations that save lives, create jobs, and expand minds. Our economic impact is critical to the aspirations we share with the Department of the Economy and the wider Executive. A recent independent report calculated that the value of Queen's University to the economy is over £3billion per year, which represents an economic benefit to cost ratio of over 8 to 1 (the highest of any Russell Group University). Three quarters of all NI deep tech start-up companies originate from QUBIS, the commercialisation arm of Queen's. We are also ranked 2nd in the UK in Octopus Ventures' latest Entrepreneurial Impact Ranking (2022), which measures universities' success at turning their academic achievements into thriving companies, and in June 2024 Queen's was rated as 28 in the world for university innovation.

QUBIS+ is in the top 3 in Northern Ireland in generating and transferring Intellectual Property, and it is the most active private seed investor in the Northern Ireland early-stage equity market. Together with QUBIS, our portfolio of 42 active spin out companies currently employ over 3500 people. Overall, we have developed in excess of 100 companies with an estimated combined turnover of circa £500 million.

Through the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) our vision as a civic university is to bring lasting economic and social benefits to the people of Northern Ireland and beyond, working with our partners to deliver a transformational £220m programme of innovation, with a funding commitment of £170m from the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive. We believe we can harness huge opportunities through collaboration with industry, government and communities. With forward-thinking people and proven excellence in research capability, we are well-placed to drive progress for generations to come through our data-driven Innovation Centres in advanced manufacturing, clinical research and secure, connected digital technologies. The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, Momentum One Zero and iREACH Health build on the areas where Queen's has demonstrated research excellence. They provide vital insights into the industries of the future, supporting businesses with access to tools and testing new approaches that give data meaning and drive innovation. These Centres are designed to address societal challenges by bringing together the ingenuity of the private sector, the enabling capacities of central and local governments, and the creativity and problem-solving capabilities of our global research experts.

Universities are uniquely placed to shape the world in which we live, by helping to solve the challenges faced by individuals and communities at a local, regional and global level. They also have a pivotal role to play in underpinning the economic, social and cultural growth of their region. Queen's is central to the socioeconomic success of Northern Ireland; we are a university for Northern Ireland and will be both accessible, agile and responsive to the needs and priorities of our region and our world.

Through our institutional Strategy 2030 we are committed to driving social and civic responsibility and economic prosperity throughout the region. We are working to deliver in four key areas:

### **Enhance future economic growth and prosperity**

Queen's makes a major contribution to the Northern Ireland economy, but there are opportunities to go further. Education will provide the skills that Northern Ireland needs, and our research will drive the innovations that will help to stimulate the economy. In 2024/25 we will continue to deliver on the Regional Growth Deals and the Northern Ireland Executive's strategic priorities, and secure funding to focus on the strengths of Queen's and Northern Ireland. We will partner with other anchor institutions to deliver collective impact and maximise benefits.

### **Drive social change**

We will address key social challenges in Northern Ireland, such as poverty, inequality, conflict resolution and climate change through our research and teaching, and also through our role as a major civic institution in the region. We demonstrate our commitment to tackling social inequality through widening participation and lifelong learning opportunities, as we meet the needs of society.

**Achieve a better and more sustainable future for all**

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a blueprint for achieving a “better and more sustainable future for all” by 2030. We continue to embed the SDGs across all our activities, from research and education to adopting a leadership role in the promotion of the SDGs, and leading by example in areas such as equality, diversity and inclusion, sustainable procurement and a commitment to disinvestment from fossil fuels.

**Transition to a zero-carbon society**

One of the most prominent challenges facing society is climate change and the associated environmental issues fundamental to securing a sustainable future. We are building upon our success to date in tackling climate change and, as a major civic university, implement our plan to enable us to continue on our journey towards achieving net zero emissions by 2040 across our scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. To achieve this, we must ensure that we integrate climate action into all that we do. Our Net Zero Plan sets out a road map to how we will reach net zero emissions by 2040.

Below, we have outlined our commitments in each of the specified areas for the year 2024/25. We have also included some initiatives which we believe make a crucially important contribution to delivering on the economic vision outlined by the Minister in February 2024.

**Queen’s University Outcome Agreement – Key Actions**

**A Regionally Balanced Economy**

As an anchor institution for the entire region we are delighted to continue to support the strategic priority to ensure fairness, equity and opportunity, for students, businesses and communities across Northern Ireland. Queen’s University has been making a positive contribution to people’s lives and livelihoods for 180 years, and as a key driver for economic growth in the region, we believe that the skills we provide and the opportunities we create can be used to best affect across Northern Ireland. Ensuring a skilled workforce throughout the City and Growth Deals’ timeline is critical for achieving inclusive growth - helping to harness additional investment, create new jobs and accelerate inclusive economic growth.

Our collaborative approach brings together the key City and Growth Deal Partners stakeholders to ensure region wide delivery.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skills Assessments for City and Growth Deals. As key partners of Belfast Region City Deal – QUB BRCD Skills team are working on a collaborative basis with other City and Growth Deals and leading on the production of a number of key skills assessments to support City Growth Deal Interventions across Northern Ireland on behalf of the NI-wide Cross Deals skills group.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skills assessments aim to identify the specific skills needed to meet job creation expectations from City and Growth Deals. These are focussed on key sectors including Construction, Advanced Manufacturing, Virtual Production and Creative Industries, Digital and Health and Life Sciences. Undertaking the skills assessments on a Cross Deals Skills Basis supports the DfE ambitions of promoting regional balance through City and Growth Deals.</li></ul>

## **Addressing Skills Imbalances**

The Education and Skills strategic priority of Queen's University Strategy 2030 will provide our students with a sense of purpose and the competencies to shape their own lives and to contribute to the lives of others.

We will develop our students as global citizens with the skills to work internationally, but the opportunity to build a career locally, meeting the needs of the economy in key sector areas and supporting the growth of the knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland.

Goals:

- Deliver a transformative student experience
- Provide an education for societal impact
- Broaden access to Higher Education
- Innovate our Teaching and Learning

### **Deliver a transformative student experience**

Through a partnership approach with students, we will establish a transformative student experience with wellbeing, inclusivity and cultural diversity at the fore. Our new central campus Student Centre, including a new Students' Union facility, will be the focal point for the delivery of integrated and holistic support services. We will ensure our students are internationally connected, benefitting from both a multi-cultural experience on campus and a range of global opportunities with our network of partners.

### **Provide an education for societal impact**

We will continue to prepare our students for leadership and citizenship in a global society, committed to sustainability and social responsibility. Our educational programmes will be increasingly focused on embracing the ethos of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at a local, national and global level.

For our students there will be a focus on their role as future leaders with the transdisciplinary skill set required to pre-empt and respond to local, national and global challenges.

### **Broaden access to Higher Education**

We will ensure that Queen's is accessible to students from all backgrounds and that every learner is supported in the development of their full potential. Partnership arrangements with Further Education Colleges and Schools, along with revised admissions criteria, will broaden the opportunities to study here and expand the diversity of our students.

### **Innovate our Teaching and Learning**

We will innovate our Teaching and Learning with curriculum and assessment development, the use of digital technology and skills enhancement in relation to employability, innovation and entrepreneurship. We will further enhance our links with business and industry, working in partnership to ensure we produce graduates with the skills needed for key sectors of the economy. We will also ensure a flexible and innovative module portfolio which offers students access to a wider range of cross-discipline and cross-Faculty educational opportunities.

Through our 2024-25 Actions in this area, we will strive to maintain our sector leading employability levels (currently in the top ten in the sector in the UK). We will also work to ensure that our BRCD Innovation Centres, AMIC, iReach Health, and Momentum One Zero skills pathways develop the talent of the future, creating good jobs and increasing the proportion of working age people in good jobs.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p><b>Transforming Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme level assessment review and curriculum evolution projects informing development of Queen's programme level assessment tool</li> <li>• Develop Assessment Tool Kit with case studies, living examples and content to support students' skills development</li> <li>• Assessment Support Hub with revised policies and roll out of digital exceptional circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of core skills for Queen's students that builds and develops skills linked to graduate attributes and skills gaps.</li> <li>• All students will develop core skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enacting civic and social responsibility</li> <li>▪ Embracing innovation and enterprise</li> <li>▪ Enhancing research skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Education for the Future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding Education for Sustainable development within the curriculum</li> <li>• Integration of collaborative online international learning (COIL)</li> <li>• Future Ready Graduates – Professional Skills Programme</li> <li>• Future Ready Skills pilots across a range of Schools in the three faculties</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to the graduate attributes and technical skills aligned with their programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources designed to be externally accessible to all learners across NI (promoted in terms of FE and school usage)</li> <li>• Courses designed to be delivered flexibly, distance first and designed around the needs non-traditional learners, directly supporting underrepresented groups and wider regional skills provision.</li> <li>• BRCD Innovation Centres supporting city/region partners in developing upskilling and Reskilling provision for Level 6 +, which may include content development or accreditation of lower level programmes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Building AI Capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of AI Hub and Toolkit for staff and students</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Upskilling and reskilling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on SkillUp success to offer a wide range of economically relevant upskilling and reskilling courses, targeting those seeking employment as well as those underemployed in key areas of economic growth/need, including health care, green economy, digital (including AI/cyber/data and creative arts), and advanced manufacturing. Courses also include increased productivity through management and leadership provision.</li> <li>• Each of the City and Growth Deals Skills Assessments will identify potential opportunities for upskilling and reskilling – this could involve upscaling provision of existing programmes in Construction, Virtual production, Advanced Manufacturing etc. – such as Skill Up or working with other partners like FE colleges or Councils through Labour Market Partnerships to identify pathways.</li> </ul>	

## **Creating a Culture of Lifelong Learning**

Queen's University has a long and proud history of providing educational opportunities across society. Since 1850 we have been offering short courses to the local community. Today our Opening Learning team manages an expanding hub of activity, offering short courses in topics such as Creative Writing, Digital Photography, Law, Personal Finance, Media Studies and Drama, and many more. Through the actions we describe in 2024-25 we aim to move towards a situation in which an increased number of learners access short courses and micro credentials, and that learners transition across the tertiary sector in Northern Ireland, accessing programmes and courses to upskill as their careers develop and the skills they need to adapt to the needs of future employers. This relies on funding that allows for learners to access learning in a way that enables them to succeed, at a time, place and pace that suits them and their lifestyle and employers.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p><b>Transforming the student experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-location of Student Services and Students' Union to promote transformative student experiences and embed Lifelong learning.</li> <li>• New Student Experience Team established to enhance transformative student experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-location has resulted in over 20,000 visits within a year and enhanced student experience and student support/wellbeing</li> <li>• One stop shop for student support and development resulting in a transformative student experiences, enhanced student continuation, completion and progression.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culture of learning for student success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MyQueen's site relaunched to align to the student journey, providing a Pre-arrival tool kit – giving students the skills they need to get off to the best start and thrive at University (open access resource).</li> <li>• Welcome and orientation programme at the start of each semester with a programme of student-led community building events throughout the year.</li> <li>• Transition Skills for University rolled out to all Undergraduate (UG) Students supporting our diverse students to succeed.</li> <li>• Enhanced Academic English services delivered for international students, providing in programme support with 96% student satisfaction (Service survey).</li> <li>• Disability and well-being support expanded for students with community of practice established for School based Student Support Experience staff to support consistency of approach and practice.</li> <li>• Through the Belfast Region City Deal innovation centres and partnerships, support the promotion and delivery of lifelong learning especially with the emerging demand for upskilling and reskilling to support digital technology transformation and the changing skill sets required to respond to net zero carbon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support students to succeed and reach their potential.</li> <li>• Support learners back into education and generate a pipeline of talent from UG through to doctoral level.</li> <li>• Reduction and removal of awarding gaps (based on intersectionality data).</li> </ul>

**Enhancing Digital Skills**

Our actions in this area in 2024-25 will enhance graduate attributes, with learners able to evidence digital skills to employers, that employers will be able to indicate that graduates have digitally enhanced skills and also that employers will report enhanced digital capabilities through staff who engage with upskilling/re-skilling opportunities.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p><b>Building Digital Capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed sector leading AI Hub (open access) of training resources for staff and students</li> <li>• Digital Learning @ Queen's site under redevelopment to provide staff and students with a one-stop-shop for access to the latest training</li> <li>• Jisc Discovery Tool used to help staff and students to understand where they are in their digital skills development and link to skills development programmes.</li> <li>• Video enhanced Teaching and Learning (T&amp;L) project produced guidance and training to support staff integrating video into teaching and learning to transform student experience and encouraging more opportunities for active participation</li> <li>• Centre for Digital Innovation and Technology (CDIT) Technical Working Group established for CDIT – QUB Stranmillis College and Belfast Met to identify range of activities which can be enveloped under the CDIT collaborative approach. CDIT has been integrated into the DfE 10X Action Plan and is listed as Action 4.5, with Belfast Metropolitan College recruiting a CDIT Project manager to lead on these activities.</li> <li>• QUB working with BRCD team to lead on Digital Skills Assessment on cross City and Growth Deal basis and findings will feed into the CDIT approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students/learners will be digitally enabled with the skills needed to be transformative.</li> <li>• Students will be supported and receive training to develop AI skills and competencies.</li> <li>• Students will be proficient working with big data.</li> <li>• Resources designed to be externally accessible to all learners across NI (promoted in terms of FE and school usage).</li> <li>• CDIT will identify potential cohorts within QUB Computer Science students/graduates to develop upskilling / employability projects that would benefit the students which could include vendor certifications such as cyber security, leadership and management skills, project-based scenarios around IT, CV and interview sessions. This programme and relevant partnerships will start to be developed in 2024-25.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education for the Future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital assessment and feedback toolkits embedded into T&amp;L</li> <li>• Integration of AI within Quality Assurance/Quality Education (QA/QE) processes and updates to assessment hub to include AI coverage.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Operational enablers for Digital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jisc Digital Maturity Framework pilot involvement for AI.</li> <li>• Enhanced VLE (Virtual learning environment) pilot programmes launched, with review and evaluation of pilots. Jisc commissioned to report on VLE content quality/consistency.</li> <li>• Four proof of concept AI projects running on enhancing education effectiveness and efficiency.</li> </ul>	



## **Widening Access and Participation**

At Queen's University, we are committed to providing students with a world leading educational experience. We are also committed to ensuring that those most able but least likely to participate in higher education should have an equal opportunity to do so. Our Widening Participation activity this year included support for care-experienced young people, delivery of the Junior Academy, which offers a range of focused interactive activities to nominated pupils in Years 9 to 12, and piloting of interventions pre- and post- GCSE. The Pathway Opportunities Programme (POP), which provides an entry route to Queen's for talented young people who have the ability to thrive at university but need additional support and encouragement to fulfil their potential, has continued to develop. The seventh cohort of 305 participants across all subject areas exceeded the 2022-23 intake target whilst the conversion rate in September 2022 surpassed the goal of 50 per cent, reaching 52 per cent with an intake of 133 students.

Our actions in this area in 2024-25 will focus on the following key impacts:

- The University increases the number of Widening Participation students and enables them to thrive whilst at university, exit with a good degree outcome and access good graduate employment.
- Micro credentials project (including tertiary senior leaders forum working group) enables students to transition between FE/HE, embed lifelong learning and enable all learners to achieve their potential.
- Resources designed to be externally accessible to all learners across Northern Ireland (promoted in terms of FE and school usage). All resources use open access materials so anyone can use and access them.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p><b>Pathway to Queen's</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathway opportunity programme to support WP students to access Queen's.</li> <li>• Junior academy offers a range of focused interactive activities to nominated pupils in Years 9 to 12, with the aim of supporting their attainment and raising their aspirations to attend university. focusing on exam preparation.</li> <li>• The Senior Academy provides 2 yr. programme with subject specific tutoring for post 16 participants which will not only further develop their knowledge of the subject but also acquire exam skills and techniques that will stay with them in further study</li> <li>• Programme of reading and maths support for care experience children to enhance their engagement with education and support their attainment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing opportunities and support for students from WP areas to visit Queen's early in their education, aspire to join and be supported to reach their potential.</li> <li>• Attract a diverse and inclusive student population to study at Queen's at UG, PGT (postgraduate taught) and PGR (postgraduate research) (and micro credentials/ short courses).</li> <li>• Enable every student at Queen's to thrive and reach their potential.</li> <li>• Provide a more flexible and wider reaching QUB education and infrastructure development.</li> <li>• Provide an underpinning infrastructure supporting other initiatives that directly contribute to a regionally balanced economy, creating a culture of lifelong learning, addressing skills imbalances, widening access and participation, tertiary education.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alternative routes to HE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE partnership to identify articulation and progression opportunities for students onto university programmes through curriculum mapping; amendments of existing Level 4/5 programmes; and co-design of bridging modules.</li> <li>• Conversations ongoing with partners (e.g. through Belfast Region City Deal) to support work force supply for Innovation Centres and relevant sectors.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Operational enablers for flexible pathways</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme Management Framework evolution project – enhancing flexibility in programme awards and student choice, and drive student success. See also Tertiary Education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting distance-based learning</li> <li>• Support and training to develop AI skills and competencies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Voice and representation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched Student Academic Representation Code of Practice; completed recruitment of 800 under-graduate representatives.</li> <li>• Reverse mentoring programme launched with 40 student mentors mentoring staff to enhance understanding and co- create effective working practices.</li> <li>• Established review of the experience of FE students on HE programmes, and Queen’s student from FE pathways</li> </ul>	

## **Research and Innovation**

The University’s commitment to world-leading research with wider economic and societal impact is outlined in three main strategic plans. These are interconnected and symbiotic initiatives with the shared goal of strengthening our research position and working with the business community and wider society to broaden our translational impact and innovation, ensuring we deliver high-quality, world-leading research, which addresses local and global challenges.

- Strategy 2030 Research & Innovation Strategic Priority
- Knowledge Exchange Strategy and Action Plan (linked to HEIF 5)
- Qubis Business Plan 2023-2026

The **Research & Innovation Strategic Priority** of Strategy 2030 is structured around three key pillars – People, Research Quality, and Partnership & Place. It entails a range of strategic interventions and projects aimed at enhancing research and researcher excellence at Queen’s through a focus on quality over quantity, translated into wider societal and economic impact through agile engagement and partnerships locally and globally.

Investment in fundamental research and the staff and students and that deliver it will enhance our reputation for academic impact (142<sup>nd</sup> globally in THE World University Rankings 2024), improving our ability to attract competitive UK-wide and international funding for research in NI and attract/retain the top talent in the academic staff and student recruitment markets.

As part of the R&I Strategy, Queen’s supports and enables fundamental research in alldisciplines and thematic areas; however, particular focus is placed on several strategic researchthemes aligned to local and global challenges. These are:

- Healthy Living for All
- A Transformative and Sustainable Economy
- Secure Connected Intelligence – AI and the Data Revolution
- Human-Environment Relations
- Inclusive and Cohesive Communities

To further articulate its commitment to embedding a culture of innovation in Northern Ireland and encouraging R&D-intensive activity in the economy, Queen’s, as part of its participation in the Department’s HEIF 5 programme, has developed an institutional **Knowledge Exchange Strategy**. This strategy is closely aligned with Strategy 2030 and ensures

Queen's plays a leading role in the creation of a sustainable, globally-connected, knowledge-driven Northern Ireland economy, benefiting the higher education and business sectors as well as the wider community. It aims to accelerate the positive impact of Queen's research on the economy and society locally, nationally, and internationally, while promoting and communicating that impact to encourage future business partnerships. Additionally, the strategy enhances public understanding of the benefits of high-quality research, inspires the next generation of innovators, and stimulates increased business investment in R&D, particularly among SMEs.

Queen's commercialisation and spin-out vehicle – **QUBIS Ltd** – has established a three-year business plan (regularly reviewed) that aims to maximise the commercial potential of research and innovation at the University and enable growth of its spin-outs, spin-ins and licence portfolio. Through this plan, Queen's will help NI stand out in the world, attract academic and entrepreneurial talent, and reinvest its returns in promoting these objectives. These efforts build on Queen's sustained excellence in research commercialisation over recent years and its growing influence as a driver of entrepreneurial culture and talent, playing a critical role in a region characterised by relatively low innovation, IP and investment.

These strategic plans demonstrate Queen's commitment to working collaboratively with the Department to deliver shared ambitions for research and innovation in Northern Ireland.

Below we have highlighted priority actions that will support these endeavours during the coming academic year (2024/25); however, it is important to stress that this is a non-exhaustive list and that our efforts to deliver world-leading research and innovation that drive economic growth and productivity in the region are an ongoing enterprise supported by a range of high impact business-as-usual activities.

To deliver these strategic ambitions and priorities, the University is committed to working closely with the Department to ensure research and innovation is sustainably funded in NI to maximise our competitiveness in increasing regional draw-down of competitive funds (e.g. UKRI or Horizon Europe programmes) and optimising outcomes in national research assessment exercises (e.g. REF 2029). The fiscal challenges facing NI are recognised; however, it is important to note that core funding for research and innovation in NI through e.g. QR and HEIF operates at a structural gap relative to the rest of the UK, and therefore exercises such as REF will have a variable effect on driving research quality that in other parts of the UK. As a priority, we are eager to see the Department maintain and enhance existing programmes which it delivers to grow our capacity in key areas such as postgraduate talent (PGA and CAST), innovation and knowledge exchange (HEIF), all-island and international collaboration (US-Ireland), and research infrastructure (HERC).

To clearly articulate these actions, we have structured these under the following headings, aligned with the guidance provided by the Department:

- Research Quality and Culture
- International and Cross-Border Research Opportunities
- Impact, Engagement and Knowledge Exchange
- Innovation and Commercialisation.

## 1. Research Quality and Culture

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
Secure additional funding to enhance our research infrastructure, leverage DfE HERC funding, and build our connectivity to the rest of the UK to access critical infrastructure in other institutions nationally and across the island.	Increased draw down of research income from key sources including UKRI and Horizon Europe, including in thematic priority areas
Fully embed framework to support preparations for REF 2029, including initiatives to strategically optimise Queen’s eventual outcome in the exercise relative to UK peer institutions, including support world-leading research outputs through a Publication Quality and Dissemination Action Plan, identifying and accelerating examples of research impact to be submitted as case studies, and delivering on institutional and regional initiatives to enhance research culture (including Wellcome funded NI Research Culture Network).	Enhanced external reputation for high quality research outputs and culture, with the potential to attract and retain talented researchers, including in thematic priority areas  Successful delivery of flagship initiatives and projects (each of which will have their own KPIs and outcomes defined)
Deliver an enhanced programme of support for research grant applications including targeting key funders (e.g. UKRI) and large programmatic grants with a focus on areas of strategic importance such as Net Zero, Health and Life Sciences, Manufacturing, AI, Cybersecurity, Food and Agriculture, Peace and Conflict, Human Rights. Linked to this – support delivery of flagship initiatives aligned to our research themes, including – Smart Nano NI, PMC, CASE, SFI Co-Centres, Cyber-NI, and FMI.	Development of a high skilled, agile research workforce, increasingly aligned to NI economic needs
Develop a strategic framework to support recruitment and retention of high-calibre academic staff and researchers, across all levels and disciplines within the University, including through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted internal recruitment programmes and fellowship schemes</li> <li>• Supporting academics and researchers to increase success in external fellowship schemes</li> <li>• Review of internal academic progression and pathways to recognise full range of contributions to R&amp;I</li> </ul>	A strong and relevant pipeline of postgraduate research students with skills that will support the economy  Increased profile for Queen’s and NI in national and all-island networks and initiatives
Ongoing compliance with the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. In 2024/25 we will implement a robust framework for Trusted Research, i.e. research security, to support the integrity of international research collaborations.	

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p>Lead on the establishment and delivery of institutional, regional and all-island initiatives to support a positive and inclusive research culture, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and delivery of a new institutional Research Culture Action Plan at Queen’s, building on the first iteration that was delivered between 2021 and 2024. This will include a particular focus on priority areas including our EDI in Research Action Plan, Open Research Roadmap, and new Responsible Research Assessment Policy.</li> <li>• Establishment and delivery of year 1 of the Wellcome Trust funded NI Research Culture Network project, led by Queen’s in partnership with Ulster University, including delivery of a landscape review and report of regional research culture.</li> <li>• Jointly lead the All-Island Research Culture Network (in collaboration with University College Dublin.</li> </ul>	
<p>Develop and support a diverse cohort of postgraduate research students equipped with advanced skills aligned with the needs of employers, including through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-quality training and development through the University’s Graduate School.</li> <li>• Enhanced institutional capacity for excellence in externally- funded doctoral training programmes, e.g. UKRI, EU/ Horizon Europe.</li> <li>• Harnessing the opportunities presented by the DfE PGA and CAST schemes, support recruitment of high-quality doctoral students with a particular focus on connectivity with business and other non-academic partners.</li> </ul>	
<p>Continue to play a leading role in supporting new networks and initiatives to recognise and reward the contribution of non-academic staff to research and innovation activities, including through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery against the UK Technician Commitment (of which Queen’s is a founding signatory) through a new multi-year action plan.</li> <li>• Continue to embed new NI Research Professionals Network to connect research managers and administrators across NI.</li> <li>• Continue to play a leading role in the HEA-funded All-Island Research Excellence Network (AIREN) which seeks to make north-south connections between research managers and administrators across the island.</li> </ul>	

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p>Continue to support the development of highly-skilled and engaged early-career researchers and postdoctoral research, including through our commitments as a signatory to the UK Researcher Development Concordat, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of a new Research Careers and Employability Officer (funded through the Wellcome Trust NI Research Culture Network project) to work across Queen's and Ulster University, supporting researchers and employers to understand the opportunities that exist for diverse and varied career pathways with and beyond academia.</li> <li>• Fully embedding internal initiatives to fully recognise, reward and support career development of ECRs, including a new annual PDR/ appraisal process tailored to ECRs and development of a dedicated career pathway for those on research contracts.</li> <li>• Extending professional and career development support options for Fellowship Academy members, with a focus on interdisciplinary research and deliver the first Crucible Programme for IDR, with a focus on ECR participants.</li> </ul>	
<p>Develop an action plan to support compliance with UK Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice.</p>	

## 2. International and Cross-Border Research Opportunities

2024-25 Action	Impact/ Success Measure
<p>Further strengthen all-island collaborations to support research and innovation clusters, seeking to enhance engagement with existing partners and new technological universities, and supporting bids to key funding opportunities such as PeacePlus, HEA North-South, and DfE-SFI US-Ireland Programme.</p>	<p>Identification of and support for all- Ireland clusters in high-productivity sectors improving work-relevant skills, including through upskilling researchers and increasing the number of PGR students</p>
<p>Strengthen existing and build new collaborations with key international research partners, including: US universities and industry (enabled through DfE-SFI US Ireland R&amp;D Programme), and other target markets (enabled through DSIT ISPF).</p>	<p>Attract international talent that can supply high levels of skills, innovation and productivity to the economy</p>
<p>Through the DfE Collaborative Research Support Fund, support efforts to strengthen engagement with European partners to enable NI contribution to European challenge areas and enhance our portfolio of Horizon Europe funded projects, with key activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on Horizon 2020/ Horizon Europe success while improving NI capability and preparedness through raising awareness of Horizon Europe.</li> <li>• Further embed institutional European Strategy Group consisting of academics to drive forward engagement with key European higher education institutions.</li> <li>• Continue to build upon strong engagement with the NICP</li> </ul> <p>Network colleagues to boost participation in Horizon Europe, countering the negative aspects of Brexit, and raising the profile of the Northern Ireland research and innovation community to European partners, reinforcing an 'open for business' message.</p>	

### 3. Impact, Engagement and Knowledge Exchange

2024-25 Action	Impact/ Success Measure
Strengthen our engagement in key national initiatives, consortia and networks to leverage the benefits for NI business and industry and more broadly for the economy, e.g. Catapult network.	Drive growth and improvement across a wide range of sectors leading to new jobs and better productivity and profitability.
Work collaboratively with Invest NI to support delivery of shared ambitions for regional economic development and growth in NI.	Ensure successes are fed back into the University,
Support design and delivery of the NI Innovate UK Action Plan, including enhancing the drawdown of IUK funds in NI.	opening new, commercially relevant research areas,
As a founder member and key stakeholder of DfE's Connected programme, Queen's will continue to work with HE and FE partners to contribute to the NI innovation ecosystem through the delivery of a range of KE activities.	supporting student teaching and providing opportunities for industry placements and case studies.
Continue to engage with business across NI through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) to enable businesses to access academic research and resources to boost productivity and profitability.	Increased capability to respond to the needs of business (including companies of all sizes) and the wider community.
Secure and allocate UKRI Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) funding to resource collaborations with industry and commercialisation.	
Harnessing the opportunities presented by the DfE PGA and CAST schemes, support recruitment of high-quality doctoral students with a particular focus on connectivity with business and other non-academic partners.	



#### 4. Innovation and Commercialisation

2024-25 Action	Impact/ Success Measure
<p>Continue to deliver priority activities through the HEIF KE Strategy and QUBIS Business Plan, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage existing strengths in IP and commercialisation and maintain UK leading position</li> <li>• Engage local SMEs to solve industry challenges and increase competitiveness</li> <li>• Support the scaling of high-growth companies and maintain increased start-up rates</li> <li>• Continue leveraging HEIF funding to secure external translational funding</li> <li>• Support FDI projects by promoting Queen’s research capabilities and potential for collaboration</li> <li>• Increase collaborative research and technology out-licensing to enhance IP transfer to businesses</li> <li>• Expand investment impact in Northern Ireland through the creation of an all-Ireland Deep Tech Fund.</li> <li>• Support the Entrepreneurial ecosystem in Northern Ireland through programmes such as Founder Labs and NI start up weekend.</li> <li>• Continue to contribute towards net zero through the creation of globally competitive clean technology companies such as Catagen and Nuada, with our strong pipeline of new ventures in this space via Scaling the Edge NetZero programme.</li> <li>• Spin out IP rich business to support job creation in Northern Ireland.</li> </ul>	<p>Increased proportion of ‘commercially relevant’ research</p> <p>Growth in innovation activities through collaboration across government, academia and the private sector</p> <p>Increased innovation through 3rd mission activities such as supporting Innovation Driven Enterprises including spinouts, technology start- ups, technology transfer and diffusion</p> <p>Development and growth of innovative high value-added enterprises which help increase productivity in the economy</p>
<p>Continue to deliver key programmes aimed at enabling and instilling a culture of enterprise and innovation amongst the research community and wider economy in NI, and work with NI business to support their transition between programmes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICURe programme funded by Innovate UK and supporting researchers on their journey from research to commercialisation</li> <li>• InQUBate university wide alliance supporting student &amp; graduate innovation &amp; enterprise through programmes like QUest and networks like SFF (Start for Future, European Entrepreneurial Network)</li> <li>• Scaling the Edge programme supporting NI companies to scale their ideas and helping to grow the local innovation ecosystem</li> </ul>	

## Tertiary Education

The importance of a connected and porous tertiary education sector across all providers in Northern Ireland is key to delivering our educational, social, and economic priorities. In 2024-25 our initiatives in this area aim to support:

- Further development of university college partnerships to provide a thriving collaborative ‘ecosystem’ of tertiary education opportunities within Northern Ireland to meet the needs of students, of all ages and backgrounds, and employers.
- Strong engagement with clear uptake of learners, moving seamlessly from the post-primary sector and Further Education (FE) into Higher Education (HE) including HE in FE, and work-based learning programmes such as apprenticeships.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<p><b>Transforming the student experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further development of the current microsite to create a stand-alone single dedicated admissions portal to signpost schools, parents and applicants about the “ecosystem of opportunities”, including mobility between FE and HE.</li> <li>• Collaboration in and promotion of widening access pathways between universities and colleges to encourage and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate and progress through the educational ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting distance-based learning, part time learning and transitions through and between FE and HE</li> <li>• Provision of a dynamic and relevant portfolio of programmes to meet regional social and economic mobility requirements - including driving economic growth and addressing the skills imbalance;</li> <li>• New flexible approaches to delivery to increase the diversity of up-take including those in employment, returning to work and marginalised sectors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education for the future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a suite of micro-credential modules across the NI tertiary sector to support students to gain qualifications at their own pace through attainment of “stackable modules.”</li> <li>• Employer engagement through City and Growth Deals Skills Assessments have identified the need for short courses and micro credentials – especially SME’s who lack trainers to upskill employees. The value of these courses to employees can support recruitment.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Programme Management Framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of exit awards to enable those unable to complete their studies to exit with an award</li> <li>• Prior learning review project to support a diverse group of learners to join the university</li> <li>• Development and roll out of a micro credentials framework;</li> </ul>	

## Healthcare

Central to the economic and social success of any society is a functioning and equitable healthcare system. We are committed to continuing the delivery of a high-quality professional pipeline for the health care sector, focussing across the breadth of skills required, and ensuring the opportunity for development, growth, and cutting-edge training and study opportunities for all our students and healthcare professionals.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Educating the healthcare care professionals</b> (doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives) with the clinical, managerial, research and leadership skills to deliver a health service in NI that works for all.</li><li>• <b>Work with postgraduate training agencies to secure funding for more training places</b> so that more of our Medicine and Dentistry graduates can undertake the crucial first few years of postgraduate working in healthcare here in NI and be facilitated to stay within the healthcare system here in NI.</li><li>• Working towards implementation of the <b>Bengoa report</b> to deliver best, sustainable, research embedded and informed health care.</li><li>• Delivering graduates with awareness and training in <b>Public Health issues</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Right sized healthcare work force to meet the needs of the NI Healthcare Services</li><li>• Health maintenance and disease prevention (- interventions such as healthy eating, exercise promotion, vaccinations, water fluoridation) are given appropriate emphasis in future government planning.</li></ul>

## Advanced Manufacturing

The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre - a £100m investment under Belfast Region City Deal - is a collaborative, innovative powerhouse of advanced manufacturing set to elevate our region globally. AMIC is supporting economic growth and prosperity for Northern Ireland by creating high quality jobs and increasing inward investment through high value manufacturing innovation clusters throughout the region.

The Centre will drive industrial transformation, paving the way for future technologies and competing globally with a more sustainable focus.

AMIC is key to an exciting future for manufacturing in this region. It builds on 50 years of sustained innovation and industry support through the Northern Ireland Technology Centre (NITC), the Polymers Processing Research Centre (PPRC) and the more recent university-industry partnership, NI Advanced Composites and Engineering (NIACE) as well as UK-leading research capability in smart design and nanotech and photonics.

AMIC is on track to open a 10,500m<sup>2</sup> state-of-the-art Factory of the Future at Global Point Business Park in Newtownabbey in 2026.

Designed for industry, the open access manufacturing and engineering innovation centre will reinvigorate Northern Ireland's industrial potential and address the future technology and skills challenges faced by the region's manufacturing sector.

It will provide a specialised environment for advanced manufacturing, materials, and engineering sectors to access the latest digital, automation and robotics technology supported by experienced engineers and underpinned by academic excellence.

Throughout 2024/25 AMIC's development will focus on progressing the following:

- A successfully functioning Learning Factory engaging a diverse range of industry, community and education groups.
- A collaborative plan and skills portfolio based on intelligence around skills gaps and future skills needs across Northern Ireland.
- Increased productivity and high value jobs.
- More people and enhanced diversity entering into Advanced Manufacturing pathways and jobs.
- Increased options and take up of apprenticeship pathways which are joined up and responsive to industry need.

2024-25 Action	Impact of Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>AMIC will create a Skills strategy</b> and begin to deliver a portfolio of skills support and development of partnerships to deliver, including input into STEM subjects, upskilling and reskilling for industry and communities, leadership development in advanced manufacturing.</li> <li>• <b>AMIC will work with regional partners and High Value Manufacturing Catapult partners to develop knowledge and Intelligence Sharing</b> to help inform future advanced manufacturing skills needs.</li> <li>• <b>AMIC will take a leading role in profiling advanced manufacturing</b>, contributing to enhancing attractiveness of sector and Northern Ireland as a place to live and work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing benefit to industry to help ensure a pipeline of appropriately skilled workers to enable businesses to succeed and grow,</li> <li>• Help bridge skills gaps through training and access to facilities.</li> <li>• Industry supported by future skills intelligence supporting businesses to futureproof their workforce, allowing them to innovate and grow.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Skills and Apprenticeship Pipeline</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AMIC will work with FE and HE to seek opportunities to expand the range of apprenticeships and HLAs to meet Industry demand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better and more appropriate apprenticeship pathways to support industry workforce needs.</li> </ul>

For further information please contact James Dillon, Assistant Director and Head of Government and Civic Engagement, Queen's University Belfast ([j.dillon@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.dillon@qub.ac.uk))

## Signatories

The University and the Department for the Economy agree to work in partnership with each other in line with the arrangements set out in this Outcome Agreement.

Signed:



Name: Prof. Ian Greer

Position: Vice-Chancellor and President, Queen's

University Date: 4 September 2024

Signed:



Name: Conor Murphy MLA

Position: Minister for the Economy

Date: 1 October 2024