



World Council of
Anthropological Associations

May 16, 2016

Professor Patrick Johnston
President and Vice-Chancellor
The Vice-Chancellor's Office
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN
Northern Ireland

Professor Adrienne Scullion
Pro Vice-Chancellor
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 INN
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Re: The single honours anthropology degree at Queen's University Belfast

Dear President and Vice-Chancellor Johnston and Pro Vice-Chancellor Scullion,

I am writing to you on behalf of the World Council of Anthropological Associations, (WCAA), a network of over fifty national, regional and international anthropological associations from all continents. We are deeply concerned to learn of the proposal to terminate the single honours anthropology degree at Queen's University Belfast, and would strongly urge you to reconsider this move. There are compelling arguments in favour of retaining this degree, given anthropology's long-established standing as a core discipline within the academy.

Anthropology as a field of study is at the core of social science research. As such, it is not merely an add-on or supplement to other disciplines. Always recognised as a foundational discipline that provides a rigorous critique of social theory and conventional methodologies across disciplines, anthropology is increasingly seen as indispensable in negotiating today's complicated world. Merely offering it as a joint honours degree will militate against the extended, specific and profound training required to equip students to be innovators in a wide variety of fields, both theoretical and applied. For example, anthropology graduates in Ireland and Northern Ireland are in demand in realms as diverse as high tech, medical sciences, commerce, government, advertising, design, counselling and a host of other fields.

Furthermore, the anthropology programme at Queen's University Belfast has a formidable international reputation due to its exceptional cohort of scholars of note. As such, it will continue to attract high quality students from throughout the U.K. and Ireland and from across the world. However, removing the single honours degree programme will mean that for the best students Queen's will no longer be an option worth considering. In turn this will diminish the cadre of students moving on to graduate studies, thereby adversely affecting the amount and quality of research conducted within the programme. The broad and long-term consequences of these types of cuts diminish more than just the targeted programme. Once these cuts begin, the degradation of the entire programme will continue, and inevitably joint degrees will be less attractive to students who will perceive that Queen's is not a university of choice for serious social science education. It is a needless waste of painstakingly accumulated intellectual capital to thus hobble a programme celebrated for its research excellence.

Finally, as a discipline that is focussed on culture and society, with a local and international outlook, there can be no doubt that anthropology at Queen's promotes the university's engagement with the public and with the global community. The suggestion that this can continue once the single honours programme is eliminated is simply mistaken, because, as noted above, it will have the effect of diminishing the reputation and attractiveness of the entire programme. Anthropology at Queen's will no longer be viewed as a serious programme with commitment and support from the administration. Outstanding faculty and students will not want to teach and study there, and the connections and energy that they bring will be lost.

Queen's University Belfast's anthropology programme is a world leader in heritage studies, post-conflict studies, migration, and other critical areas of enquiry. There is substantial funding available to support these increasingly relevant fields. Undermining the anthropology programme in the manner proposed would serve neither the programme nor the university. We thus urge you to reconsider this proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact the World Council of Anthropological Associations if you wish to discuss this matter with us.

Sincerely yours,



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