

BARGAINING ALERT!

Merit Pay and You



Take a moment to consider the “best” moment that you have had in your career at Queen’s University. No doubt that moment is

closely linked to your teaching or research that you care deeply about. We chose to pursue our careers in academia because we genuinely enjoy creating and sharing new knowledge in our field. We are committed to the pursuit of excellence in our chosen field as a result of our intrinsic motivation.

Merit pay is a form of extrinsic motivation. Someone who is working “in the zone” is there because they love what they are doing--not because they are wondering how many merit points they will receive as a result of their creative work. Of course, we may consider that question in hindsight as we use our valuable time to complete our Annual Reports--but merit points are generally not what keep us up at night thinking and then thinking again about the knowledge that we are creating and sharing.

Interestingly, “at least 70 studies have found that rewards tend to undermine interest in the task (or behavior) itself; this is one of the most thoroughly replicated findings in the field of social psychology.”¹ These findings could be one reason why 72% of the FLABU Members who responded to a

survey about merit pay *did not* agree that merit pay was an indicator of the value of their Queen’s work.²

Another reason why 72% of our Members may be dissatisfied with the current system is because, under the current competitive system, there simply are not enough merit points available to reward *all* of the work that our Members do. Having colleagues compete against each other for merit points undermines our willingness to work together collaboratively, and it can disrupt our sense of belonging to a community.

The number of merit points available on an annual basis for each unit does not change (Article 42.2.2.8). If every Member in a particular unit has a spectacular year, they will still receive the same number of points that they did in the previous year. Perhaps we need to consider using a criterion-based system that has enough merit points (and money) available to reward all of the work that is done in a more consistent, transparent, and equitable fashion. This approach would be extremely challenging for administrative and financial reasons, but theoretically it makes more sense than the current competitive model.

Given that the funds available for merit will likely not increase in the near future, we need to consider other ways to use the available funds. The current Collective Agreement stipulates that the mode of the academic career development and merit score shall be 10 merit points (Article 42.2.2.3). Most of our Members receive a score of 10

points, which is simply the normal annual career development (or progress through the ranks (PTR)) adjustment. Only scores above 10 are truly merit based.

The small³ amount of money⁴ currently used to reward merit scores of 12, 15, or 20 could be used in a number of different ways. One possibility would be to have Members apply for these funds on an annual basis. Applications would then be adjudicated in a transparent and equitable fashion, and payments could be made on a one-time basis. This approach could significantly decrease our administrative workload (especially for department heads).

It should be noted that the amount of money devoted to PTR and Merit combined was just under \$2 million out of \$83.7 million in 2006-2007, with the merit component alone at approximately 0.25%.

An alternative would be to encourage the administration at Queen’s to use the funds allocated for merit pay to address our many concerns about the exponential increase in our workload⁵ so that we can get on with our research and our teaching--simply because we love it!

We need to hear from you. Get in touch with your Council Representative, the QUFA Executive, or the QUFA office to let them know what you think about this important issue.

Notes

¹Kohn, Alfie. *Punished by Rewards*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. In this book, Kohn reviews the available research on the damaging effect that rewards have on the quality of performance (§3) and on intrinsic motivation (§5), as well as the application of this research to workplaces (§7). You can read more about Kohn's work at www.alfiekohn.org.

²QUFA Survey, 2004. Please note that Sessional and Term Adjuncts are not eligible for Merit.

³"A minority of faculty also receive extra points (scores of 12, 15, 20) to reflect especially meritorious performance, but these extra points only amount to 9% of the standard PTR increases," and "the dollars directed to reward true merit represent an extremely small fraction of annual compensation increases (0.2% of total salary)." Bargaining Alert 5: "Faculty Compensation at Queen's" (3 October 2007).

⁴Article 42.2.2.8 provides that the minimum and maximum number of merit points annually available to faculty Members across campus will be maintained according to the following formula:

a) The minimum will be (10 x the number of eligible faculty Members and Continuing Adjunct faculty Members) x 1.06.

b) The maximum will be (10 x the number of eligible faculty Members and Continuing Adjunct faculty Members) x 1.09.

For 2007-2008, each merit point is worth \$258.57 (Article 42.2.2.4). See Figure 1.

⁵QUFA Survey, 2007 (http://www.qufa.ca/workload/flabu_wl_2007/workload.php)

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
Total PTR and Merit Value available	106 x \$258.57 = \$27,408.42	109 x \$258.57 = \$28,184.13
Amount used to meet PTR (i.e., 10 points)	10 x \$258.57 = \$2,585.70	10 x \$258.57 = \$2,585.70
Total amount of Merit Value left over to be divided amongst the 10 Members	\$24,822.72	\$25,598.43

Figure 1: Theoretically for a Unit with 10 Members



QUFA encourages you to print out a copy of this Bargaining Alert and post it in a visible space in your department or unit. Thank you!