

PSAC 901 Postdocs Under Attack: How You Can Help?

Send a letter or email to Queen's University administration

This document outlines our members, their demands, and our bargaining history. We encourage you to craft a statement that speaks to your organization's solidarity, but if you need help crafting a letter or are looking for a template, don't hesitate to reach out!

Make sure that the following people hear your voice: Principal Patrick Deane, principal@queensu.ca, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) Matthew Evans provost@queensu.ca and matthew.evans@queensu.ca, Donna Janiec Vice-Principal (Finance and Administration) janiecd@queensu.ca, Vice Principal (Research) Nancy Ross, Nancy Ross nancy.ross@queensu.ca and vpresearch@queensu.ca, Associate Vice-Principal (Faculty Relations) Dan McKeown dan.mckeown@queensu.ca, and Faculty Relations Office Director Michael Villeneuve michael.villeneuve@queensu.ca, Also make sure to cc vppd.psac901@gmail.com and president.psac901@gmail.com so we can see your message!

We encourage you to Condemn the Employer's actions, including canceling the Pilot Project and their expectation that postdocs continue research and teaching without basic protections. Highlight the responsibility Queen's has to its postdocs, many of whom relocate from outside Kingston, and demand the Employer provide the necessary support and care these individuals deserve.

Post your letter of support (and let us do the same)

We believe that showing solidarity means *showing off* solidarity! We encourage you to post your letter of support for your members and networks to see. We'll also share your letters to help boost Postdoc's spirits in the wake of our employer's aggressive actions. as we show them your support!

Join us Tuesday, November 12, at 12:00 pm for a Solidarity Rally.

If Queen's gets its way, this may be the first day postdocs are forced to walk a picket line. That's why we are planning to hold a lunchtime rally to show Queen's Postdocs that they know their collective strength and that the community has their backs! If you are not local and would like to join us on the 12th, please reach out so we can help arrange transportation. [Either way, we appreciate your RSVP.](#)

Your support will make a meaningful difference in our fight. Please do not hesitate to reach out to vppd.psac901@gmail.com and president.psac901@gmail.com if you would like further information or help with letters of solidarity.

Who are Postdocs, and why is our fight important?:

Postdoctoral Scholars at Queen's are unionized as Public Service Alliance of Canada Local 901 (PSAC 901) Unit 2. We are a Bargaining Unit that Represents over 200 Postdocs in a union representing over 2000 academic workers. PSAC 901 is the largest trade union at the largest employer in Kingston, Ontario.

Postdocs are highly skilled and trained researchers—early career scholars and scientists who have completed doctorate degrees and are now taking on cutting-edge research projects. They can be employed in many disciplines, from Electrical and Computer Engineering to Biomedical Sciences, cultural studies, and Mathematics. At Queen's University, Postdocs are Public-Sector researchers hoping to make a huge impact on their community and the world.

Due to the length of time it takes to complete a Doctorate Degree, Postdocs are also often at the start of building new family lives. An international workforce by nature, many Postdoctoral Scholars come to Kingston, relocating young families from around the globe in hopes of finding community and a home for not only their research but also their loved ones.

At Queen's, postdocs contribute massively to the university's research profile, bringing in millions in grant funding and taking on vital roles in teaching and committee service. Postdocs are often funded by Federal and Provincial grants that they've secured for Queen's (even as they may bring with them heavy debt loads from their previous studies...). Unlike their faculty and graduate student colleagues, however, they do not have access to many on-campus benefits, such as available healthcare and childcare services.

Making matters worse, Postdocs also often receive surprisingly low wages while working at Queen's. Whereas recent federal guidelines recommend that Postdocs be paid a minimum funding level of \$70,000/yr, currently, the minimum rate for postdocs at Queen's is \$36,000/yr. For comparison, a person working full-time minimum wage in Ontario can earn \$35,776.

By underfunding and not supporting Postdoctoral Scholars, Queen's is contributing to a public sector "brain drain" that leads many highly skilled researchers to pursue more lucrative positions in private industries or abroad. All people, including postdocs, do their best work when they are put in a position to succeed. By alleviating the significant financial pressures and other major stressors affecting postdocs' ability to do research, Queen's can help postdocs bring their best effort and output to their work – your publicly funded research. Unfortunately, Queen's does not see this, or Postdocs, as a worthy priority.

Our Demands:

Decent Wages:

The minimum wage for postdoctoral scholars at Queen's is \$35,958. Recent federal government investments in Canada's research ecosystem, as announced in Budget 2024, have increased the annual value of Tri-agency postdoctoral fellowships to \$70,000, effective September 1, 2024. For comparison, a person working full-time minimum wage in Ontario can earn \$35,776/yr.

The Employer's recent offer did not propose meaningful wage increases to address these gaps, continuing to undervalue postdocs despite the increased government funding and growing national awareness of the need for fair compensation in research environments.

Access to Comprehensive Healthcare:

The **Queen's Health Team Pilot Project**, once a pioneering initiative as the **first healthcare access program for postdocs in Canada**, was a symbol of Queen's leadership and commitment to supporting its research community. However, instead of preserving this groundbreaking legacy, **Queen's cancelled postdoc access to the program on the very first day of negotiations**—a shameful decision that undermines their commitment to postdoctoral scholars. **While Queen's continues to provide basic healthcare services to nearly 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students, it refuses to extend the same care to the 200 postdocs** who conduct cutting-edge research and bring in millions in grants to the university. It is unjust and unreasonable to deny healthcare access to such a vital group.

Mental Health and Hardship Support:

A growing number of postdocs have expressed concerns about their mental health, especially given the immense pressure of research responsibilities and the uncertainty surrounding their unlivable wages and no access to healthcare.

We are demanding the creation of a mental health fund and an emergency hardship fund to support postdocs facing significant financial or emotional distress.

Relocation Assistance:

Postdocs who are relocating for their positions, especially international postdocs, face significant financial burdens. We are asking for relocation funds to support those who move to Kingston for their work. Many postdocs are incurring thousands of dollars in expenses to move here without any support from the university.

Timeline: Where are we and how did we get here?

Postdocs Last contract, COVID, Bill 124, & More

On June 30, 2020, Unit 2's last contract expired. As Postdocs prepared to fight for a new Collective Agreement, which would solidify access to Healthcare services, offer fair wage increases and reflect the needs of a diverse and highly-trained workforce, the COVID-19 Pandemic struck and a decision was made in the face of uncertainty to rollover the previous Collective Agreement.

Unfortunately, this took place at a time when Doug Ford's Bill 124 was still in place. Bill 124, a law which has since been struck down by courts because it was unconstitutional, capped the wage rates of public service workers in Ontario at 1%. Despite the rapid rise of inflation and cost of living costs over the past few years, Postdocs (like most other workers at Queen's) have been stuck at a 1% wage each year since.

Cancellation of the Queen's Health Team Pilot Project:

On June 30, 2023, the rolled-over contract expired, and four months later, in October 2023, Postdocs and Queen's hit the bargaining table, hoping to make up for the sacrifices made while rolling over the last Collective Agreement.

On the very first day of bargaining, the Employer abruptly cancelled the Pilot Project for Postdoc health and wellness support without providing any replacement or support structure. At the same time, they expect postdocs to continue their research and teaching responsibilities as if nothing has changed. This puts undue stress on postdocs, who already face financial and mental health challenges.

One Year In: Queen's Refusal to Engage

This bargaining round, a new challenge has gotten in the way of the Postdoc's efforts for progress: Queen's Upper Administration! Claiming poor, despite favourable credit ratings, access to millions of dollars of available cash in Pooled Investment Funds, and annual budget surpluses, and record-breaking private sector donations, Queen's Senior Leadership Team has implemented austerity measures, much to the condemnation of the community. It should be noted that.

The strength of Postdocs has allowed the bargaining team to make incredible gains over the past year, but Queen's remains unwilling to move on many key Postdoc demands.

Timeline (cont.)

Conciliation Efforts and Employer Response:

After over a year at the bargaining table, instead of giving Postdoctoral Scholars a fair deal, the university took its first steps towards locking Postdocs out of their labs and research work and into forced job action. In August, despite our continued attempts to work towards finding a fair deal, Queen's unilaterally applied for conciliation.

On October 16, the Union's bargaining team presented counter proposals to the Employer during a scheduled conciliation meeting. The Employer took over seven hours to respond, finally delivering their package at 5:30 PM, leaving the Union just a few hours before their arbitrary deadline of 11:59 PM that same day.

The Employer's offer failed to address core issues of wages, healthcare access, relocation support, and mental health funding, making it impossible for the Union to accept. This deadline attempt was seen as pressure to force a hasty agreement without due consideration of postdocs' needs.

Aggressive Escalation Toward Job Action:

On October 21, after only two sessions with a Conciliator, Queen's University requested a "No Board" report, an aggressive step that fast-tracks the process towards a potential lockout. This action indicates that the University is preparing to put itself in a legal position to lock out our members in the coming weeks.

Despite this escalation, our bargaining team has remained steadfast in demanding serious attention to issues such as healthcare access, mental health support, relocation funds, protections, and wages.

November 12 - Lockout Deadline? Rally in Support of Postdocs

After over a year at the bargaining table, Queen's has aggressively escalated its attempts to push Postdocs into accepting an inadequate contract. As of October 26, Queen's has requested and received a "No Board Report," which would allow the university to legally lock out all Queen's Postdocs as early as 12:01 am, on November 12th.

If Queen's gets its way, this may be the first day postdocs in Canada are forced to walk a picket line. That's why we are planning to hold a lunchtime rally to show Queen's Postdocs that they know their collective strength and that the community has their backs! If you are not local and would like to join us on the 12th, please reach out so we can help arrange transportation. [Either way, we appreciate your RSVP.](#)