

# **SCHOLARS AT RISK**

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## IRELAND SECTION

### **Scholars at Risk Ireland condemn the ongoing abuse of Prof Colin Harvey, Queen's University Belfast**

Colin Harvey is a Professor of Human Rights Law at Queen's University Belfast (QUB), where he is the Director of the Human Rights Centre at QUB; a fellow of the QUB George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice; and a former Head of the Law School. He was a former commissioner on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. In such capacity, Prof Harvey has engaged actively in the public sphere and has contributed to central debates on human rights protection, Brexit and Irish reunification.

Over the last few years, Prof Harvey has become the subject of attacks on social media and in sections of the press. Different commentators have questioned Prof Harvey's integrity and actions as an academic and some individuals on social media have posted threatening content. Prof Harvey has had to take security precautions as a consequence.<sup>i</sup>

Several politicians have contacted Queen's University Belfast as his employer to complain about his work and to constrain his public engagement. These interventions challenge the institutional autonomy of universities which is a condition for academic freedom.<sup>ii</sup>

The overall effect of these social media posts, press commentary and political interventions creates a threatening and chilling atmosphere for academic work and free expression. This is especially concerning in the context of Northern Ireland where, in the past, efforts to delegitimise professional lawyers and human rights defenders have been the prelude to violence.

A number of reputable groups have catalogued these interferences with academic freedom. Recently, this has included the annual report by Scholars at Risk (SAR)<sup>iii</sup> and a SAR podcast.<sup>iv</sup> Calls for protections for both Prof Harvey and for academic freedom were also raised by Amnesty International<sup>v</sup>; and in a letter to the UK government by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression,

the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.<sup>vi</sup>

We welcome Queen's University Belfast's statement of support for Prof Harvey,<sup>vii</sup> and that of the Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University branches of the University and College Union.<sup>viii</sup>

We, at SAR-Ireland, express our solidarity with Prof Harvey and his family, and condemn efforts to constrain his academic freedom and to interfere in institutional autonomy.

## **Scholars at Risk Ireland**

11 November 2022

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<sup>i</sup> BBC: [Colin Harvey: A target has been put on my back, says Queens academic](#).

<sup>ii</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: [General Comment on the Right to Education \(1999\)](#).

<sup>iii</sup> Scholars at Risk: [Annual Report 2022 Free to Think](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Scholars at Risk: [Podcast, Episode 22](#).

<sup>v</sup> Amnesty International Northern Ireland: [Authorities must protect Professor Colin Harvey and academic freedom](#).

<sup>vi</sup> UN Special Rapporteurs' [Statement on threats against Colin Harvey](#).

<sup>vii</sup> Queen's University Belfast: [The University condemns the threatening and abusive commentary towards Professor Colin Harvey](#)

<sup>viii</sup> The Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University branches of the University and College Union: [Statement from UCU at QUB & UCU at UU on academic freedom](#)