



Return to campus

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| Outcome requested: | Council is asked to discuss the attached paper. |
| Executive Summary: | The paper addresses the interaction between management and staff and students regarding the teaching provision for the current year. Appendices: a. Letter from QMUCU to Colin Bailey 25/09/2020 b. Response from Colin Bailey to QMUCU 05/10/2020 c. Response from QMUCU to Colin Bailey 06/10/2020 |
| QMUL Strategy: strategic aim reference and sub-strategies [e.g., SA1.1] | Teaching and student experience |
| Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points: | N/A |
| Strategic Risks: | Student experience |
| Equality Impact Assessment: | N/A |
| Subject to prior and onward consideration by: | No |
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| Author: | Dr Darryn Mitussis |
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Return to campus - Staff Perspective

Introduction

Crises provide excellent stress tests of management capabilities and organisational resilience. Where there are management failures or organisational weaknesses they will become evident during crises. This additional visibility is an opportunity for improvement, without which an organisation will decline, irrespective of the crises or future crises.

Over the last three years, there have been significant improvements in the underlying performance of the university. The combination of cost controls and increases in non-regulated student fees has put the university into structural surplus. Even in the face of a potentially significant downturn in postgraduate international student fee income, the absence of significant capital expenditure commitments means that we expect to generate more than £10m in cash. We also now have a much better understanding of the condition of the estate and are able to develop a multiyear plan to improve working and studying conditions on the campuses. The denial of planning permission for the business school building and teaching block mean that, so far, Queen Mary has not suffered the same constraints in operational flexibility seen at other institutions.

However, in the area of human relations, the institution is failing, and the response to Covid-19 provides a useful lens for evaluating the way that the university functions. It is to this topic of this paper, focusing on the way that management has interacted with staff and students around teaching provision for the current teaching year.

International, national and local coronavirus context

The general coronavirus context is covered well in the press and by expert groups such as Sage and Independent SAGE:

- Infection rates, hospitalisations and deaths are rising again.
- Seasonal flu and coronavirus together may have a double impact throughout the autumn and winter.
- A vaccination is still some way off and the effectiveness rate is unknown, as is the length of immunity (there have been reports of people succumbing to the virus twice).
- Treatments have improved.
- There is now widespread recognition that the risk of aerosolised transmission has been underestimated (a particular concern for winter).

The national government is generally judged to be not handling the crisis well. Problems with contact tracing and testing, in particular, are well documented, and not just this week.

London does not have the same infection rates as other parts of the UK. However, these are rising and the local boroughs have particularly vulnerable residents, a larger portion of whom are likely to need to commute for their work than in wealthier London suburbs where residents might be more able to work from home.

Internationally, the most worrying lessons are from universities in the United States, which traditionally start their semesters earlier than UK universities. There, despite many having very extensive campus testing regimes, significant outbreaks were still not avoided.

Council members will have read the international stories, as well read reports of lockdowns and quarantining at other UK universities, read stories about poor support given to students, and considered the human costs and the reputational risk to institutions.

Queen Mary in its context has a series of mixed blessings. On the one hand, as something more akin to a city university than a campus one, we have a lower portion of students living in university organised accommodation than other universities. This might serve to lower the likelihood of super-spreader events in dormitories. On the other hand, the higher portion of students and staff who commute increases the chances of infection crossing from university staff and students to the local community. This is particularly the case for students who live with nuclear or extended families.

All of this suggests we should have a very cautious approach to the return to campus and we should set expectations for staff and students around online and on campus teaching very clearly and very carefully.

Direct communications with staff

Communications, individual or collective, provide a valuable insight into the thinking of the authors. We can only write what we think, and we can only think what we can write. Institutional communications are no different.

An analysis of recent communications to staff and students is therefore worrying. Reviewing the all-staff, weekly, "Coronavirus: update from the Principal" email since the beginning of September shows a systematic message about returning to campus while only once acknowledging the work staff have put into developing online teaching. Worse, there is no promotion of these efforts to students. The likely effects on staff and students are easy to infer.

In the table below, the first two columns reflect whether or not the weekly email acknowledges the work staff have done taking learning activities online (✓ positively, ~ mixed or neutral, X not at all). The third and fourth columns reflect the extent that on campus activities are promoted.

Table 1: Content of recent all-staff and all-student emails

| Date | Acknowledge Online Efforts | | Promote on Campus | |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | Staff | Student | Staff | Student |
| 05/10 | X | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| 28/09 | X | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| 23/09 | X | X | ~ | ✓ |
| 17/9 | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| 11/09 | X | X | ✓ | ✓ |

04/09

~

NA

✓

NA

Notes:

- The email on 5 October is much more positive, but it acknowledges the outcomes of staff efforts, not the extensive nature of those efforts.
- The email on 5 October follows two letters sent by local members of parliament the previous week.
- The email on 04/09 is mixed because the most positive sentence about staff efforts is: "Colleagues are continuing to work hard to ensure students can access all their education whether or not they can join us in London, as well as ensuring all students who are able to join us on our campuses have some on-campus educational activities to enjoy."
- The only positive comment, on 17/09 was: "A huge amount of work has been completed to move the backbone of our education online, and I am immensely grateful to everyone for their efforts."

Analysing the communications reveals a very partial message being sent to students:

- Students are actively encouraged to expect more on campus activities.
- Students get no sense of how much effort has gone into developing a viable online offering and how Queen Mary online activities are significantly different to traditional online education. In particular, there is no recognition that online teaching at Queen Mary often includes an equivalent amount of interactive and small group interaction with peers and tutors as previous years.
- Importantly, there is no acknowledgement that social distancing means that much of that interaction that can happen online, especially in small group teaching, is not possible on campus (though on 05/10 there is acknowledgement about the possibility of interaction in large group teaching).

In short, students received messages that will encourage them to expect more on campus activities and did not encourage them to think well of the online activities available to them and the efforts of staff in developing and delivering those online activities.

Staff will infer from the communications disregard for their efforts preparing online teaching. Most forewent annual leave and weekends to re-engineer their modules. Many have had other modules, in which they have invested heavily, summarily cancelled.

Promoting on-campus residence, learning and social activities may have seemed appropriate over the summer, given concerns about recruiting students. However, as evidence of the spread of coronavirus became apparent during the new term at universities in the United States, and as rising coronavirus cases were witnessed first in Continental Europe and now in the UK, the messaging should have evolved to reflect the new circumstances and set expectations accordingly.

The messages also continually refer to government guidance, without emphasising that the institution has chosen to go beyond it in places and could choose to go considerably further still. Given the low level of trust in the government, especially over coronavirus, trumpeting government guidance as the benchmark undermines trust in our institution's decisions.

In short, through silence the communications diminish the efforts of staff and actively sets worrying expectations for students.

Of course, communications also happen when accountable decision-makers have conversations with staff. The three ways this happens at scale is through senior management attendance at school and departmental meetings, through the management hierarchy, and through engagement with the recognised trade unions.

On the first, it is worth asking how many times the principal and faculty vice-principals have attended, listened to staff and responded to questions at school and departmental meetings since the beginning of the crisis. My enquiries revealed none. There are short examinations of the second and third below communications routes below.

A fundamental misunderstanding about blended learning

The messages and guidance, including training by external consultants, provided to academics in the schools, and the expectations developed from them, stands in stark contrast to the messages that students have received. This misunderstanding presents management and possible legal issues.

Staff throughout the campus, but particularly in subjects where laboratories and performance spaces are not needed, thought they were going to be teaching online. Students in central messaging were systematically told to expect otherwise.

Academic staff expended huge effort over summer preparing for online teaching, and professional services staff expended a huge effort preparing to support academics and students online. The understanding of staff reflected observations about expectations of a second wave and the high likelihood that university campuses would host super-spreader events. From their perspective, management failed to develop a coherent, consistent plan, lacked credibility and were consequently unable to impose any authority on schools. Schools, who have been much more sensitive to the delicate balance of educational attainment, the working conditions that are required to facilitate it, and the realities of the virus went to great lengths to encourage and support staff to deliver online.

The continued use of the term 'blended learning' in communications seems inappropriate to many staff. At least in the social sciences, most educators have already been delivering blended learning (a small number of on campus learning activities supported by considerable online resources) for some years. At best, use of the terms sounds patronising to staff while is likely meaningless to students (better to simply talk about how we support their education).

Staff should not be blamed for feeling angry that their relationship with students, and their hard work, has not been recognised and, worse, has been undermined by university messaging. That they are now expected to organise new activities having carefully redesigned material over the summer, adds additional work (I know of nobody teaching who is not working 50+ hours a week), disenfranchisement and stress. This is a significant issue of morale and motivation, as well as having implications for stress and associated workplace illness.

On the other hand, by building students' expectations that there would be a significant amount of on campus activity, by continuing that messaging even as infection rates grow, and by failing to systematically celebrate the efforts and successes of our online offering, we have increased the likelihood that students will be disappointed. This will be true whether, in future, Queen

Mary limits on campus activity out of an abundance of caution or by following government advice. That disappointment increases the likelihood of complaint and demand for compensation through internal processes, the OfS, the OIA and in public forums, all with real financial and reputational costs.

If students ever have access to the conflicting messages noted above, they surely have a strong case for mis-selling.

Engagement with unions and health and safety representatives

Industrial relations at Queen Mary has steadily worsened, and show no signs of improving, despite a range of informal, formal and public attempts by the unions to attract management attention to issues that concern staff. This is worrying because the branch committees are very much reactive to issues brought by members and addressed in branch meetings.

In trying to address those issues, representatives see that management has an increasing tendency to only do what is legally required, rather than seeing working with recognised trade unions as an integral part of the process of understanding working conditions and staff attitudes, and making good decisions. Worse, health and safety representatives report that they are unable to access in a timely fashion documents they are legally entitled to request, and are too often excluded from decision-making processes and structures that are making decisions about health and safety issues. This, of course, is particularly worrying in the current crisis.

Rather than detail the issues raised by UCU, I attach the recent letter sent to the Principal and President by the branch (following direction at a branch meeting), the reply and rejoinder from the union.

It is worth noting that the governance issues noted play out in other areas. For example, two recent proposed restructurings, including one involving two academic schools, one of which was subject to the last, painful academic restructuring, were not discussed with the unions first, as is practice whether or not redundancies are expected.

Staff generally, and therefore their representatives, feel an increase in workload and a decrease in their capacity to exercise professional judgement over how that work is undertaken. All of the academic staff I have spoken to have been working six and seven days weeks, including throughout much of the summer. Many now report being exhausted even though we are not even one third the way through the first semester. Exhaustion and stress lead either to physical and mental collapse or erratic behaviour. These problems will be consequences of management choices about communications, resourcing and workload, and expectations setting, and therefore our responsibility. Unless more explicitly and effectively addressed, the pressure representatives are under to advance matters to formal disputes and complaints to external bodies will only continue increasing.

A note on the moral authority of the institution

The introduction noted the particularly vulnerable nature of members of the local boroughs and central government failures to manage the Covid-19 crisis.

By not going above and beyond government guidance, as many City firms did when the government (briefly) called for workers to return to their offices, Queen Mary demonstrates a lack of care and attention to the particular nature of its place in the community. None of the staff and students emails recognise our individual and collective responsibility to those who share our physical space.

When we choose to commute and/or meet in person and have other options, we choose to increase the risk of the diffusion of the virus, including to those who are more vulnerable than ourselves, no matter the level of risk involved in the individual behaviour. By not being explicit about this, and actively engaging our staff and students in this discussion, we are, and present ourselves as, an uncaring institution; one in breach of its founding goals.

Concluding comments

The University could improve matters considerably by:

- Taking steps to acknowledge and address workload.
- Openly and explicitly supporting staff to continue to deliver fully online, if in their judgment that is the best course of action in the circumstances.
- Ensuring that the effort made by staff to develop their online courses is understood by students, and celebrated by management.
- Ensuring that messages to students are more balanced and reflect the challenges (and often impossibility) of safely and effectively teaching on campus.
- Being clear to staff and students that, because of an infectious disease, decisions must take into account those around us we might infect, and we have a moral duty to go above and beyond minimum government requirements to ensure the safety of our neighbours.
- More regularly, more openly and more proactively engage with the recognised unions to ensure that issues are acknowledged, understood and addressed before they become serious and members feel compelled to use outside pressure to be heard.

When we combine staff concerns about health and safety, a feeling of alienation from the decision-making processes that affect their work, a justifiable sense that their extraordinary efforts are diminished, let alone undervalued, and exhaustion, we have the makings of a poorly functioning organisation.

Unless we address these issues, at the very least motivation will flag, senior management initiatives will be ignored (as already seen across the campus), and the kinds of industrial action seen at other UK campuses is more likely.

Staff engagement creates education and research. Our first task must be to listen to them properly.

Appendices

Letters between Queen Mary UCU and the Principal (x3)

- Letter to the employer (Letter to employer - 25.9.20.docx)
- Response from the principal (Dr Darryn Mitussis UCU - Letter of Response - 05.10.20.pdf)

- Acknowledgement and reply from QMUCU

Dear Professor Bailey,

RE: The physical conditions of work and health and safety breaches at Queen Mary

We are writing on behalf of Queen Mary UCU to express our profound disagreement with the university's approach to the management of the health and safety risks posed by Covid-19. In the view of our members, these matters are so grave as to provide grounds for a potential dispute between our union branch and the university.

You should consider this letter a notification of our members' resolution over these important issues.

In this letter, we lay out in full the reasoning behind our position.

The current context

As you will be aware, Covid-19 infection levels are rising rapidly. Past government responses to the threat posed by the pandemic have been delayed and insufficient, leading to the disastrous consequences witnessed in the spring, including the highest death toll and second highest death toll per capita in Europe in the first wave of infection. The current reluctant approach of the government, against the advice of many scientists, is likely to lead to a second wave of infections, hospitalisations, and deaths in the coming weeks.

Recently, hundreds of thousands of students moved across the country to take up residence at or near universities, and face-to-face activities on campus have resumed, including at Queen Mary. Expert [commentators](#), alongside both [SAGE](#) and [Independent SAGE](#), noted the tremendous risks this presented for Covid transmission. Most students fall into age categories which are presently experiencing some of the highest infection rates in the population. Furthermore, people in this age group are more likely to suffer asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic infections, making cases hard to trace. Worrying evidence from the United States, and now from several other UK universities (especially in Scotland, where students returned earlier), shows that universities are settings in which Covid-19 can spread rapidly.

Over the summer, UCU laid out [Five Tests](#) which must be met before a safe return to campus can take place. In our view, these tests have not been met either at Queen Mary or at any other university. QMUCU first expressed this view in our response to the institution-wide risk assessment in August, and recent events have only strengthened this assessment. The General Secretary of UCU called for all classes to be moved online as a default and for students to remain at home unless absolutely necessary. QMUCU concurred with this view and wrote to the Vice Principal for Education and the Head of Student and Academic Services to this effect on 2nd September. Our warnings were not heeded.

Having missed this opportunity, the situation is now very grave. According to your most recent communication to all staff, there are now confirmed Covid-19 infections among our staff and student population. It is time to reverse course before the situation deteriorates further.

Below we outline the steps which we require you to take in order to avoid a dispute between us:

1. Rapidly improve Health and Safety governance at Queen Mary

Health and Safety governance at Queen Mary is barely functioning. There is an agreed structure for consulting and reporting on health and safety matters, which relies on the Health and Safety Advisory Group (HSAG) and its subcommittees. This is the only body in the university to which trade union appointed safety representatives are invited. HSAG has not met since 17th June 2020 and is not scheduled to meet again until 29th November 2020. Not a single emergency meeting of HSAG has been called since the pandemic emerged, even though this is the most significant health and safety emergency which the university has ever faced. In our view, there is a clear reason for this: the university refuses to frankly discuss its approach to Covid-19 while trade unions are present.

Instead, unions were invited to an informally constituted "Covid Joint Consultative Forum (JCF)" with no agreed standing, no decision-making powers, and no minute-taking. It met fortnightly over the summer, but only for 45 minutes at a time and it was also tasked with addressing a wide range of other serious matters - not least the university's decision to terminate the contracts of hundreds of fixed-term staff in response to pandemic. The time allotted for discussion of health and safety matters was minimal.

We raised our objections to this arrangement in a letter to Sheila Gupta in July. Following a meeting, a discussion paper regarding H&S governance was circulated a month later proposing to increase the frequency of HSAG meetings and to disband the Covid JCF in favour of a normal JCF meeting which would not discuss health and safety matters. Since then, while the Covid JCF was indeed disbanded with immediate effect, the frequency of HSAG meetings has not changed. The next JCF meeting is not scheduled until 5th October, which would be our earliest opportunity to discuss this again. In the meantime, other communications requesting urgent clarifications on H&S matters sent to the JCF have been ignored.

During the pandemic, trade unions have regularly been sent risk assessment documents at a late stage or after they have been approved. Most recently, last week we were sent a retrospective list of changes to the institution-wide risk assessment. This included a major change, which was the decision to remove the control specifying that staff should continue to work at home where possible. We were not consulted on this at all before the updated risk assessment (RA) was cascaded to line managers. Yet the university continues to tell its staff in communications that risk assessments have been introduced after consultation with trade unions.

Furthermore, the university continues to develop health and safety policies in response to Covid-19 without consulting the trade unions or even informing us that they had been issued. This includes the recently introduced "Emergency Plan" and the "Track and Trace Policy". We submitted a request to the Health and Safety Directorate to see the Emergency Plan on 17th September and have still not seen a copy.

We would like to remind you that the university has a statutory obligation to consult with trade union safety representatives "in good time with regard to [...] the introduction of any measure at the workplace which may substantially affect the health and safety of the employees the safety representatives concerned represent". This duty is imposed by Section 2(6) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Regulation 4A(1)(a–e) of the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

Queen Mary is currently in clear breach of these statutory obligations and UCU reserves the right to pursue civil, regulatory or criminal proceedings as appropriate.

2. All teaching and services which can be delivered online, should be delivered online.

In response to the pandemic Queen Mary staff have worked tirelessly to move teaching and other services online. This meant redesigning all modules for online delivery over the summer, and drastically changing ways of working for professional services staff. This was a huge undertaking, but these efforts have meant that it is now possible to deliver our degrees and many services online. In several departments, staff were reassured by line managers that all teaching would be delivered online. However, the university opted instead to deliver an ambiguous message to students advertising “blended learning”. Blended learning is a technical pedagogical term which implies a learning journey where both online and in-person core elements are carefully sequenced to maximise active student engagement. This was not at all what was intended or planned for by Schools and Institutes, who were instead preparing for online classes accompanied in some cases by non-core, optional “enrichment” activities which could not possibly include all students due to space constraints.

This ambiguous formulation clearly succeeded in preserving recruitment figures, but it appears it did not succeed in managing student expectations. With the start of the new academic year, student representatives reported disappointment and confusion from some students about the lack of face-to-face activities. At the same time, colleagues across the university suddenly reported far more pressure from their line managers to offer face-to-face activities and to be physically present on campus for a set number of days a week. A face-to-face meeting protocol was hurriedly released (again without consultation with union appointed safety representatives). Messages were sent to students (copied to staff) promising that “everyone will have some of these [face-to-face] activities to enjoy, and that they will all be Covid-safe”, without any qualification with regard to health and safety constraints or staff availability. A further message was sent to staff declaring that “[w]e will continue to provide in-person education activities (as agreed) for students”, which came as a surprise to many staff who had never “agreed” to this, had no plans in place to deliver it, and had never been told they were required to do so.

These initiatives are not only being hastily improvised, they are unsafe. This is not only because of the difficulty of delivering teaching safely given the insufficient controls currently in place (on which see more below), but because they will increase traffic onto campus, in the local area, and on public transport at a time of rising infections. The likely impact on vulnerable communities in Tower Hamlets of particular concern and also risks long-term reputational damage to the institution. Moreover, given the likelihood of a second wave, further restrictions, and outbreaks on campus, it seems inevitable that any plans for face-to-face teaching will have to be reversed. It is far better to prepare thoroughly for online teaching, than haphazardly for a halfway house which cannot be delivered.

It is time to be honest with staff and students about this, and move all teaching online by default. We recognise there are some subjects with significant practical or clinical components where moving all teaching online would not be possible. In these cases, subject to health and safety requirements and mitigations, it may be possible to hold a number of face-to-face activities where absolutely necessary. However, given the risks, it is essential that optional face-to-face activities beyond this cease in order to minimise the likelihood of transmission while these other essential activities continue. Moreover, no staff member should be forced to do any face-to-face activity which they feel to be unsafe, and they should face no repercussions for expressing this view. Likewise, now that the government has shifted its guidance to encouraging all office workers to work from home where possible, it is time to reintroduce this control and encourage all academic and professional services staff to work from home. You will no doubt be aware of the national measures announced on 22

September which state that people in educational settings only need go into work “where necessary”.

3. Controls must be introduced which adequately recognise the risk of airborne transmission

In particular, this means: (a) mandatory face mask wearing in all multiple occupancy indoor spaces, including classrooms; (b) taking any room which does not meet ventilation standards completely out of use.

At present, Queen Mary Covid-Secure planning does not take sufficient account of the risks of airborne transmission of the virus, which is now a matter of [broad scientific consensus](#). As far as we understand from the teaching rooms risk assessment, the current plan is still to use poorly ventilated teaching rooms for teaching as long as 2m distancing and/or lowered occupancy is in place. But 2m distancing is not adequate to prevent airborne transmission. To illustrate this, please see the table below from a [BMJ study](#) on airborne transmission.

As you can see, even with low occupancy, rooms which are poorly ventilated, used for a prolonged time, and host activities including speaking without mask wearing, have a high risk of transmission. In fact, the risk is still medium even where ventilation is good. Yet countless risk assessments at Queen Mary instead claim that the risks of using classrooms in these conditions are “low/tolerable”. This approach must be corrected if limited on campus teaching is to be made safe.

| Type and level of group activity | Low occupancy | | | High occupancy | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| | Outdoors and well ventilated | Indoors and well ventilated | Poorly ventilated | Outdoors and well ventilated | Indoors and well ventilated | Poorly ventilated |
| Wearing face coverings, contact for short time | | | | | | |
| Silent | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium |
| Speaking | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium |
| Shouting, singing | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | High |
| Wearing face coverings, contact for prolonged time | | | | | | |
| Silent | Low | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | High |
| Speaking | Low | Medium* | Medium | Medium* | Medium | High |
| Shouting, singing | Low | Medium | High | Medium | High | High |
| No face coverings, contact for short time | | | | | | |
| Silent | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | High |
| Speaking | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | High |
| Shouting, singing | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | High |
| No face coverings, contact for prolonged time | | | | | | |
| Silent | Low | Medium | High | Medium | High | High |
| Speaking | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | High |
| Shouting, singing | Medium | High | High | High | High | High |

Risk of transmission
 Low ■ Medium ■ High ■

* Borderline case that is highly dependent on quantitative definitions of distancing, number of individuals, and time of exposure

4. Test and trace arrangements must be improved

The university's current plan is to rely entirely on NHS testing systems. As is well known, these are under huge strain at the moment and cannot meet demand. Since there is no accessible testing site within walking distance, our students in residence have to rely on the slower postal testing system. Moreover, NHS tests are only available to those who are symptomatic.

[Peer-reviewed analysis](#) suggests that regular testing of *all students*, even those who are not displaying symptoms, is essential to prevent outbreaks on university campuses. This has been introduced at a large number of US colleges, and also at several UK universities. As we understand it, university management has been approached on more than one occasion by well-qualified senior academics at Queen Mary with proposals to introduce a university-led testing system, but has chosen not to do so.

As for tracing, the university procedure is also in need of improvement. At present, the plan is to inform staff and students only where there has been a "close contact" defined as "closer than 2 meters for 15 minutes or more". As we explained above, airborne transmission means that infection can easily happen in university settings even where 2m distancing is maintained. This protocol would mean that staff or students who had spent up to an hour with an infected person in a classroom would not be informed of their contact with that case, even though they would clearly be at high risk of being infected. This is not acceptable.

Furthermore, the university should publish a regularly updated and publicly available dashboard of anonymised data on all known infections on campus, as other universities here and abroad have done. This is important for public information purposes in our local community, as well as for staff and students to make judgements about their own safety coming onto campus.

Next steps

The QMUCU branch is therefore asking the university to agree a timescale for urgent discussions in an eJNC to be held within 10 working days of receipt of this letter with a view to reaching agreement on the physical conditions in which our members work. Further, we are seeking commitments, in light of the new national measures which oblige the university to consult safety representatives once more in accordance with [section 2\(6\)](#) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, that the university will work with UCU in making and maintaining arrangements to accord with these new measures and in checking the effectiveness of the university's response to these measures. Lastly, given the heightened risk of coronavirus infection at this time, the branch committee would like also like written confirmation that the staff are only obliged to undertake **necessary** face-to-face work in accordance with the new national measures.

Please note that, unless UCU receives confirmation by **5pm on Tuesday 29th September 2020** that these requests are agreed, the committee have been mandated by the branch members to initiate the dispute resolution procedure.

Your sincerely,

QMUCU Branch Committee

5 October 2020

Dr Darryn Mitussis
UCU Branch Committee and Membership

Dear Dr Mitussis

Re: The physical conditions of work and health and safety breaches at Queen Mary

I recently wrote to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 25th September 2020 on the above issues, which you sent to the Chair of Council, the Vice-Principal People, Culture and Inclusion and myself. In acknowledging receipt of your letter, I responded stating that the University did not agree with the contents of your letter, indicating that a full and detailed reply would follow addressing the points that you raised.

The University is, and continues to be, happy to engage in constructive dialogue and consultations with QMUCU. It is therefore with regret that I note the intention of the Union to invoke the dispute resolution procedure if the University did not “agree” to all the “requests” contained in your letter, by 5.00pm on Tuesday 29th September 2020, which is, on any interpretation, an unrealistic and unreasonable timeline, having only received your letter at lunchtime the previous Friday. The University will continue to engage with UCU in the spirit of constructive consultations and hopes that UCU will alter its current stance to one that is collaborative.

In advance of addressing the detail of your letter, it is equally important to provide the contextual background to the events of this year and how the University has responded to them to ensure the successful operation of all our campuses and the protection of our students, staff and wider communities.

For the duration of the Coronavirus pandemic, our primary objective has always been and continues to be the safety of our staff and students.

It is important to recognise the exceptional work that has been undertaken by multiple teams working together to prepare our campuses to be Covid-Secure to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all our students and staff who are either returning to, or arriving on, campus. The incredible efforts of the majority of our staff across the University from Estates and Facilities, IT Services, Health and Safety, Human Resources, and Faculty, School and Institute offices to Heads of School and Institutes, academic colleagues across our faculties, and technical staff in our laboratories, have been pivotal in contributing to the planning and preparations required to create an environment that is Covid-Secure and ready for this new and very different academic year, as demonstrated by the extensive information, advice and guidance published on our Health and Safety Directorate website: <http://www.hsd.qmul.ac.uk/covid-19-secure-procedures/>

I shall now turn to the separate points in your letter. I have inserted sub-headings to make it easier to follow the different issues raised in your letter.

In my letter I also refer to the Trade Unions in plural in the interests of accuracy, as our interactions have been with all our Campus Unions, though I recognise that in your letter, you have raised these concerns on behalf of QMUCU only.

1. Rapidly improve Health and Safety governance at Queen Mary

Establishment of groups to respond to Covid-19

Your contention that the Health and Safety Advisory Group (HSAG) is the only body in the University to which Trade Union appointed safety representatives are invited is not correct. Trade Union representatives are invited to, and have representation on, each of the Faculty Health & Safety Management Group Meetings and also local School & Directorate Health & Safety Committees. The next meeting of HSAG is 23rd October 2020 and monthly thereafter from this new academic year.

The University set up appropriate Strategy Groups, initially the Coronavirus Response Group, which was later known as Silver Group; the Return to Campus Group (RtG); and more recently the Covid-19 Management Group, to deal with business continuity and emergency planning. However, these groups were not constituted to act as formal Health and Safety Committees, nor were they constituted to operate as consultation bodies. Trade Union representatives have however been involved quite properly in other groups consistent with our governance structures.

The extraordinary challenges presented by Covid-19 were compounded by the speed of the March lockdown and it is understandable that the Trade Unions felt during March (although there was current industrial action taking place at the time) that they did not have a forum through which they could input into decision-making, be consulted on relevant issues, and raise their concerns in relation to the impact of Covid. It was therefore understandable that the Unions at the time requested an Emergency meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) to discuss these matters. The University responded in March 2020 by stating that we felt it was important to go further and proposed a model that was tailored to dealing with the very particular challenges presented by Covid and suggested the establishment a new Covid-19 JCF. The purpose of the meetings, their frequency, membership, agenda setting, and areas of business that would be covered, were set out in an e-mail from Sheila Gupta, Chair of JCF, dated 23 March 2020 to the Campus Unions, members of senior management and HR. This proposal was accepted by you on behalf of the Campus Unions in an e-mail response dated 25th March 2020 to Sheila Gupta.

Covid-19 JCF

Whilst I do not intend to cover all the contents of the 23rd March 2020 e-mail here, there are some points that need to be corrected or clarified in relation to your letter. The purpose of the Covid-19 JCF was, as its name suggests, instituted specifically to provide a forum in which the Unions could meet directly with senior management to raise Covid-19 related issues. The Covid-19 JCF was constituted to enable consultation between senior management and the Trade Unions on issues including, health and safety, staff wellbeing and mental health, policies developed to deal with the implications of Covid and any issues you wished to raise with us.

Given that the membership on the management side was the same as the standing JCF, with the addition of the Director of the Health and Safety Directorate (HSD) to address Health and Safety issues, it is difficult to understand the contention that the Forum had no standing. For the avoidance of doubt, the Covid-19 JCF had the same standing and decision-making powers as the standing JCF.

In addition to the creation of this additional consultative group, our e-mail to you also recognised the fast-paced nature of the situation and highlighted that Sheila Gupta and Jonathan Morgan were also available to be contacted by phone at any time, should you wish to raise any matters with them. The offer to contact them at any time outside scheduled meetings was made on more than one occasion. To this extent, the Unions had the opportunity to either raise matters at the Covid-19 JCF or directly

with senior management. This is important, as it seems to me that the University has done much to promote a positive culture of collaborative working with our Campus Unions.

With reference to your point that there were no minutes, it is important to note that actions were formally noted and addressed at each meeting. The reason for formally noting actions and not taking detailed minutes at each meeting was one of capacity within HR. It was simply not possible to organise and service a fortnightly Covid-19 JCF to the same level as a termly JCF meeting. The HR department had also absorbed a significant level of additional work with the same team having to develop a vast range of new guidance, procedures and processes to deal with the on-going impact of the pandemic. This is evidenced by the extensive material available on our dedicated website referenced above.

The Covid-19 JCF met a total of 11 times between 8th April 2020 and 12th August 2020, normally every fortnight. To suggest that it only met over the summer is simply not correct. The meetings discussed Covid-related issues and considered relevant documentation. Some of the key issues covered in these meetings included: institutional and individual risk assessments; UCU's Statement of Intent, which was an item requested by the Unions; guidance on virtual meetings; guidance on how to conduct return to campus conversations with staff; guidance on the use of face coverings; wellbeing initiatives; voluntary options and the voluntary severance scheme; and guidance on TATF contracts. The new TATF process was introduced to enhance the University's procedures for workforce planning to better align the skills of our staff with the future needs of faculties. It was not as your letter suggests to terminate fixed term contracts in response to the pandemic.

With reference to your point that there was insufficient time to discuss health and safety matters in meetings; the University does not agree. In accordance with the original proposal, additional meetings were held to discuss more detailed items of business to afford appropriate extra time for their discussion. These included meetings with our Director of Health and Safety Rebecca Jones on 22nd May 2020 and 26th May 2020 regarding risk assessments; on 1st June with UCU to discuss the statement of intent that UCU had proposed; on 7th July to discuss the TATF paper; on 17th July 2020 to discuss health and safety governance with Sheila Gupta and Jonathan Morgan; and on 17th September 2020 to discuss the TATF assimilation agreement and fixed term contracts.

To this extent, it can be shown that the University did meet with the Unions outside the scheduled meetings, so if there were health and safety matters during the period from 8th April 2020 that the Unions wished to discuss, the Unions had every opportunity to request additional meetings for these purposes and would have been aware that other meetings had been held at the request of either side throughout the period from May onwards.

I also have to state that the three members of Senior Team on the Covid-19 JCF, were all carrying extensive portfolios in addition to their own areas of responsibility and, as such, the length of the meetings had to fit with their own availability.

Health and Safety Governance

In response to your points relating to health and safety governance, the University has given full and proper regard to these matters. I set out some important facts here by way of background:

- I. James Eastwood raised concerns in an e-mail to Sheila Gupta, Wen Wang and Rebecca Jones on 15th July 2020.
- II. Sheila Gupta responded to James Eastwood on 16th July 2020 offering to meet on Friday 17th July 2020. The meeting took place with the Unions, Sheila Gupta and Jonathan Morgan.
- III. On Monday 20th July 2020 Sheila Gupta sent a detailed e-mail to the Unions setting out the objectives that were discussed at the meeting and proposing key steps to meet those objectives.

- IV. The Unions responded at the end of the same day endorsing all of the steps proposed. In addition, the Unions expressed a concern to see further changes to the governance structures amidst a worry that having the Covid-19 JCF as the sole forum for discussing these matters held the risk of insulating rather than affording the Unions the opportunity for input into decision-making processes.
- V. Sheila Gupta also responded to other matters raised in your e-mail of 20th July, in her e-mail response dated 29th July 2020.
- VI. Following discussions with members of SET, Sheila Gupta produced a discussion paper on proposals for health and safety governance, which was shared with the Unions on 12th August 2020 following the Covid-19 JCF meeting. The paper took into account the specific concerns that the Unions had raised about not feeling included in decision-making and therefore proposed mainstreaming all Covid-19 related issues back into HSAG and the standing JCF as relevant to the remit of each committee. The Unions were invited to provide their feedback and response to these proposals, but the University did not receive a response.

The University has taken account of the Unions view that HSAG should meet more often and arrangements have now been introduced for the Committee to meet monthly. The standing JCF will now consider all issues, including those related to Covid that require consultation with the Unions. The University has responded to concerns raised by the Unions at the end of the previous academic year and implemented new provisions from this new academic year. Given this passage of events and the new arrangements now in place, it is difficult to accept that the University has not taken seriously the issues raised by the Unions and responded positively and in good faith.

It is true that the Unions have very recently sent a number of further e-mails to various areas across the University asking a range of questions. In the interests of clarity and consistency, the University is preparing responses to these multiple e-mails.

Risk Assessments

I shall now respond to the points made in your letter relating to the University's approach to Union consultations with regard to risk assessments. This section is necessarily detailed to respond to the assertions in your letter that are not accurate.

A general point is that risk assessments have necessarily been updated to reflect prevailing government guidance as amended throughout the pandemic.

i) In response to the contention that the unions have been sent risk assessment documents at a late stage or after they have been approved: the Director of the Health and Safety Directorate (HSD) met with the Campus Unions on 22nd May 2020 to consult on the first draft of the Institutional Risk Assessment (IRA) and minor changes to the document proposed by the Unions were accepted and the IRA was then signed off by SET.

It was agreed with the Unions at the beginning of the consultation process that, due to the restrictions of the functionality of the internal MySafety system the only way to allow all Trade Union representatives to access the risk assessments was to add them to the distribution list. Trade Unions were always given the opportunity to challenge the content of the assessments even after they were approved by the Director of HSD or relevant Head of School, Institute or PS Director, as is any member of staff, who were consulted in the same way. Risk assessments are living documents and can be discussed and amended at any time.

It is not possible to constitute formal committees to respond to constantly changing government policies and, as such, it is necessary to recognise that we all have to adapt to work in a more agile

and responsive way. It should be perfectly acceptable, especially in our new virtual environment, to review and consult on documents outside formal scheduled meetings.

ii) The Unions were consulted again on the IRA (via email) on 28th July 2020 following minor changes we had made which were largely matters of clarification and actually introduced evidence to strengthen the University's procedures. Any Union responses were considered and incorporated, if they were appropriate.

iii) The University sent the Unions V4/5 of the IRA as agreed by SET, with the summary of changes made to reflect guidance issued by the UK Government on 3rd August 2020. As mentioned above, the Unions have every opportunity to challenge the content of risk assessments, even after sign off by either the Director of HSD or relevant line manager. Thus, the decision to remove the requirement to work from home from the IRA reflected the advice of the Government at the time. In fact, many of the changes made to the IRA related to implementing further controls thereby making the risk assessment more robust. The Trade Unions would have been aware of the fact that the previous processes that were already documented on the IRA had now been actioned. It is important to emphasise that the University has continued to manage the return to campus process with full compliance of Covid-Secure requirements and these changes are reflected in the IRA. In the interests of transparency, they appear in track changes.

iv) It is recognised that this a constantly evolving situation and the University has remained open to the need to amend and update its documentation on an on-going basis. This approach was evidenced most recently in response to your e-mail to the HSD helpdesk on 3rd August 2020, with a general letter of concerns. The Director of HSD responded on 7th August 2020, which the Unions acknowledged. You followed up with a reply on 17th August 2020 copying in the Chairs of HSAG and Return to Campus (RtC). As a result of the operational health and safety matters that you raised, e.g. in relation to ventilation, the Director of HSD met with all the Trade Unions again on 18th August 2020 and agreed to take forward comments to the RtC group. This was done in the following week and the suggestion from the British Dental Association representative to have Covid occupancy on doors was adopted. This does not accord with your contention that the Unions do not have a voice.

v) Your assertion that the University develops health and safety policies without consulting the Trade Unions is not correct, and does not align with the evidence available. HSD received an email on 17th September 2020 at 12.52 requesting a copy of 'QM COVID 19 Emergency Plan' as soon as possible. The HSD Director responded a couple of hours later (at 15.08) to explain that this was a Public Health matter and advised the Unions to contact the Director of Student and Academic Services, Sarah Cows (who was copied in) as she is a key point of contact with Public Health England (PHE).

With reference to the Track and Trace Policy, this was shared with the Trade Unions on Friday 25th September 2020, by Sophie Harris, the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Organisational Effectiveness). In her communication to you she stated that the University wished to meet with Campus Unions to explain the policy, and seek feedback on its implementation. Furthermore, the University asked you to confirm who from the Unions would attend the discussions.

The University has not introduced many new policies due to the constantly changing Government guidance, making meaningful policy development impractical. For these reasons, we have instead mainly issued guidance, procedures and protocols to help managers and staff in Schools, Institutes and Directorates. The only policy that we have developed recently is the Face Covering Policy, which was shared with Unions for your feedback. We are always happy to receive your comments and feedback on this or any other documentation. It is of note that the Trade Unions have not specified the Health and Safety policies with which you are not happy.

For the avoidance of doubt, the University does not accept that it is in breach of its statutory obligations and will defend its position rigorously if you seek to pursue civil, regulatory or criminal proceedings.

2. All teaching and services which can be delivered online, should be delivered online.

It is disappointing to see the rather cynical reference to “preserving recruitment figures”, given that it is successful student recruitment that ensures a vibrant and dynamic University, the future sustainability of the University, the protection of employment for our varied staff population and our important contribution to the local community and nationally.

Move to on-line learning and perception of an ambiguous message regarding the term “blended learning”

i) The Education aspects of our provision in response to Covid are being progressed by the 3.1 Education Group. Membership of 3.1 comprises all Deans of Education, Faculty Operations Officers, representatives from both Heads of School and the wider academic community, representation from the Professional Services including Estates & Facilities and Health & Safety, as well as from Queen Mary Students’ Union. The Deans have been asked to share information from the Group in their respective areas. The University depends on the collegial relationship enjoyed by the academic staff and their line managers, as well as with the professional services staff and, as such, the contention that staff had “never agreed” to provide in-person activities is at odds with the whole ethos of our academic culture. It is also of great concern if academic staff do not see the provision of in-person activities as a core part of their role.

ii) The definition of blended learning is covered in the Education 3.1 Project Overview document which was shared with all 125 members of the project team and provided the following definition: online delivery, supplemented with on-site lectures, seminars, or tutorials.

This definition is not ambiguous and has informed the planning of our educational offer from the outset.

iii) The University refutes the assertion that it has acted without regard to health and safety considerations or to factoring in staff availability. Let me take the point you make about controls.

- All academic staff were asked to submit their timetabling requirements for in-person activities, and the academic day was extended to be from 8am to 9pm. The extended day introduced flexibility for academic staff to best arrange their teaching day to balance the needs of their students with their own commitments.
- In fact, because there was more than sufficient capacity, no activities were required to be timetabled after 7pm.
- The Timetabling Department has scheduled all in-person activities that they have been asked for, and out of 204 rooms 60 of these have not been used and remain available for additional activities if needed. Thus, significant additional space for in-person activities remains.
- Students have been split into smaller groups than usual, so for example, instead of an academic running one session for 100 students, they may run four sessions of 25 each.

This approach does not support your assertion that activities are “being hastily improvised”, that “they are unsafe”, or that there are insufficient controls in place. In summary, there are effective controls in place in relation to the use of space for in-person activities; these spaces are Covid-Secure so it is safe for staff to deliver these activities; the degree of flexibility made possible by the extended day means that the numbers coming onto our campuses can be safely managed.

iv) The contention that what was prepared was a “halfway house” between on-line and in-person activities is unfounded.

The Education 3.1 project was set-up in April 2020 with the following guidance:

Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, the University needs to review how it will provide education for the 2020/21 academic year in the following scenarios:

- *All students are able to join us on our campuses in September*
- *Some students are able to study and live on our campuses and some are studying the same programmes solely online*
- *All students are studying solely online for the first three months.*

These three scenarios have been planned for, with the expectation that as the rate of infection ebbs and flows, Queen Mary will adjust its education offer accordingly. This has been made clear in all communication and discussions with both staff and students.

In preparing for these three scenarios, we have planned that teaching will move between them as needed. Online teaching has been thoroughly prepared for, with all modules having online and in-person content prepared in a way that supports transition from one method to another, as needed.

Those programmes whose Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRBs) required practical or clinical components to be delivered in-person in Semester 1 have had mitigating actions discussed and prepared. Under 3.1, we have worked with twenty-nine PSRBs to ensure that the activities and assessment patterns will not compromise a student’s ability to graduate and receive professional accreditation.

In terms of taking account of health and safety requirements and ensuring compliance with mitigations where possible, programmes have either delayed work until later in the academic year or worked to provide appropriate technology. For example, IT Services has provided USB cameras attached to microscopes, so that activities can be recorded and provided online.

The University also considered what would happen to students residing on-campus if there was another national lockdown, and upgraded IT and networking capability in all Queen Mary owned residences to ensure that students could participate solely online if required. Queen Mary has also developed standards and practices for providing support services including provision of food and other necessities. This is already being provided to those students who are isolating after travelling from another country.

The University has been unambiguous in its advice to managers to be wholly sympathetic to the personal circumstances and concerns of staff when engaging in discussions with them about returning to campus. The Assistant Director of HR (Organisational Effectiveness) wrote to the Unions on 11th September 2020 setting out the University’s advice to managers in some detail, in particular, the importance of taking into account the needs and concerns expressed by individual staff members about attendance on campus. Thus, these matters are covered in our guidance to managers regarding return to campus conversations with staff.

Furthermore, it is a point that I personally emphasise when speaking to Heads of Schools and Institutes in our fortnightly meetings. In fact, I made this very point at our recent Heads of School meeting on 1st October 2020.

In relation to how the University has ensured that our working practices are Covid-Secure and that staff have sufficient protections, I refer you once again to the following extensive range of guidance on our website. <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/coronavirus/> and <http://www.hsd.qmul.ac.uk/covid-19-secure->

[procedures/](#) . I reiterate that if you have suggestions on how our guidance can be further enhanced then we should be pleased to have your input, either via formal or informal channels.

The Cabinet Office published new FAQs announced by the Prime Minister on 22nd September 2020. You will have noted that under the sections on who is allowed to go to work and on the rules applying to returning to University, the advice given is that 'Public sector employees working in essential services, including education settings, should continue to go into work where necessary'. This is the advice that the University provided in the communications to staff and students. As mentioned above, the principle of flexibility applies to the provision of in person activities, to allow staff to best arrange their in-person activities, balancing the needs of students and research activities and their own requirements.

3. Controls must be introduced which adequately recognise the risk of airborne transmission

The University has introduced a clear 'Face Coverings Policy and Procedure' that addresses fully your point regarding the wearing of face coverings in indoor spaces (<http://www.hsd.qmul.ac.uk/covid-19-secure-procedures/>)

In relation to your point about 'ventilation standards', given that there is no definition in any of the guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or trade bodies as standards available to which we can refer, it would be useful to understand the 'standard' to which you are referring. However, aside from the specific point you make in your letter, I can confirm that the Director of Estates, Facilities and Capital Development did write to the QMUCU H&S Officer on 8th September 2020 explaining the University's response in ensuring Covid-Secure Ventilation Assurance, as per the current HSE guidance. The BMJ study to which you refer does not define the parameters for either time or ventilation. It is also subjective and concludes that further work is required. It uses negative evidence (the absence of confirmed COVID in testing) as a reason to argue that it has not been disproved. These flaws in the study you refer to were explained to the Trade Unions at a COVID JCF by the Director of HSD.

With reference to your comment regarding the risks of using 'rooms which are poorly ventilated' I can advise you that the University is not using poorly ventilated rooms and have taken these out of use. As you are aware, there are many arguments around this issue, and until any standards are published, we are applying Government and HSE guidance to ensure that we have a Covid-Secure environment on our campuses. In addition to our actions on ventilation, we have also implemented measures to enhance the amount of cleaning that is being undertaken, reducing the number of users per room to enable social distancing to be maintained, providing hand sanitiser throughout our buildings and residences, and requesting that people adopt good personal hygiene practices. Anyone experiencing symptoms are also requested not to come on site.

4. Test and trace arrangements must be improved

We are working with government Public Health England (PHE), the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) and the London Borough of Islington (LBI) on test and trace.

All Heads of School and School Managers are being informed about any cases involving their students, this is then cascaded locally to colleagues as appropriate. We are also requiring anyone diagnosed with Covid-19 to complete a university tracking form that can then be shared with PHE and the local authorities if needed. The university has a booking system in place for all study spaces and we are keeping records of attendance for all outlets on campus (including QMSU outlets). We have worked closely with PHE on the details of our tracking data and I can confirm that they are very confident in the measures we have put in place.

Next Steps

The University is willing to convene a meeting to discuss the Covid-Secure arrangements that the University has implemented in accordance with Government guidance and to address any on-going concerns that QMUCU wish to raise. As stated earlier in my letter, the University's senior management have always been willing to meet with our Campus Unions throughout the period since the March lockdown.

I also confirm that the University has been, and continues to be, willing to consult our recognised health and safety representatives in accordance with the HSAW 1974 and new national measures introduced in March this year, and as amended from time to time. I reiterate that we have mainstreamed all Covid related matters now into HSAG and the standing JCF, having taken account the concerns that you raised with us over the summer. We have also extended membership of HSAG, with the addition of the Vice-Principal People, Culture and Inclusion, so that the Committee is also constituted to deal with employment matters that may require consultation. Evaluating the effectiveness of our measures is integral to our approach in the interests of ensuring the safety of our staff and students. I trust that this demonstrates the University understands the challenge faced by us all as we seek to manage our response to the pandemic. We understand your wish to be confident that your members are returning to a campus where they feel safe. For these reasons, we believe that we can achieve far more through collaboration than disputes, which, if anything, are more likely to prolong than expedite solutions. We have also shown that we can act at pace.

The University will continue to adhere to the new national measures and will adapt to meet them if they are changed. I reiterate that managers have been advised to exercise their duty of care to their staff through extensive guidance on how to manage the return to campus of their staff. In asking staff to return, this will be so that they can perform any necessary functions associated with their role, including in-person teaching and fully support for our education and research activities.

Yours sincerely



Colin Bailey

President and Principal

6 October, 2020

Professor Colin Bailey
Principal and President
Queen Mary University of London

Dear Professor Bailey

RE: The physical conditions of work and health and safety breaches at Queen Mary

Thank you for your response to our letter. Rather than entering into a detailed exchange on the events of previous months, our primary interest is in reaching agreement on urgent matters concerning health and safety and the physical conditions of work at Queen Mary.

To that end, we support the decision to increase the frequency of HSAG meetings to once a month during the period of the pandemic. We also look forward to receiving any outstanding requests for information in a timely fashion, as you commit to doing in your letter.

We welcome the university's recent decision to publish data on confirmed Covid cases among our staff and student body, which aligns with a request made in our letter. However, we note with disappointment that the relevant webpage only refers to the "4,600 permanent members of staff" who work at Queen Mary, even though the university employs a large number of fixed-term staff who are also at risk of catching the disease. We hope this does not mean that confirmed cases among fixed-term staff will not be counted in this data, and we look forward to receiving reassurance on this point.

As regards the other requests we made, your letter is not always explicit about how the university proposes to respond. Our members need a clear response before we can decide our next steps. These outstanding questions are as follows:

- 1) Will the university commit to consulting trade unions *in advance and in good time* on the introduction of *any* further policy, procedure, protocol, guidance document or otherwise named measure which substantially affects the health and safety of staff at Queen Mary?
- 2) Will the university commit to moving all teaching online for the academic year 2020/1, except where the essential practical and/or clinical components of a programme cannot be delivered online?
- 3) Will the university mandate the wearing of face coverings in all multi-occupancy indoor spaces, including classrooms during teaching?

- 4) Will the university commit to completely removing from use any multi-occupancy room where the ventilation does not meet or exceed minimum standards?¹
- 5) Will the university commit to implementing a testing programme to supplement its reliance on the overstretched NHS postal system?
- 6) Will the university amend its Track and Trace Policy to notify any member of staff or student who has been in the same teaching session as someone who tests positive for Covid-19?

We would be willing to meet with the aim of reaching agreement on the above points. Failing that, we will consult our members on invoking the dispute resolution procedure.

Yours sincerely,

QMUCU Branch Committee

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, we take this minimum standard to be 10 litres per second per person or an equivalent measure. This is the standard we have previously discussed with staff from Estates. As we understand it, under current policy, rooms which currently do not meet this standard can still be used with 2m distancing in place.