



QMSU President's Report

Outcome requested:	Council is asked to note the QMSU President's report
Executive Summary:	<p>The report is an update from the start of the academic year on activity within the Students' Union. It includes the following sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Key UpdatesStudent VoiceWelfare and LiberationStudent Opportunities
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President's University Council Report

September 2021

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President's Report

Key Updates

Welcome Fairs

The Welcome Fair events returned during Welcome Week and were a great success, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from student attendees, stallholders and staff. The Mile End Fair took place across campus in the Students' Union Hub, Great Hall, Sports Hall and various outdoor spaces.

Over two days, we had 10,500 entries to our indoor locations, with students exploring 186 student group and Students' Union stalls, an outdoor festival zone, and a daily performance area featuring 15 student group performances each day, including live music, cheerleading and fencing. The event also featured a Get Active sports pop-up and several external organisations and charities.

Several new measures were successfully introduced to prevent overcrowding and queuing and ensure a safer experience for all in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. This included a new ticketing and arrival slot booking system that spread student numbers throughout the day, a longer event running time and encouraging measures such as face masks.

Our first Fair took place on the Whitechapel campus on the Wednesday of Welcome Week for our medical and dental students and was a large success in bringing back the University's community spirit. There were more than 100 stalls across the BLSA Building, Garrod Building and the Blizzard Mews. This was the first time we used the Blizzard Mews, which enabled us to provide more space to student group demonstrations and highlighted the potential of this space for future outdoor events and activities.

So far, this academic year we have sold over 5600 student group memberships.

Welcome Events

The Students' Union delivered a packed programme of events for Welcome Week that has continued into week one. Attendance was significantly up on previous years with over 8500 tickets sold for Students' Union welcome events (excluding the Welcome Fair) at the time of writing, with a further 2000+ attendees at ticket-free events, highlighting a clear desire from students to attend in-person activities and events.

Events have included a series of walking tours (including Harry Potter, East London and Royals & Rulers of Britain), speed meeting, club nights, comedy nights, food & drink tasting events, sporting activities, outdoor yoga on Canalside, a Boat Ball down the Thames and a Thorpe Park trip. In addition, our programme has featured a series of wellbeing events including online workshops on preparing for university, creating a productive study space and looking after your wellbeing at university. Dedicated events were run for commuters, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students to help them meet others within these communities, with over 400 students in attendance at each, which was great to see.

We also collaborated with the QMUL Residences team to deliver several halls-specific activities including speed meeting events for individual halls, craft activities, pick, paint and plant events and neon life drawing attended by over 450 attendees.

In Whitechapel, the BLSA hosted a diverse week of events including a peer support scheme connecting over 600 new and returning students, comedy nights and the popular sports club event Tables.

Our events programme was complemented by several events delivered by our student-led Clubs and Societies such as an Erasmus Students Picnic, History Society trip to the British Museum and meet and greet events.

Welcome Crew and Help Squad

After a year out due to Covid-19, this September we were helped by 100 volunteers in stand-out 'Here to Help' hoodies throughout move-in weekend and Welcome Week at Whitechapel and Mile End. Our volunteers supported the delivery of Welcome Week by welcoming new students, signposting to opportunities, and helping students navigate our campuses. The volunteers' dedication to ensuring that new students had a positive experience has been remarkable and we cannot thank them enough for their time, hard work and positive energy! As in previous years, we hope to work with Residences to offer a thank-you party for volunteers.

Sustainability

The Reuse Fair took place over move-in weekend, attended by 600 students who were able to provide a new home to over 500kg of donated items that would otherwise have ended in landfill. Of attendees surveyed, 94% of were happy with their experience and 82% felt that it eased their transition to university.

In September and October, sustainability events will include allotment growing sessions, biodiversity volunteering on campus, canal clean-ups and a foraging walk.

The Students' Union has, once again, scored 'excellent' in Green Impact, a United Nations award-winning programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practice in organisations. The auditors had this to say about our submission:

"Queen Mary SU has clearly demonstrated that sustainability is still high on its agenda, despite the additional challenges of the pandemic. I was really impressed by the holistic approach the union is taking in terms of addressing the breadth of sustainability, and how student voice is being centred in the SU's work. Really excited to see what comes next for QM's sustainability work!"

Student Groups

Despite the impact of Covid-19 on what many student groups could deliver last year, the number of student groups re-affiliating from 2020-21 to this academic year is higher than usual. Of the 316 student groups we had affiliated at the end of last academic year (excluding sports clubs), 273 have re-affiliated for this year. This number will continue to grow throughout the year as new student groups affiliate and inactive student groups are re-activated. Currently there are 10 societies in Malta, and we expect more to affiliate this academic year.

Once again, our student group survey demonstrates that our student groups enable student communities and skill development. 81% of committee members who responded to the end of year survey agreed that they feel part of a community through their involvement in a student group, and 88.8% of respondents agreed that they have developed skills through their involvement in a student group.

A priority for the Student Engagement Team this year is to support groups to re-establish themselves on campus and run quality activities for their members. Whilst over half of respondents in the student groups survey suggested that their student group would retain some elements of online provision this year, a focus for the staff team will be to enable as much in-person activity to happen as possible. Key to this will be our continuing work with stakeholders across the University to improve student group access to space on campus for their events and activities.

Volunteering

The Students' Union are once again providing volunteers for the London Marathon 2021. The London Marathon is one of the largest annual fundraising events and this year is expected to be the largest marathon ever with over 100,000 people taking part. 50 student volunteers will marshal along Mile 19 of the route, providing assistance to runners and spectators. We are also working on re-starting our Give Volunteering a Go programme, where students can sign-up to a range of one-off, low commitment volunteering opportunities.

This year we are once again facilitating the Social Responsibility element for the Dentistry 'Professionalism, Team Work and Social Responsibility' module, an element of the module which was paused last year due to Covid-19. Students will complete social responsibility activities, sourced and verified via the Students' Union volunteering service, before submitting a reflective piece on their experience and how what they have learnt can shape their role as future dentists.

Students' Union Finances

The Students' Union has navigated a stormy financial environment, and our current end-of-year operations deficit is £31.5K. The financial framework and principles we have put in place were effective, having moved us from initial projected deficit of £800K. In addition, we received financial support from the University for those perceived to be eligible for furlough (80%), and we absorbed the other 20%.

The Block Grant for 2021/22 will be at the same level as this year, with a 5% reduction maintained from the previous year, in addition to an unbudgeted cost of living increase and £25K one-off funding outlined in the letter. There are conditions in place, which will be monitored by the MOA panel and the mechanism framework that has been developed over the past year.

The Budget for 2021/2022 has a group surplus of £20K. We will take steps to build on this when we review financial performance for our mid-year forecast, as we need to strengthen our cash flow and balance sheet after a tough couple of years.

There are ambitious commercial services targets to deliver the group results and support the delivery of the student experience. We are still maintaining our tough financial framework, built on process improvements and agile monitoring of financial performance. Presently, the permanent staff structure is lean, with some capacity challenges. The charity restructure was completed on time, and the new structure is in place at the beginning of June 2021, with financial savings achieved.

Student Voice

Autumn Elections

The Students' Union Autumn Elections are currently taking place, and students can put themselves forward for more than 400 positions. The majority of these are Course Rep positions, but the elections also include our NUS Delegates, a small number of Part-Time Officer positions and some Malta-based positions.

We're working in partnership with student support staff and academics from all parts of the university to promote the roles and encourage students to become representatives for their cohort. Nominations are open from 22 September until 6 October, and voting takes place from 12 October until 14 October. The winners of the elections will take office immediately and be in post for the rest of the academic year.

Postgraduate Research Representation

Work continues to improve our representation structures for postgraduate research students. In collaboration with the Doctoral College and the Students' Union PGR Reps, we are in the process of implementing a number of changes to the Course Rep system for PGR students. These changes include a name change to Subject Reps to better reflect the nature of postgraduate research programmes, and a change to the timing of the elections period for PGR Subject Reps to make the elections more accessible for PGR students.

Malta Representation

Due to the increasing number of students based in Malta, we have reviewed our representation structures for Malta-based students. As a result, we are introducing several new rep positions to ensure that Malta students' interests are represented. The new positions are: Welfare Officer, Societies Officer, Sports Officer, Secretary and Entertainments Officer. In addition to the new roles, changes are also being made to enable more Malta-based student groups to apply for Students' Union affiliation, and the introduction of a new subcommittee of our Student Council that will focus on the student experience in Malta.

Welfare and Liberation

Graduation Fund

Applications for the Students' Union Graduation Fund are currently open to undergraduate and postgraduate students attending graduation ceremonies in January 2022. The Fund aims to support students who are facing financial hardship with the costs of graduation and covers the cost of cap and gown hire.

Students can apply to the Fund online and funding decisions are made by a panel of Executive Officers. We are expecting a high number of applications for this funding round, because several graduations have been postponed due to Covid-19. Ten days before the application deadline, 400 applications have already been submitted, and we expect this number to increase before applications close.

Black History Month

Our annual Black History Month campaign is led by a committee of elected representatives and student groups. This year, the Students' Union provided £3,200 through the Liberation Fund to support the delivery of Black History Month and provide grant funding for student-led events and activities. Our full programme will launch on 1 October and features over 20 events, including panel discussions, workshops and showcases, as well as online content including blogs, articles and student profiles. The full programme will be available from 1 October at www.qmsu.org/bhm

Umii App Pilot

Last year, the Students' Union trialled a partnership with Umii, a social media and messaging app designed to help university students make social connections and prevent isolation and loneliness. Over the trial period, we achieved good engagement, with over 1900 messages sent by students using the platform. The trial ended in summer 2021 and Muneer Hussain, Vice President Welfare, is currently working with several University teams to secure funding for the project to continue.

Campaign on sexual & gender-based violence, harassment and hate crime

We are working on plans for a new campaign to take the place of our previous Zero Tolerance campaign, which operated until 2020 and was run in partnership between the University and Students' Union. While conversations are at an early stage and will engage more stakeholders in the coming weeks, our intention is to create a student-led campaign with opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. In addition, last year we developed a new toolkit, ACT, that aims to empower passionate students to run their own campaigns and projects on social justice issues, including on sexual and gender-based violence, harassment and hate crime.

In-House Nightline

Radhika Thiagarajan, Vice President Communities, has started work on an in-house Nightline project, to increase access to the peer-to-peer listening service on campus. Radhika is currently in conversation with a number of groups, including London Nightline, the Nightline Association and the PROJECT:TALK QMUL society, as well as Nightline branches at other institutions including Kings College London and Warwick University about possible ways forward.

Postgraduate finance

Radhika has been contacted by student representatives and students regarding potential bursaries that could be available for international students at Queen Mary. Radhika, as a part of her campaign, intends to improve the availability of bursaries and hardship funds for international and postgraduate students and is discussing the project with University staff.

Student Opportunities

Spaces

As more students are returning to our campuses, Adi Sawalha, President, is working on a project to re-evaluate students' space needs post-lockdown. The project will collect data from students to understand their space needs. Currently, the data collection tools are being designed, and it is expected that data collection will begin in October. Adi is also collaborating with various stakeholders within the university to ensure student feedback is used to shape ongoing projects relating to study spaces, including the Queens' Building Restack. Initial discussions with faculties and Library Services have received very positive responses, and discussions will continue over the next few months.

In terms of Students' Union spaces, the Students' Union Hub, BLSA Building and Multi-Faith Centre have fully reopened and student groups are now able to book spaces in our buildings with normal capacity restrictions in place. The Multi-Faith Centre timetable has been updated and Friday Prayer has restarted in the Nest, with over 300 students attending during Welcome Week.

Community Foundation

Our Sport Camps returned this summer with student coaches delivering sport sessions on campus for young people aged 8-13 from within the local community. We managed over 100 participant engagements over the 3-week period and delivered a number of free activity packs to local schools.

This year, we will once again receive a £1,500 grant from Santander. This funding will be used to support student groups delivering projects through our Social Cohesion Sport Programme with a specific focus on Equality & Diversity.

Employability:

Radhika, is currently working on two projects to improve employability. The first project involves organising networking opportunities between current students and alumni in a social setting with coffee and cake, in collaboration with the Global Alumni Engagement Team. This project aims to improve awareness of the social

aspect of employability and use networking in a social setting to help students gain jobs and build connections.

The second project involves improving systems for online alumni-student networking, in collaboration with the Head of Change & Student Experience in IT. This project will involve looking into options to better facilitate connections between students and alumni, including external platforms like LinkedIn.

Radhika is also working with the Graduate Attributes team to ensure that the academic curriculum matches the skills expected from employers. The team is currently working on bridging the gap between employer expectations and taught modules, with a focus on highlighting transferrable skills to enable students to prepare for competency interviews and make this less daunting and time consuming.

Club Sport

62 clubs have returned to training towards the end of September as part of the Club Sport programme, now that Covid-19 regulations have allowed the full return of many of our sports. 25 clubs will be competing in BUCS (British University and College Sport) and LUSL (London University Sport leagues) from 13th October with further competitions and friendlies due to take place also in semester one for our clubs. All club committee members have received training ahead of the academic year and personal professional development sessions are due to commence from October onwards for student groups. In addition, the first Club Sport Board meeting of the year has taken place with relevant student leaders.

Welcome Communications

We delivered a strong package of communications to welcome new students to Queen Mary that was successful in ensuring students knew what was on offer to them pre-arrival, during Welcome Week and beyond. This included:

- A Welcome Pack mailout sent out to over 5000 UK home students featuring information about the Students' Union, Sport at Queen Mary and what events were coming up in Arrivals Week.
- A dedicated Welcome website for new students, with website views from A-Level Results Day to Welcome Week up 38% on 2019 with over 750,000 page views across our website.
- A series of Welcome emails sent out from A-Level Results Day to Welcome Week that complemented the University welcome email schedule featuring information about events and activities, helpful tips on things like what to pack for University and guides of what to do in the local area and East London.
- Dedicated communications to returning students, encouraging them to also get involved in Welcome Week activities, particularly for those who missed out in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Daily social media features. Our social media engagement and reach is at its highest ever. Over 9000 members are now part of our Official Queen Mary new student Facebook group, with our Instagram story posts being regularly viewed by over 2000 people.
- Collaboration with the University Internal Engagement team on all our welcome communications to ensure joined up messaging.

Adi Sawalha
Students' Union President
29th September 2021