



Senate

Paper Title	Students' Union President's Senate Report
Outcome requested	To Note
Points for Senate members to note and further information	Student Voice QMUL: Furlough Our Student Staff Strike Compensation Assisting the NHS Coronavirus situation Student Experience and Learning Resources Course Reps and Part-Time Officers Course Rep reward and recognition Be Kind To Your Mind Mental Health Awareness Fortnight Sports Study Well campaign Employability Volunteering Careers and Employability support amid COVID-19 Sustainability National Union of Students Conferences
Questions for Senate to consider	
Regulatory/statutory reference points	
Authors	Megan Annetts Students' Union President

President's Senate Report

May 2020

www.qmsu.org



President's Report

Student Voice

As we near the end of our term as Executive Officers for the Students' Union, we have entered a stage of reflection about our experience. Whilst there have been many positive moments, and the achievements by the student body continue to make us proud, there is a troubling undercurrent that has been a theme throughout the year. This is regarding the genuine weight given to the 'Student Voice'. Looking at the Queen Mary University of London's 2030 strategy a lot of emphasis has been put upon co-creation, but much to our disappointment this seems to have become a tokenistic expression used to indicate a student was present rather than an active participant. Throughout the year we have found ourselves voicing real concerns over mental health, safety, sustainability and community but these seldom result in any meaningful change to a predetermined decision that has been made by the Principal Professor Colin Bailey and other senior members of the team.

Prior to Covid-19 our requests to address institutional racism, declare a climate emergency and provide equity across all campuses were repeatedly ignored. Since the pandemic has hit these issues remain and sadly more have arisen. Two examples include the extension of the working day to 8:30am-8:30pm and our requests for the University to consent to furlough our 216 members of student staff within our commercial outlets. We as an Executive team were disappointed with the response when this was raised at the Council meeting on 21st May 2020 and hope to address these issues and allow the student voice to flourish.

QMUL: Furlough Our Student Staff

During COVID-19, we made the difficult decision to close all of our outlets and buildings in order to protect both our staff members and our customers. We decided to apply for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) in order to provide financial security to our 216 student staff. However, our request was denied by the University, who control our payroll in order to save costs. After 7 weeks of discussions, the 'QMUL: Furlough Our Student Staff' campaign was launched. The campaign was launched by student staff members and Commercial Services Officer, Joe Vinson, alongside the Students' Union President, Megan Annetts. The campaign has so far attracted media attention, alongside the support of several MPs and local politicians, but there has been no firm commitment from the University to allow access to the CJRS.

Strike Compensation

The strike compensation that the Students' Union conducted had over 1600 responses. The findings indicated that the two most popular options were for the money to go towards bursaries, or towards a one set fee payment to all students. This, alongside other considerations surrounding timeline of refunds and parity between fee status, was relayed to the university, who have decided to conduct further financial modelling and wait for the results of a UCU ballot taking place towards the end of April to fully measure the impact of the strikes. The Students' Union are communicating updates to students regarding compensation when they arise.

Assisting the NHS

The BLSA has organised and facilitated the recruitment and training of 373 SMD students to assist our local trusts and GP practices respond to covid-19. This has been met with a lot of gratitude from the clinical teams and the students have provided a lot of positive testimonies about their experience. This has also allowed for an improved transition to interim jobs for a number of our recent graduates who finished their exams as lockdown began, started volunteering and are now holding FiY1 (interim jobs) as they are accelerated through the pathways to becoming junior doctors, which would normally start in August.

The campaign's success can be credited to the willingness and enthusiasm of the students to help, their passion is a credit to Barts and The London and the wider University. The BLSA worked closely with the SMD to ensure that there were protective measures in place for students to work in a way that is conducive to their academic commitments which are still ongoing, such as maximum shift lengths. We produced clear guidance to highlight that there were a number of ways students could help if they wanted to; such as working with local foodbanks, assisting with childcare for key workers or data collection for Public Health England, as being on

the frontline would not be appropriate or possible for all. To ensure the students were minimising the risk of COVID-19 to themselves and others, on signing up to help they supplied their postcodes. With this information the BLSA was able to allocate students to trusts and practices that would require a minimal commute; we also worked closely with Queen Mary Residences team to provide complimentary accommodation for anyone who was in need. We created a competency document detailing the clinical skills that have been taught to our Physician Associate, Medical and Dental students which helps the ward teams and students know what their clinical competency was to ensure safety and comfort for students, staff and patients.

Further to this we worked with the SMD Student and Academic Pastoral Support Service to create Connecting Practice which is a programme that offers a range of specific supportive measures including virtual induction workshops, e-huddles and 1:1 phone calls, in addition to the services already provided by Queen Mary Advice and Counselling to make sure there is a tailored response to this unique event.

Coronavirus situation

Emergency Corporate Finance Committee

On 19 March 2020 the Students' Union's Board of Trustees agreed to establish an Emergency Corporate Finance Committee, jointly with QMSU Services Ltd, to maintain the charity and the business as going concerns by monitoring cash-flow, assessing and addressing risks, and considering and representing the educational and welfare interests of the Students' Union's members. The Committee has overseen the work of securing a judgement of 'going concern' from the Students' Union's auditors for the twelve months following filing of the Students' Union's Annual Accounts for 2018-2019 in April 2020, aided by a Letter of Support from the University. Based upon this judgement, the Committee is now working to stabilise the Students' Union's finances for 2019-20 and plan for 2020-21. These are uncertain and turbulent times, our focus is not only to ensure we can see through the crisis, but also ensure our offer to students is not compromised at a time when they may most need the Students' Union to support our communities, create and develop new opportunities and innovation, represent students in a fast moving and fragile environment.

Payment of Students' Union Staff affected by the lockdown

The Students' Union suspended its commercial activity from 19 March 2020, to ensure the health and safety of both students and staff. The Students' Union is currently negotiating with the University concerning access to the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) in respect of staff who are normally paid through the commercial income generated by QMSU Services Ltd, or their profits gift-aided to the Students' Union. The Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of QMSU Services agreed to the furloughing of the staff affected, but the University has maintained the position that it does not believe that the Students' Union should access this scheme. As Students' Union staff are employed on Queen Mary contracts and paid through the University's PAYE reference number, the Students' Union is unable to access the scheme without the assistance of the University. Instead, the University has offered to support the Students' Union financially up to the amount it would receive through the furlough scheme for the current lockdown. At present the Students' Union is working with the University to agree the scope, amount, and duration of the support offered.

A significant number of the staff affected are students employed on casual contracts. At present, it is not clear whether they are to be included in the support offered, which is of particular concern as they would appear to fall within the scope of the CJRS were they employed elsewhere. In the meantime, the Students' Union has paid them for March based upon actual and scheduled shifts, and for April at 80% based upon previous availability and shifts likely to have been worked. Many have contacted the Students' Union expressing their concerns, particularly as they are prevented from accessing other forms of government support due to their student status.

Student Experience and Learning Resources

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the prioritisation of these meetings and has therefore been the focus of our Education work the past few weeks. As a result, Annika Ramos (Vice President Education) has been attending regular internal Students' Union meetings about the issue, as well as attending university meetings specifically about education support for different groups of students. Through these contributions we were able to create and implement a policy regarding student award, progression and classification. The 'No Detriment' principles were communicated to students centrally by the university, and in greater detail via

individual schools. It is worth noting that the Students' Union has received numerous queries/informal complaints regarding the university response to 'no detriment', which we have been responding to accordingly. We will also be a part of discussions about bridging assignments and the 20/21 academic year, and what education will look like for students continuing and starting university at this time.

Course Reps and Part-Time Officers

We have continued to support the Course Reps and Part-Time Officers during the coronavirus outbreak. We've adapted to working online, and we have worked with the Part-Time Officers to help them adapt their projects to the current circumstances.

To enable our student leaders to continue to set the direction for our work, we have moved our democratic meetings online. In early April, we held an online Student Council meeting, where the Student Councillors discussed and voted on motions. We also held an Education Zone meeting online at the beginning of April. The zone is made up of part-time officers with education portfolios and we have been gathering feedback from student councillors on the current situation.

In order to maintain quality standards whilst continuing to deliver education provision online, Annika has collaborated with the university to create guidance documents on remote SSLCs (Student Staff Liaison Committees), which encouraged fortnightly online meetings so that any issues could be raised and picked up in due time. This guidance was circulated to the relevant university staff within schools. Furthermore, together with the Head of QMAcademy and the Interim Head of E-Learning, we created a document outlining student expectations for online materials and level of support that was also circulated to course reps in order to help them within their role.

To ensure Course Reps were prepared to continue to represent their peers online, we also distributed further training on effective representation, emphasising the need to stay in communication with peers overseas and signposting for emerging issues.

To keep up to date with student voice on a school level, we have maintained communication with staff regarding SSLCs. We have created a working document outlining how each school is managing SSLCs during this time. We are in the process of collating themes from the minutes to get a good understanding of the types of issues that are surfacing across the university.

Course Rep reward and recognition

Despite the pandemic, we have awarded over 210 Course Rep Contribution Awards this year. This is to recognise the engagement of course reps over the course of the academic year. This academic year we launched a new reward and recognition scheme called Course Rep of the Month. We have successfully awarded five winners since November 2019, which can be found on our website.

www.qmsu.org/reps/coursereps

Be Kind To Your Mind

We worked on adapting our existing 'Be Kind To Your Mind' wellbeing campaign to give students some resources of how to cope during the lockdown period, as well as including tips on some good ways of looking after your mental health. The guide was split into two different sections and was released the week the UK lockdown was announced, detailing ways in which students could still stay connected and active. The second part was released a few days later, which detailed ways in which students could work on their mindfulness, learn new skills and continue to give back to the local community. These tips have formed the basis for a dynamic campaign that is constantly expanding and adapting to the current circumstances.

Mental Health Awareness Fortnight

An annual campaign that was delivered across social media this year by Alice Scholfield (BLSA Welfare Officer) and Jack Juckes (BLSA Disabilities and Specific Learning Differences rep and incoming Vice President Welfare) created some informative graphics which help to tackle stigma around a variety of mental health conditions. Podcasts, books, news pieces and films were also shared so students could engage in their own homes. There were daily pieces of advice on how to maintain your wellbeing during a global pandemic which included collaborative work with BL Islamic Society to ensure our advice was accessible for those celebrating Ramadan.

Sports

Despite the Students' Union closure we have been engaged in some extremely positive campaigns, events and developments, not only for the Students' Union but also for the wider Queen Mary community. The focus has been on engaging students, staff and alumni in sport through different initiatives, some highlights are listed below;

- Our latest initiative will be launched on the 18th May. This will be a virtual challenge through the 'Strava' app, with participants having to collectively run or cycle the distance from London to Beijing (10,939.76 km), from the Mile End campus to the Queen Mary partner, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. Participants will be travelling to seven landmarks en-route to Beijing over an 8 week period, with the landmarks linked to our global campuses.
- The Sport and Marketing departments have run a series of stay at home challenges and posted articles with tips and resources to highlight the importance of looking after your mental health during this difficult time.
- Qmotion have introduced a new "Qmotion at Home" programme. It offers a range of workout and fitness plans for students and staff to follow at home for a range of fitness levels. All the plans include video demonstrations of how to do it. Qmotion have also introduced weekly online Yoga and Pilates sessions throughout the assessment period.
- We have given Sports Clubs the option to move their elections online in order to make the transition into next year as smooth as possible.
- Our Club Sport Board and Sports Officers raised a total of £651 for Mind through their 'Any Body Can' Merger Campaign. 'Any Body Can' celebrated body positivity. We know that body image can be a barrier to participation in Sport, so the campaign worked with Mind to share information to encourage people of any shape or size to get involved in Sport and see the positive benefit Sport has on mental health.
- This year, the Community Sport programme has engaged over 100 student leaders who have facilitated over 1,600 hours of sport and physical activity with over 12,500 participant engagements in the local community. To ensure the continued engagement of our students with the programme and the local community under social distancing measures, we have been developing our digital processes. This includes an e-mentoring platform for students to maintain their outreach. The programme also made the final shortlist for the 'Enhancing the Workforce Award' at the London Sport Awards in March.

Study Well campaign

Study Well launched during the week commencing 27th April 2020. Due to the current pandemic, the campaign is being facilitated solely online. It is utilising our social media pages and online platforms to deliver activities such as; themed playlists, online chat and chill sessions with the Executive Officers, Zoom online fitness classes with Qmotion, online giveaways for 'study with me' videos and online Study Well bingo. The aim of the campaign is to encourage students to take a break from studying and to provide as much wellbeing support for students as possible, therefore the Study Well campaign and our Be Kind To Your Mind campaign has been merged for this year. This has provided not just study related wellbeing support but also lockdown and mental health related support. The Students' Union has also been in contact with the new Student Study Skills Coordinator, working within Library Services in order to collaborate on Study Well, and introduce initiatives that will be helpful to students during the pandemic, such as increased office hours and tutorial sessions to account for differing time zones. He is also interested in collaborating to work towards addressing Academic misconduct and targeting support for specific schools and groups of students. We are also collaborating with various other key university departments to ensure the campaign is as accessible as possible, including; E-learning, Residences, Student Life. The campaign has also taken into consideration that it is taking place during Ramadan, therefore, Ramadan specific content has been produced; this includes a message from Shamima Akter, the Vice President Welfare, and a Ramadan edition of the online bingo. Overall, we've been able to be creative and resourceful in difficult times such as these and have managed to produce a successful campaign that is beneficial to students and staff alike. www.qmsu.org/studywell

Employability

Despite the Students' Union closure we've made adaptations to the Skills Award and are expecting 87 students to complete the award, which is a similar number to last year. The Skills Award is our employability scheme available to students who are in leadership positions within the Students' Union. In order to gain the award students need to complete 3 skills training sessions and attend a reflection session. The reflection session helps students recognise the skills they've gained throughout the year and prepares them to be able to articulate their skills and experiences to future employers. Half of the completers attended a face-to-face reflection session before the campus closure, and the other half have completed reflection exercises at home which are being marked by the Student Engagement team. Overall, the scheme has benefitted 150 students this year. Completors will have the Skills Award on their HEAR transcripts.

Due to uncertainty about future funding from the University for the scheme and the format of semester A, and how this will impact student engagement, as well the Student Skills and Development Coordinator position being vacant, the Skills Award is unlikely to take place in the same format in 2020-21.

Volunteering

For a number of years now the Students' Union have been facilitating the social responsibility element of the PTSR module for Year 2-4 dentistry students. The aim of the module component is to enable dental students to develop transferable skills that they need in their professional lives whilst having impact locally. This academic year, second to fourth year dental students and first year oral hygiene students logged over 1,000 hours of volunteering as part of the PTSR module. Due to COVID-19 the module had to be suspended but the hours that students have completed as part of the module will roll over and will count toward next academic year.

Careers and Employability support amid COVID-19

Annika Ramos has been in contact with the Careers Department to discuss the possibility of increasing support for students who will be graduating this year, particularly due to the impact of the virus on the job market. We have been promoting their new campaign, #AdaptToSucceed, which has tailored information, resources and services to help students develop their careers and build employability skills from home.

Sustainability

We have been digitising how we engage students in sustainability. The response so far has been extremely positive, with 45 attendees at an online Environment & Sustainability careers event in March which was organised in collaboration with Careers and Enterprise with input from elected student officers. We have also been posting regularly about online environmental volunteering opportunities available to students.

Students' Union staff have contributed to the development of the draft QMUL sustainability policy through providing data and information on Students' Union run sustainability initiatives. Following the presentation of the draft policy and strategy at the University's April Sustainability Committee meeting, Students' Union staff and elected student representatives have provided feedback Head of Sustainability.

In May, our Sustainability Coordinator and the elected Sustainability Officer met with Vice Principal, Dr Philippa Lloyd, to discuss the University's strategy, embedding sustainability in the curriculum and engagement initiatives for staff and students.

National Union of Students Conferences

As a member of the National Union of Students (NUS), we have been able to send delegates to the annual NUS Conference and NUS Liberation Conference. The conferences are normally held as multi-day events, but due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the conferences have been held online. At the conferences, elected student delegates from Queen Mary have been able to vote in the elections for the NUS leadership roles and hold the current NUS leaders to account. The delegates have also been able to submit policies and vote on the policies, which will determine the priorities for NUS in the coming year.

Megan Annetts
Students' Union President
26th May 2020