



## QMSU President's Report

<b>Outcome requested:</b>	Senate is asked to <b>note</b> the QMSU President's report.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>The report is an update from November to the start of January on activity within the Students' Union. It includes the following sections;</p> <p>Key Updates Education Welfare &amp; Liberation Student Opportunities Student Voice</p>
<b>Author:</b>	Shamima Akter, Students' Union President
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<b>Senior Management/External Sponsor</b>	

# President's Senate Report

February 2021

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# President's Report

## Key Updates

### Fees

With a third lockdown being implemented across the UK, our students were no exception to the impact of it. Almost two thirds of the academic year have passed with little on campus activity and students are questioning their £9250 tuition fee and for international students, almost double that. Understandably, the mismanagement of this government's pandemic is the reason for this prolonged lockdown, resulting in students missing out on a lot of their University experiences. There's been widespread demand from students on compensation, from both home and international students.

A vast number of Students' Unions have joined together in a national campaign called 'Students united against fees'. We are indeed one of the many Students' Union's coming together for this. Our students also voted to support this initiative during our Annual Students Meeting. We will be working very closely with LSESU and other Student's Union on this and proceed to lobby the government for more funding.

In terms of our international student fees, students have been very vocal portraying their difficulty in understanding why their fees are still the same when they have not received the student experience they expected and for some, they haven't yet set foot in this country. There have been certain issues with the tone of communications to these students and how the process for paying fees has not been flexible, even in the midst of this global pandemic. This is something to take note of for future deadlines, we need to reconsider how these deadlines are communicated to students and relay the process clearly to them, without inflicting fear of deportation.

We acknowledge and appreciate the hard work done by various staff members, from both the Students' Union and University, to ensure students are well supported, their wellbeing is prioritised and they are given as much activity, both online and on campus, as possible. It's just as important to acknowledge and validate the emotions within the student body and their dissatisfaction, as how they feel is reflective of the current pandemic, the constant changes in guidelines, a complete mismanagement of a pandemic, underfunding and the issues of marketisation of the higher education sector, mental health concerns within the student body, the sense of isolation and a lack of peer support, the list can go on. The main factor is that we need to understand that there is an accumulation of issues that have led to the student body and their frustrations, to result in a demand for fee refunds and instead of ignoring them, as their institution, we should be acknowledging them and supporting them.

### No-Detriment/ Covid Mitigation Policy

Vice President Science & Engineering, Aphrodite Murray-Liddington, wrote a statement on behalf of the Executive Team pledging to lobby the university into reintroducing a good 'no-detriment policy' (or equivalent) to be applied across all years for students. The statement was released on our website. Aphrodite set up and currently co-chairs (alongside the Deputy Vice Principal of Education) a 'Covid Mitigation Group' whose members include, but are not limited to the Executive Team, VP Education and the Deans of Education.

In response to the joint Russell Group statement opposing a 'no-detriment policy', the Presidents of Students' Union's for 22 universities, including Queen Mary, wrote an open letter demanding the reintroduction of the policy as well as implementation of safety nets for students. Both aforementioned statements were discussed in the covid working group. The five points in the letter were evaluated and it was agreed that the university would collaborate with the Students Union to co-create policies and be involved in the discussions.

Aphrodite wrote a 'no-detriment policy' motion to be presented at the Annual Student Meeting. This explores guidelines on what an ideal policy would look like for students' and includes a borderline classification policy, extensions, discrediting the worst two modules and improving the extenuating circumstances (EC's) and appeals process. Aphrodite co-proposed this motion alongside two other students that also put forward a 'no-detriment policy' motion, and these were passed.

Aphrodite also jointly wrote comms with the University to update students on the progression and work being done regarding 'covid mitigation'. In the most recent 'covid mitigation' meeting Aphrodite organised a further 3 subgroups tackling issues in more detail which will likely be split into Exam Boards, EC's and Deadlines. These subgroups will have meetings more frequently and report back to the covid mitigation meetings. This will accelerate the process by which each request is assessed and further communications on what has been agreed will be sent out to all students.

Aphrodite has prioritised communications to students who have been involved in January exams. She is working closely with university staff to understand and flesh out how we can ensure that students who have carried out these exams will be assessed fairly. She is also working on a timeline that ensures a collective result before EQSB in February, where the policy can be signed off.

Example actions implemented by schools so far:

- School of History – given extensions in select assignments
- School of English & Drama – a 7 day grace period was given for January assessments across 3<sup>rd</sup> year.
- School of Biological & Chemical Sciences – extended dissertation deadlines to 30<sup>th</sup> April.

## Rent Issues

Vice President Welfare, Jack Juckes and Vice President Communities, Tiana Dinard-Samuel have been co-leading the work surrounding rent issues with the support of Students' Union President, Shamima Akter. This covers both students renting in university halls and students living in private accommodation. We have organised meetings with key university staff to discuss the issues raised by students directly to us, on social media, and through the student-led QMUL Rent Strike campaign. In discussions with the University, we agreed a 30% rent reduction for undergraduates in university halls. We will continue in these conversations as mandated by the motion passed at the Annual Student Meeting to support the QMUL Rent Strike campaign and address the other issues facing students such as quality of accommodation, support offered, and ensuring no penalties for students striking. We also have met with the QMUL Rent Strike team to update them on how we are negotiating with the university.

In terms of students in private accommodation, Jack and Tiana have made sure students have information on external support such as with the London Renters' Union which is now featured on our website and have also arranged an interview with them to provide students a resource on the support available. Jack and Tiana also met with local MP Rushanara Ali to make her aware of the issues and discuss how the government can support students in private accommodation during this time. They are also working on an open letter to private landlords. In addition, they submitted evidence to the NUS to use in the All Party Parliamentary Group for students to ensure that students' issues are being heard. This covers matters such as rent rebates for the lockdown period, support for international students, and feeds into the no-detriment work too.

## Events

We have provided a successful [events programme](#) that has proved to be adaptable, engaging and highly varied, despite the constantly changing guidelines. Semester 1 saw over 130 events, with over 4000 students engaged on-campus and online. We are grateful for the support provided by Residences and Student Academic Services to make the programme possible.

Online events have included daily fitness classes, wellbeing workshops, guest speakers, speed meeting, escape rooms, crafternoons, meditation sessions, quiz nights and online club nights. It also included an increased fitness offer over the Christmas break due to the enforced closure of Qmotion. A full report will go to the QMSU/SET monthly meeting.

Since 1 September, 61 student groups promoted 168 events via the Students' Union 'What's On' webpage. Most of these events were run by our Academic and Employability societies, many involved external speakers/guests, and most open to all students. Whilst these figures cannot be used to indicate how active our student groups are, as they do not include all events (such as member only events) or other activities/initiatives such as volunteering in the community, student media content creation, or interactions on

online platforms like Discord, they do provide us with an interesting and useful overview of what events our student groups are running. A more detailed overview of student group events was presented at the Student Events and Wellbeing Group last month.

We have also established a new collaborative Student Events & Wellbeing group which meets weekly and feeds into the weekly QMSU/QMUL Covid-19 group. It includes representation from both the University and Students' Union and works together to ensure a creative, innovative and joined-up programme of events, effective marketing, student feedback is acted upon and limited resources are pulled together.

### **Antisemitism Awareness Month**

Tiana worked with the Jewish and Israel Society on [Antisemitism Awareness Month](#) throughout January, creating resources to share on social media. They also organised an event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day in collaboration with the University where we invited a Holocaust survivor (Harry Olmer BEM) to speak and share his testimony. Tiana co-hosted this event with the president of the Jewish Society and the University Vice Principal for People, Culture and Inclusion. There were 160 people in attendance and the event was recorded and has been [shared online](#). We also [released a statement](#) on Holocaust Memorial Day and this year's theme of "Be the light in the darkness". Tiana also worked with History Society and supported them in doing an Instagram takeover to raise awareness of local Jewish history. Due to the new lockdown restrictions, some of the original plans were not able to be carried out, but resources were shared online.

### **NHS Volunteering**

Vice President Barts & The London, Mat Robathan has been coordinating the recruitment and deployment of medical, dental and other students onto wards and in clinical or NHS roles. This has included working with Trusts, local GPs and universities to allow students to help in a safe and helpful way and promote opportunities for our clinical and other students. A priority for Mat, as well as supporting the NHS, has been to ensure student wellbeing is protected throughout and students remain able to engage with their education whilst working or volunteering in the NHS.

Mat has been working with the University to ensure students eligible for vaccinations receive these. He is also helping certain Trusts recruit students to help with vaccination efforts.

### **Multi Faith Centre (MFC)**

In November, we made the decision to close the MFC during the national lockdown due to some behaviours that we found to be putting other students and staff at risk. We reopened the MFC in December and restarted Friday Prayer, which was attended by over 50 students on average. In light of the new national lockdown, the MFC has closed again in the Students' Union Hub. However, the MFC at BLSA remains open in line with the guidelines for individual prayer.

### **Gozo**

We are currently working with Students' Union staff, University staff and Gozo reps to improve our offering of services for the Gozo campus. Some of the improvements that have happened are:

- Funding from the SMD has been secured to support student activities in Gozo.
- Whereas Gozo Society was the only affiliated group allowed before, we have now allowed other societies to be affiliated and have now affiliated multiple new Gozo groups. 6 new societies have been affiliated, making the total 9. Students' Union staff have been working with the Student Relationship Manager in Malta on how best to support student led activity there.
- We have better defined the roles of Gozo Rep and Gozo Society President that used to be one role but are now split.
- We are working at developing a new governance structure for Gozo that may include a BLSA Gozo Board, headed by the VP Barts and The London that will cover issues specific to Gozo but run much like the BLSA Board in London. The Gozo Rep and Gozo Society President will hold more senior positions on this board.

## **Rites Of Passage (RoP):**

The RoP dates for 2021 have been finalised but we are still monitoring the ongoing situation and pandemic to see if the ceremony is still feasible. Mat is supporting the VP Barts and VP London in trying to ensure the RoP ceremony can continue in any possible capacity as long as it is safe to do so. Mat is also planning to start conversations soon with relevant reps and bodies regarding an equivalent ceremony for other SMD students.

## **Student Staff**

Our student staff are again experiencing reduced hours and closures of our outlets due to the national lockdown. We were successful in working with the University on securing the equivalent of CJRS payments for December and January for those students that were affected by reduced hours. We will continue to work with the University to source further CJRS payments / equivalent payments for the remainder of the lockdown so that students continue to have some income.

The employee reward scheme for student staff that Jack was previously working on has now been implemented. This allows student staff to purchase discounted gift cards for retailers to use as payment for purchases, and should hopefully make a tangible improvement to their financial circumstances.

## **Education**

### **HSS Student Concerns**

At the start of the year, Vice President Humanities & Social Sciences, Cameron Storey, received numerous enquiries from students across the faculty, mainly concentrated in the School of English and Drama, and the School of History. Cameron attended 'town-hall' meetings organised by the Heads of School and senior members of the staff team as the Executive Officer who represents their interests. The main concerns that were noted surrounded the re-introduction of a 'no-detriment policy', which is being picked up by the Covid-Mitigation Task and Finish Group, of which Cameron is a co-chair of the EC and deadline subgroup; limited access to resources for dissertations, mental health and well-being support, and concerns over work quality during the pandemic, to name the most high-profile issues raised by such students.

Cameron has continuously liaised with students and Heads of School to maintain oversight over the progress being made in individual Schools, and to provide updates on wider university policy discussions. He has corresponded with Geography, English & Drama, Law and History, so far, to understand the localised measures that are being taken in light of the Covid-19 Mitigation policy, and support Schools with their implementation. He also has raised the idea to both the Dean of Education and Vice Principal (Education) that Schools should be encouraged to engage in regular update meetings with students, as such forums organised so far have been hailed for their productivity.

### **SSLC Training: Co-chairing and co-creating in SSLCs**

As part of the on-going priority to improve Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and implement student co-chairs into these meetings, Cameron has been working with other Executive Officers, the Students' Union Education Coordinator, the Faculty Education Managers, QM Academy and ARCS representatives to provide a complete and coherent training programme for staff members within Schools who act as SSLC staff chairs. This training consists of quiz questions and scenarios, forums and videos, delivered jointly by academic representatives from each Faculty and Students' Union Executive Officers. The training module is in the process of being completed and will be launched as a pilot programme during the Festival of Education 2021, with the training fully opened during designated periods, September and January, coinciding with the Course Reps election.

### **Schools Representatives and School Forums**

Cameron coordinates the HSS School Representatives and Postgraduate Research Representatives, supporting these part-time officers in carrying out their duties. Since the start of the year, he has welcomed the new SEF Representative and PGR HSS Representatives to the Humanities and Social Sciences Board. These representatives are also responsible for hosting and chairing the Schools Forums, a new platform that

allows Course Representatives to liaise with their School Representative. Cameron himself has, due to a conflict of schedules, demands and vacant positions, hosted the School of Law Forum, School of History Forum, School of Geography Forum and the School of Economics Forum in Semester A. At present, the School of Law Representative position remains vacant. He has hosted the first HSS Board and has gathered very useful feedback regarding Online learning quality for Semester B.

### **SMD Course Reps and SSLCs**

Mat has had a meeting with his education team to work on ways in which we can empower Course Reps even more and allow for even better feedback collection. Some of the measures now planned include:

- An anonymous feedback form for each course and year group that enables students to give feedback throughout the year directly to Course Reps. This will be promoted to students before every SSLC but will remain open throughout the academic year. The form will also be accessible from the BLSA website and potentially QM Plus.
- Individual role email addresses for each course rep.
- Promotion of contact details for Course Reps through posters and other physical and digital advertising. This will also include, with permission, showing the course reps' faces so students can more easily recognise them.
- The development of a regular newsletter for students to receive that summarises SSLC discussions and any other news of interest.

Mat has also been able to attend more SSLCs for other courses to be aware of student feedback and help support with these SSLCs. He is planning meetings with different schools and the Students' Union to go through SSLC structures within SMD and strengthen them further and ensure all courses are adequately supported.

### **SMD Study Spaces**

Students were concerned over the lack of study facilities available in Charterhouse Square and Whitechapel, especially on the weekends. There were particular issues with the Garrod Building opening times and how to book this space.

During the Christmas period, Mat was able to ask the library in West-Smithfield to remain open for some days in order to provide study space for any students staying over the holiday period in Dawson Hall. The commute from Dawson to West-Smithfield is a 10minute walk compared to a 30minute tube ride for the Mile End library. Mat has also organised with the University for the Garrod building to now be open for extended hours, including weekends (subject to Health and Safety approvals). Following discussions, the booking system will be simpler and more visible by being added to the library website for students to book from that booking system as for any other study space.

The library in West-Smithfield will now be open longer hours on a trial basis with opening on Saturdays (it did not previously open on weekends). Following discussions, the IT Suite in West-Smithfield is now open for students to book from the library website. There were limited PC facilities in the library before this. All study spaces can now be booked with 0-hour lead time following feedback from the Students' Union, other users and staff.

### **SMD Education**

For students able to continue face to face education under the current lockdown, Mat has been working with reps and students to ensure their concerns and feedback are passed onto the University. The safety of students is a top priority and education quality must be maintained.

The current peak is putting unprecedented strain on the NHS and the SMD's partnering Trusts. This has understandably limited some of the opportunities for students on placement. Mat has been working with staff in the medical school to ease the return to hospital placements for medical and dental students in light of this. He is also liaising with Course Reps to continue to collect and pass on student feedback.

## **SMD Exams and Assessments:**

Written exams, including the upcoming PSA, a national exam for final year medical students, must now be held online with online proctoring. Mat is working with the University and SMD to ensure that exams are fair and accessible to students, no matter the course. This includes working to provide space students can take exams in where there is more reliable internet and working with the department to relay student feedback and concerns. Discussions are also ongoing about practical exams that are happening in person and how to ensure students are adequately prepared for these.

Mat is also helping support the Executive Officers on the no detriment policy and fair assessments policy and is working with all educational reps for SMD to continue to engage them in such conversations where possible.

## **NSS Meetings**

Aphrodite has attended the 3 NSS meetings analysing data that have occurred so far in Engineering, Electronic Engineering and Computer Science. Aphrodite was present to give student feedback and reasoning for scores where applicable. EECS scores seem to have improved in comparison to 2019 results (perhaps because the courses transition well to online learning) whilst some SEMS courses had ~40% of their answers sitting in the lower quartile of ratings. Aphrodite has organised meetings with the Heads of Schools to discuss NSS scores, feedback from students and approaches to improve the scores for the 2021 NSS survey. Cameron has also attended 5 NSS meetings within Humanities & Social Sciences.

## **NSS 2021, UKES, PTES and PRES**

The Students' Union is supporting the promotional campaigns for this year's survey season covering the NSS (National Student Survey), UKES (UK Engagement Survey), PTES (Postgraduate Taught Engagement Survey) and PRES (Postgraduate Research Engagement Survey). The Executive Officers contributed to the promotional plan for the surveys, with suggestions including voucher prize draws and a £1 donation to charity for each NSS completion. The Executive Officers worked with School Reps to select nominated charities for each faculty. These charities are Whitechapel Mission, Young Minds and Cancer Research.

## **QM Academy**

Cameron has continued to support the QM Academy in various formats. Firstly, he is a member of the Festival of Education 2021 Steering Group. Lucie Langley (HSS Faculty Education Manager) and Cameron will be jointly chairing a student panel on the Student Engagement Day of the Festival, where students will be invited for a conversation about the student experience at Queen Mary over the past year. He is also a member of the Assessment and Feedback Workstream, which feeds into the Inclusive Curriculum Working Group. Aphrodite (Vice President Science & Engineering) and Cameron will be co-chairing one of the Task & Finish groups of this workstream called 'Student Voice'. At present, an initial meeting has been held and further meetings of the group has been scheduled to look at the obstacles to student voice and improvements that can be made on module evaluations. Furthermore, he is also involved in the Advisor Training Working Group and the Student Engagement Educational Development Group

## **Online Exams Project**

As a member of the Online Exams Project Board and Working Group, Cameron has been involved in the two supplier presentations, alongside Aphrodite, looking at a new effective solution for online high-stakes exams. This has involved attending internal tender preparations meetings, and scoring supplier presentations, methods statements, functional requirements and technical requirements of the proposed solutions, as well as the moderation process that took place before a choice of solution was proposed.

## **Physician's Associate (PA) feedback**

Following feedback last Semester, Mat and the Course Reps for the PA programme met with the Faculty to talk about the role of Course Reps for this programme and how we can better support them. We have since agreed to organise a separate SSLC for the PA programme that is more tailored to the PA students and staff.



The PA Course Reps were also given individualised email addresses to carry out their roles and we identified any reps who had been missed off from any training. We also discussed elections for the new first year PA students who joined us in Jan 2021. Mat is also exploring with the University how we can support students who might need special travel arrangements for placement.

### **United Hospitals**

Mat is in regular contact with the other London medical schools (collectively known as the United Hospitals) about their approach in the current pandemic and lockdown. They are discussing different initiatives to support education, activities, wellbeing and welfare and sharing experiences and good practice. Mat also recently attended the United Hospitals virtual conference.

### **UKFPO**

The national petition Mat worked on with other medical school student representatives from across the country has now garnered over 6400 signatures. It has also now been shared with its intended recipient, the UKFPO, to call on them to better take into consideration student voice and opinion when regarding their recent decision to change the way medical students apply for their medical foundation jobs.

### **OIA Consultation**

Jack led the response from the Students' Union to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) consultation on group complaints from students, and provided feedback on the new proposals. This will hopefully allow students to engage in group complaints to the OIA about their Higher Education provider, if they have overlapping issues in their complaints.

### **Global Health Intake Suspension:**

Conversations are ongoing on supporting the Global Health BSc students and collecting feedback and student opinion on the suspension of intake for the Global Health BSc course. The course is not expected to recruit any new students again in September 2021.

Mat, the Allied Courses Rep and other BLSA representatives are working on ways forward that will allow students to express their opinion on these issues in a constructive way.

## **Welfare & Liberation**

### **LGBT+ History Month**

Tiana coordinated the organising committee for [LGBT+ History Month](#) consisting of student reps, society committee members, and Executive Officers who identify as members of the LGBT+ community and want to get involved. They have planned an entirely online campaign due to COVID-19 restrictions, and one of the main themes to be explored this month is Intersectionality. Tiana, VP Communities, met with university staff members to coordinate plans and ideas and offer support, also putting them in touch with the BL LGBT rep. Together with Aphrodite, they have also organised another Diverse(ish) event, this time focussing on creating the forum as a safe space to discuss the theme of intersectionality between sexuality, race and religion. Student groups submitted bids into the Liberation Fund which provided funding for things like external speaker fees, LGBT+ flags for Whitechapel and Malta, and prizes for events taking place in the month.

### **Mental Health**

Jack is working with numerous external stakeholders on mental health initiatives. Jack is working with Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies on a series of wellbeing webinars, and working with the Residential Support and the Students' Union Marketing team to improve branding and promotion of these events to maximise reach to students.

Jack is in discussions with Rethink Mental Illness about a new initiative for students that would equip them with the skills to run free mental health workshops for other students, and also be paid for their time.

Jack is also working with university staff and external stakeholders on a project to connect and streamline University mental health services with NHS services (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies – IAPT).

The Be Kind Campaign is ongoing this semester as the COVID-19 restrictions continue. New mental health and wellbeing workshops will also tie into this campaign further. The campaigns can be viewed at [www.qmsu.org/bekind](http://www.qmsu.org/bekind) and [www.qmsu.org/studywell](http://www.qmsu.org/studywell).

### **Project Talk**

For context, Project Talk is a peer support scheme created by students at the University of Bristol, and is now being piloted here at QMSU. Jack has continued work with Tiana, student reps and Students' Union staff to get Project Talk close to formally launching. Project Talk is listed on our website, has been advertised via email, received applications for volunteers, and Jack and Tiana are now interviewing volunteers to ensure they understand what is required of them and to answer any questions. The next step after this is for the Project Talk team at University of Bristol to deliver training to the volunteers.

### **Umii**

Umii is a brand-new app designed for university students, to replace the “spontaneous meeting” where they would bump into other students around campus, and connects students based on their mutual interests. Jack and our staff have been working with the app's developer to begin a trial of the app for our students. The trial launched on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021, and the team will monitor data to assess how the trial is going.

### **Estranged, care-experienced, and other independent students**

Jack attended the Care Leavers and Estranged Students (CLES) working group with university staff and discussed what additional support could be given to these students. The university is hoping to sign the Care Leaver Covenant, and if so then Jack will push for maximum support in light of this commitment.

### **Study Well**

Before Christmas, Jack recorded a video interview with the QM Academic Skills Coordinator about the Apps4Learning project and promoted this as part of [Study Well](#) as a valuable resource for students. There were also a number of study skills workshops and revision workshops, which were very successful. These workshops are continuing this semester, as well as additional events focused on mental health and wellbeing which tie together with the Be Kind campaign.

### **Disability Awareness Week**

Aphrodite filmed videos for disability awareness week that focussed on individuals with family members with autism, dyslexia or Asperger's. Aphrodite took part in answering questions regarding her experience with people with autism and also interviewed another individual to gain some insight into what it is like for a parent with autistic children. The videos were sent to our Disabled and SLD Rep, who added closed captions and promoted them across social media.

### **SMD Welfare**

Mat and the BLSA have expanded the Connecting Practice programme to all SMD students to prevent them feeling isolated. The self-isolation webpage is also being adapted and expanded to provide engaging activities and suggested tasks for all students feeling isolated, not just those self-isolating.

The Welfare Representative is now extending the Peer Scheme to second year students. This scheme invites students to virtually meet others from their year and course by buddying them together to form study and friendship groups.

The Mummies and Daddies scheme which pairs new students at the SMD with current students in older years is launching again to help pair students who have joined us in January or missed out on joining in September. The Welfare Representative is leading this and we are hoping to run a digital event.

Mat has been able to organise accommodation to be available to students on a short term, flexible contract for students who are working, volunteering or attending placement in the NHS that cannot do so whilst living

in their usual home due to the risk of bringing the virus back to vulnerable individuals that live at their usual home.

The team are trying to launch more networking events for certain student populations such as commuters and Allied Courses students.

Jack has continued to deliver sessions with the Clinical and Communication Skills team about Raising Concerns, and was also invited to sit as a panel member on the medical school's Connecting Practice panel on the topic of "Being Human" in medical education and medical practice.

### **Undergraduate Scholarships**

Alongside the university's bursaries team, Jack was involved in the process of awarding undergraduate scholarships to students based on academic achievement, whilst also contextualising for additional extenuating circumstances such as difficult home circumstances, socioeconomic deprivation, significant illness, etc.

### **Hardship Funding**

Jack's project on the Financial Assistance Fund (FAF) is ongoing, and he will be collaborating with the Deputy Academic Registrar on her planned review of the FAF.

The government have also announced an additional £20m of funding for universities to support students in financial hardship. The Office for Students (OfS) have allocated this to each university and Queen Mary has been allocated an additional £84,500. Jack has had meetings with university staff about how best to allocate this funding, and will continue to push for financial support for vulnerable groups of students. Currently there are discussions of utilising this to provide additional support for Care Experienced and Estranged students, and Postgraduate students.

Looking more generally, there are multiple pots of funding within the university for students in financial difficulty but with various differences between them – e.g. Laptop Fund, Covid Emergency Fund, FAF. From Jack's discussions with the university, it seems students may not be identifying that either the support is available or that they are eligible for this support. Both the university and the Students' Union will be increasing promotion of the support available, and modify language to engage the maximum number of students (e.g. avoiding using the word 'hardship', as students may not identify with this).

### **University of Sanctuary**

Tiana and Jack have been a part of the University of Sanctuary group to develop the offering at the University for refugee and asylum seeker students. They have been in conversations with PhD students and have put them in touch with key university staff members such as those working on the QM Network to see how we can get PhD students or alumni to support prospective asylum seeker or refugee students. Tiana also invited the QMUL Student Action for Refugees group involved as they volunteer to support the same community of people. They have also reached out to the local group, Citizens UK, that support refugee communities to get their involvement in the project and have organised a student listening event to hear their stories about how we can improve access to HE which will take place in February.

### **Menstrual Health**

Jack is working with the BL Women's Representative on a project to attain free menstrual care products for students. They have presented some ideas to the VP People, Culture & Inclusion, with a very positive response, and work will continue on developing ideas and proposals.

### **Advisor Training**

Jack is continuing to attend meetings with university staff about the revamp of the university's Advisor system and the training they receive. Jack has provided detailed feedback on assessment questions for advisors to check their understanding of welfare training material.

## **Student Immigration**

Jack is continuing to work with Tiana on welfare issues affecting EU and international students. They have had meetings with the Vice President (Higher Education) of NUS, and attended an All Party Parliamentary Group on Citizens Rights to present these issues to members of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

## **Humans of Queen Mary**

In response to several incidents of inappropriate student behaviour in online classes, Jack has created a new initiative with the HSS Faculty Education Manager called 'Humans of Queen Mary' to share human stories of our staff and students here at Queen Mary. The aim of this project is to remind our community of our shared humanity, as people can be dehumanised by our current virtual and online way of working. This will hopefully improve student behaviour online and improve connections between students and staff.

This work ties in nicely with the new Queen Mary 'Values in Action' framework, and ongoing work on Professional Values and Success in the university.

## **Sexual and Gender Based Violence**

Jack has been working with Students' Union staff on progressing the planned student consultation on sexual and gender based violence, with a provisional date planned for the 10<sup>th</sup> February. They have worked on the plan, structure, and questions for the consultation event, and have engaged with key stakeholders (such as QM Advice and Counselling, and East London Rape Crisis) to incorporate their feedback. Jack is also working with our staff and Tiana to submit a response to the OfS' consultation on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

## **Race Equality Work**

Tiana has been supporting Decolonise Society in writing up a list of requests based on issues at QMUL. This originally came out of the Diverse(ish) event held in collaboration with them during Black History Month and so since then Tiana has developed a document turning the ideas raised at the meeting into recommendations towards positive change around race equality and decolonisation. This paper was submitted to the Race Equality Action Group meeting in January and was discussed with students from Decolonise Society who were invited to speak on the paper. University staff seemed to be receptive to many of the requests, some of which will be incorporated into the Race Equality Action Strategy and Action Plan.

## **Student Opportunities**

### **Employable Me**

Cameron has now successfully hosted four events in the Employable Me series. Employable Me is a series of network sessions and workshops focussing on certain social aspects of employability. Through conversation and discussion, these events help students understand how their unique skills and experiences can impact their employability and future in the workplace.

The second event, Gender and Religion in the workplace, took a closer look at faith in the workplace, leadership and communication skills, and mentors and role models. Alumni from Queen Mary were invited for the event to share their own experiences and journey to the workplace.

At the end of January, Cameron delivered the third event (with over 60 students registered) in continued collaboration with the Alumni Engagement Team: "Your degree doesn't have to define your career".

And finally, and the end of February, Cameron hosted the fourth event titled "Imposter Syndrome in the Workplace" to great success, and included in the panel of speakers a previous council member for Tower Hamlets Council.

### **Project: Doctorate**

Tiana and Cameron have continued to work on Project: Doctorate. This project is now solely focused on two strands. Firstly, the creation of a Postgraduate Coordinator Intern role for the Students' Union. This role is

currently being designed and drafted by the two Executive Officers, and the role's main responsibilities will be to actively seek to address issues and better engage the Students' Union with the postgraduate community. Both postgraduate taught and research students are underrepresented across the Students' Union's various activities, including student groups and societies, events and activities. This role would be introduced next academic year and will receive a limited consultation from both University and Students' Union staff.

The project is also planning on executing a PG Celebration/ Awareness Week in late May/ June. The week would feature a series of networking events, workshops and social events to engage postgraduate students. Cameron and Tiana will be meeting with the Doctoral College to discuss joint collaborations and support.

### **QMentoring**

Aphrodite and Cameron worked closely with the QMentoring Coordinator to improve circulation and promotion of QMentoring to students last semester. This programme aims to help improve student's interview techniques, explore work experience opportunities and network with potential employers. Following the student-friendly approach and advertisements of the scheme in School Forums and Welfare Boards the uptake increased by 60% and the programme was able to grow and offer places to 160 students. Aphrodite will be working again to promote QMentoring for the 2021 academic year. Further to discussions had, the programme is also now available to undergraduate students in Medicine and Dentistry.

### **Online Winter Fair**

Over 130 student groups took part in our [Online Winter Fair](#) event on 27 January, which was an opportunity for students to find out more about the opportunities they can get involved with, via the Students' Union, for the rest of this year. The event was run through the Students' Union's website and involved lots of video calls, interactive content and introductory videos. There were over 2000 unique page hits on the Fair page, with over 4000 unique page hits on the Clubs & Societies page. We are working on an evaluation of the event.

### **BLSA, Griff Inn, Shield Café and Village Shop**

Following the Lockdown announcement, we have had to change some of our opening hours and facility operations. We are trying to provide students still attending face to face teaching under the lockdown rules with adequate space to study, although those who can should study from home. The space is also vital for those who do not have suitable study facilities at home. All spaces are open in line with government guidance. The Village Shop also remained open throughout the Christmas period and January as an essential service to support students living in halls.

In Charterhouse Square, the Shield Café and Fitness to Practice gym are closed. The Shield Café is currently being used for COVID-19 lateral flow testing for students and staff. We are also working on planned renovations for the space. Plans have now been drawn up and are almost finalised, so we hope for work to start soon.

Mat presented an update to the Medical College Trust who have funded this renovation work. The scope of the plans had to change slightly in light of the pandemic, but the Medical College Trust were happy with these. Following Mat's presentation, they also accepted to extend the deadline to spend funds in order for work to happen this year (the deadline was originally December 2020).

### **Sport**

Despite the ongoing restrictions we were able to run some sporting activities during semester one. This included weekly online fitness classes such as HIIT, Legs, Bums & Tums, Pilates and Yoga. During the period of eased restrictions, we were also able to run a series of on-campus pop-ups, our social leagues, Run for Fun and many of our student-led Sports Clubs have offered in-person and online activities for members to get involved in. Some key highlights from our programmes are shown below;

#### **Community Foundation**

- Sign-up process adapted with safeguarding, service level agreement and DBS check all accessible digitally.

- 12 student group applications accepted onto our Social Cohesion Sport Programme.

### **Recreational Sport (Get Active and Campus Games)**

- Received BUCS Active funding to deliver two digital projects – Halls ‘Rewards and Recognition’ Activity finder & our Wellbeing Self-referral programme.
- Get Active successfully engaged 427 students and staff in Semester 1 through a variety of different approaches including campus pop-up sessions and online inspirational talks.
- This Girl Can programme: Delivered 7 online events and engaged 256 participants – an increase on 2019/20.
- RED January, our mental health activity campaign had 33 people signed up and active.
- No Get Active Timetabled activities or courses happened in Semester 1 or scheduled to take place in Semester 2 due to the ongoing restrictions on Sport.

### **Social Leagues**

- 3 Leagues operated in Semester 1 - Football 7-a-side, Football 11-a-side and Netball.
- 245 students/staff/alumni involved in the leagues weekly
- £5000 funding secured to run a women’s football league and employ & upskill student staff.
- All indoor leagues were not able to run, and outdoor leagues were disrupted due to the pandemic.

### **Club Sport**

- 30 clubs managed to have at least 2 training sessions this semester with 25 having 5 or more despite lockdowns and restrictions.
- Indoor sports did not train at all in semester 1, with all Club training sessions severely impacted by the pandemic. No BUCS, LUSL or other competitions were held.

## **Student Voice**

### **Annual Student Meeting**

The Students’ Union’s [Annual Student Meeting](#) took place on 26 January. The meeting was held online, and almost 800 students attended the meeting. At the meeting, students were able to ask questions and raise concerns with the Executive Officers. A recurring theme was the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, and students asked for better support for those that live in private student accommodation and tuition fee refunds to reflect the lack of on-campus teaching. These themes were also reflected in the policies that were passed; the policies mandate the Students’ Union to support the rent strike and lobby for fee reductions and refunds.

### **Elections**

The [Spring Elections](#) are where students elect the Executive Officers, Student Trustees, School Representatives and most of the Part-Time Officers. All students were able to nominate themselves until 9 February, and 170 students have put themselves forward for the positions. Voting will take place from 1 March until 4 March, and results will be announced on 4 March.

Due to the lockdown, candidates are being supported to campaign online, and the debates, training sessions and support sessions are taking place online. This year has also seen the introduction of new content and role descriptions, branding, website and features such as video interviews with Exec alumni.

### **End-of-term survey**

At the end of the Autumn term, the Students’ Union collected feedback from students about their experience in light of the coronavirus restrictions. 1367 students completed the survey. The responses highlighted that a significant minority (for some questions up to a third) responded negatively to questions about their educational experience. Further, the survey showed that almost half of respondents gave negative answers to questions about their wider student experience. In particular, students have found it difficult to meet new people, make friends and collaborate with their peers. The most frequent theme in the qualitative comments was the lack of on-campus activities (including on-campus teaching and social activities).

## Motions passed at the Annual Students Meeting

Name of the motion	Executive lead(s)
Tuition fees reduction according to the "blended learning"	Shamima Akter
Should the Students' Union lobby the university to instate a 'no-detriment' policy?	Aphrodite Murray-Liddington
Should QMSU work on a national scale to refund fees for University students?	Shamima Akter
Should international fees be reduced and the payment deadlines be delayed? (as amended in meeting and accepted by the proposer)	Shamima Akter, Tiana Dinard-Samuel Jack Juckes
Should the Students' Union lobby for postgraduate research students to get automatically assigned to an external "personal" academic mentor for the duration of their PhD	Cameron Storey Tiana Dinard-Samuel Aphrodite Murray-Liddington
Should the Union lobby the University to ensure no teaching from 1-2pm on Fridays?	Shamima Akter
QMUL Rent Strike Campaign Motion: 'Should QMSU commit to supporting QMUL Rent Strike Campaign in the following specified ways?'	Tiana Dinard-Samuel Jack Juckes
Should QMSU do more to help the PGR community at QMUL?	Cameron Storey Tiana Dinard-Samuel Aphrodite Murray-Liddington
This year the 'Race and the Desire for Difference' module has been 'suspended' in the School of History due to COVID	Cameron Storey

**Shamima Akter**  
**Students' Union President**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**