



Senate Report

Outcome requested:	To note the report from the Students' Union President
Executive Summary:	<p>The report is an update from November on activity within the Students' Union. It includes the following sections:</p> <p>Key Updates Student Voice and Education Welfare and Liberation Student Opportunities</p>
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President's Senate Report

February 2023

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President's Report

Key Updates

TEF Student Submission

Adi Sawalha, President, with support from our Student Voice Team, completed and submitted the TEF 2023 Student Submission in January, which contained a range of student feedback from our Glow Up Survey and additional data collected from Course Reps.

There were a number of key themes identified including students' views of teaching quality, academic misconduct, assessment and exams, and students' confidence in developing skills and their employability.

Cost of Living

We participated in a research project with 15 other Russell Group institutions to understand the impact of the Cost of Living crisis on Queen Mary students. Over 1000 students completed the survey following a short promotional campaign and survey window. We have recently received the data from the survey and will be sharing the key findings with relevant colleagues in the University to identify how we can respond to the data.

Alongside this we have put together a new Cost of Living website (www.qmsu.org/cost-of-living) which is a collection of University, Students' Union and external resources, deals, discounts, help and support which students can use for advice in the current financial climate. The website will be updated regularly to offer continued guidance for students.

We have created a food pantry that is located by the Students' Union Hub reception for students to anonymously take what they need. Currently the food donations are coming from the local Co-op in Stepney Green and are collected and organised by volunteers from our Food Society. Meanwhile in our commercial outlets we have committed to ensuring a value range is available across all outlets and introduced a new "Cheap Eats" menu offering low-cost meals and drinks for students.

Radhika Thiagarajan, Vice President Communities, organised a clothes and books giveaway event. After collecting clothes and books from our staff and students, they were given away for free to students. This helped promote a sustainable way of life as well as to support students through the difficult cost of living crisis. This event was attended by 132 students and it was observed that there is a demand for this type of event with many queries about future ones.

Clearly the Cost of Living crisis continues to affect the Students' Union as an organisation too. We are facing a challenging situation of having to juggle significant rising costs whilst continuing to support our students who are struggling. For example, despite tight financial controls our non-pay costs have seen sharp increases, rising by 18%, whilst payroll costs have risen by a further 14%. The University have made an additional contribution of £100k to fund the £240k pay increases we have experienced, with the Students' Union absorbing the other £140k.

Rent

At the December meeting of the Residential Strategy Group, the Executive Officers discussed rent on behalf of students living in residences. It was proposed to increase rents by 9% on average, with increases ranging from 1% to 39%. The Exec argued that in light of the cost of living crisis, rent increases would negatively affect students' finances and could lead to some students no longer being able to afford accommodation. A particularly pertinent point given the demographic of our students and the universities ambitions. Unfortunately, despite these points, Residential Strategy Group decided to go ahead with the proposed rent increases.

Volunteering and Charity Fundraising

We have supported, and continue to support, several student-led initiatives to fundraise for charities supporting the disaster relief in Turkey and Ukraine. Details of these can be found on our dedicate web page here: <https://www.qmsu.org/news/article/6965/Turkey-Syria-Earthquake/>

Volunteering Week took place in February. This was a great opportunity to give exposure to our volunteering opportunities available with charity partners and to promote the benefits of volunteering to students. The week comprised of on campus events, pop-ups and online talks.

Liberation Campaigns

We delivered a number of our liberation campaigns over the last few months including Disability Awareness Fortnight, Jewish Heritage Fortnight and LGBTQ+ History Month. We are ready to launch Asian Heritage Month at the beginning of March. The campaigns are led by organising committees made up of students from the relevant groups and supported by Radhika. Students, student groups and elected representatives are invited to take part in the campaigns and organise their own events, activities and online content.

Examples of events, activities and content are:

- An online blogpost called 'An A-Z of Disabilities' written by one of our PhD students.
- Event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day
- [An article about Jewish History in East London](#) written by one of our students
- Drag Show and Drag Bingo organised by both our LGBTQ+ Societies
- A panel discussion about LGBTQ+ visibility/invisibility organised by the LGBTQ+ Society at Mile End

Our team are also working with the University EDI team for International Women's month. Together we are organising reproductive health clinics where we provide pop-up STI tests on campus. We are also organising reproductive health panel talks, led by Barts medical staff and professors, and with staff and students participating.

Student Groups

We have been working positively this year with key University departments, including QM Venues, the timetabling team, QM Catering staff, and the Student Life Team, to improve access to spaces on campus for student groups to deliver activities for their members. At a time where costs associated with running events are rising, we appreciate the work across teams to make it as easy and affordable to our groups to use spaces on-site. The upcoming trial of removing portage costs for our student group events in most spaces, will have a huge positive impact on their activities and the student experience.

There are still, however, barriers to accessing certain spaces, which are limiting student groups from running key social, educational and developmental activities on campus, impacting on the student experience. This includes, access to booking clinical spaces and access to free spaces where student groups can run more physical activities and/or bring in their own refreshments. This is stopping many groups from running informal and relaxed events, as well as some that complement the curriculum. This can often force groups to look for spaces elsewhere, including off-campus or licensed venues, which for several reasons impacts which students can attend.

It's also the time of year when we're supporting several groups to run large events, both on and off campus. This includes both a national and international surgical conference, balls, galas and cultural performances.

Our Student Engagement team are keen to best demonstrate the positive impact our groups have, as well as to improve reward and recognition for students involved in relevant activities. To help us do this, we are currently recruiting for an Impact and Engagement Intern with funding from the Westfield Fund. This is a part-time role for a current student.

January Welcome Fair

At the end of January we held our January Welcome Fair event. Over 1750 students attended the event to find out more about the opportunities the Students' Union has to offer for the rest of the academic year. Over 100 Sports Clubs, Societies and Volunteering groups ran stalls at the event, alongside Students' Union services and external organisations. There were also demonstrations and performances from our Clubs and Societies throughout the event.

Garrod Building Redevelopment

Work continues to progress on the design of the new Garrod Building spaces to replace our existing facilities at Whitechapel that are due to be demolished to make way for the Life Sciences Development. This exciting project was unveiled to students at a launch event held in the Old Library in January. Over 350 students and staff attended to view the proposed designs, furniture and layouts of the new spaces.

At the end of February, Beardwell Construction were awarded the tender for the construction work, with work due to start imminently in the Garrod Building. Alongside this the Students' Union is currently running focus groups and a survey with students and staff in Medicine & Dentistry to understand what they want from the new Café and Bar space and work continues in conjunction with the University Estates & Facilities department to develop new partnership agreements for the new spaces.

Inter-Halls Games

The Inter-Halls Games programme provides the opportunity for students to get involved in large scale sporting opportunities throughout the year as a way to meet other residents and make friends in an active and social environment. It is funded by the Residential Life Team who work closely with our Sport Department to oversee the events.

Since the beginning of the academic year, the programme has run 4 events with our February Badminton event being the most highly attend event since the start of the programme in September 2021. This event engaged 45 students across 14 of Queen Mary's halls of residence. After running a week of student feedback focus groups, the programme has made changes to its delivery and hopes to expand its provision to mid-week and weekend sessions to include more exciting activities such as Archery Tag and Canoeing.

Strategy

In February, our Board of Trustees have approved our new Mission, Vision and Values and Strategic Pillars. The headline information is provided below.

Mission: To listen, act and improve students' lives.

Vision: For every student to feel they belong in an environment where wellbeing, inclusion and community are at the core of everything we do. We will ensure every student is empowered to grow and thrive through their time at university and beyond into their future lives.

Values: Student-led, Honest, Supportive, Inclusive & Ethical

Strategic Pillars: Building an authentic student voice, Supporting meaningful connections, Resonating with every student and Prioritising students' mental health.

This work was informed by a variety of data, existing and new, including our 'Glow Up' survey which was completed by over 3000 students. This was supplemented by on-campus pops ups, social media polls, student interviews and data validation workshops. The Pillars principally represent current student's feelings and needs and a reminder of the importance of the Students' Union role. Key stakeholders will be invited to a launch in the new academic year.

Student Voice & Education

Annual Student Meeting

The Annual Student Meeting was held online at the end of November. Over 550 students registered to attend the meeting, with around 300 students present in the meeting at any one time. A series of motions were discussed and voted on by the students present. The outcomes have now been considered by our Board of Trustees and next steps communicated to students and stakeholders. The motions discussed and outcomes can be viewed on our website at <https://www.qmsu.org/news/article/6965/Outcomes-from-the-Annual-Student-Meeting-2022/>

Spring Elections

Our Spring Elections are currently taking place to find the student leaders for next academic year. Students can nominate and vote for 6 full-time Executive Officer positions, more than 70 Part-Time Officer positions and 4 Student Trustee positions.

After the main round of nominations, 121 students had nominated themselves for a role. A small number of positions were re-opened for nominations, and a further 31 students completed a nomination for a role. Nominations have been promoted through on-campus promotional materials, targeted emails, newsletters, social media, stalls on campus and at the Welcome Back Fair.

Candidates receive training and resources to prepare them to campaign effectively. Candidates can also access support and guidance throughout the elections period, including individual drop-ins with a staff member, campaigning events and informal breaks for candidates.

Voting will take place from 13 March until 16 March. During the voting period, we are planning a range of promotional events, as well as a full communications campaign. Results will be released at the Results Party on 16 March from 7.30pm.

Further details about the Elections and full details of the candidates running for positions can be viewed at www.qmsu.org/elections.

National Student Survey

The Students' Union is supporting the promotion of the National Student Survey this semester. We are running a marketing campaign to complement the central university campaign and have encouraged our Course Reps and student group members to promote the survey to their student networks. We are also working with the University on the incentives for the survey. All students who complete the survey can claim a Students' Union voucher and a £1 donation will also be made by the University to the RAG nominated charities.

Assessment & Feedback

Muneer Hussain, Vice President Science and Engineering, has been supporting students from different courses across the faculty with January exam arrangements and making sure that adequate support has been put in place, especially for courses that had planned to transition back to in person exams. A survey has been produced in collaboration with the Part-Time Officers and is being circulated to get feedback around assessment design for Science & Engineering students.

BMA Strikes

In December, Charlie Sellar, Vice President Barts and The London, met with both IHSE staff and the student representatives of the British Medical Association, the Trade Union for all Doctors working in the UK, to determine the nature of the Junior Doctor strikes that went to Ballot in January.

Given that the majority of medical students' supervision and teaching comes from juniors, Charlie raised introducing additional mitigating factors to non-attendance on strike days for students concerned about safety and the impact of the strikes. This was received well by the school.

Following a vote at BLSA Board to support strikes, Charlie will meet with the BMA representatives regularly to enquire about how the BLSA can assist in strike action and to negotiate teaching and learning resources from the BMA which can support students who feel they have missed out on teaching.

Decolonisation

Saynab Shariff, Vice President Humanities & Social Sciences, is working on a decolonisation project to better understand what students want from the University in decolonising the curriculum. Saynab will be working with students to create a collaborative gallery of creative work on their topics of interest, encouraging them to express their story and highlight the importance of decolonisation for them. A motion on decolonising the curriculum was featured at the Annual Student Meeting. Saynab is working to facilitate meaningful engagement, involvement and feedback loops for students to directly input into discussions on curriculum reform, by creating a website with resources, and events such as the gallery, screenings and a book club.

International Students

Radhika has been lobbying the university to improve the financial support offered to International Students. This includes reducing the disproportionately high international fees charged to students, providing flexible tuition fee payments with options of more instalments and for the University to provide emergency funds for international students coming from countries that are undergoing a crisis.

Radhika has also been involved in conversations with Advice and Counselling as well as the University to provide floating cash to students who are international students and have lost their wallets, keys etc. and do not have access to immediate emergency funds. She has also been working further with Advice and Counselling and other University staff to help expedite processing certain plagiarism cases to help international students get their results in time for their visa renewal.

There are also many delays in appeals processes which have adversely affected many students, particularly international students, who have visa complications and scholarships being affected because of these delays. Radhika has been lobbying the university to improve appeals and assessment processes.

Furthermore, Radhika is also involved in lobbying the University to improve funding for internationally funded students coming from China, Pakistan and Mexico, who are underpaid and are unable to meet their day-to-day expenditure from their stipends.

QA Hospital Site Visits and MBBS Curriculum Change

In December, Charlie, alongside the Quality Assurance team within the Institute of Health Sciences Education, has been visiting our hospital sites around East London to assess the quality and equity of medical education provided.

At these visits, Charlie has been speaking to students currently on placement, including junior doctor graduates of Barts and The London and consultants involved in the education of our students, to understand and assess the overall culture at the site and the integration of this culture into standard practice and education.

These site visits have continued into term 2, in preparation for the upcoming MBBS Curriculum change project, alongside the introduction of the new head of MBBS.

Post Graduate Experience & Representation

Radhika is working with our Postgraduate Reps to propose a better representation structure for Postgraduates within the Students' Union to help make them feel more included. Radhika and the Student Voice team are working with Oxford Students' Union to see how they have approached supporting Postgraduate themes.

Radhika has been lobbying the university to reconsider the £50 instalment fee charged to Postgraduate Taught students who pay their tuition fees in instalments.

Radhika is also working with PGR reps to organise a parents and carers friendly social event in order to encourage PGRs from different departments to socialise with each other. This project is in response to students requesting the Students' Union to facilitate inter-disciplinary social events. The event is set to occur in the summer term.

Welfare & Liberation

Study Well

Jojo Croft, Vice President Welfare, held two stalls to giveaway freebies to students and chat with them about how they were finding the January revision and exam period. Jojo and the team planned a series of events and workshops that were held throughout January. The final step in this project is to get feedback from the different events that occurred to help with planning the summer Study Well campaign.

Contemplation Spaces

Muneer has been collecting data on the usage of the Multi-Faith Centre (MFC) over Semester A, with particular focus on peak times and usage, for example around sunset.

The data highlights that the space is highly used and the data has been handed to the Chief Operations Officer to look at possible solutions, including other spaces and ways to improve capacity and facility for students to use the MFC.

Faith Forum

The Faith Forum stopped at the time of the first lockdown as the spaces were no longer being used. In Semester A, Jojo, attempted to restart this forum. Two separate meetings were held with the different faith societies invited, however neither had more than three faith groups attending. This has led to planning being done to find a different approach to collect information for faith groups both now and in a sustainable way going forward. We have prepared a survey which we are going to launch to the faith groups during the second semester.

Mental Health and Well-being

Radhika is continuing work on establishing a Nightline on campus. A Student Council motion was recently passed asking the University as well as the Students' Union to support this project. Radhika has been working with the Nightline Association as well as the Students' Union to identify risks and mitigations for those risks. Additionally, Radhika and our team will review the governance and good practice documents ahead of the setup of the Nightline.

Student Opportunities

Sustainability

This year, we are taking part in the SHAPE Sustainability Impacts Project, a program run by SOS-UK, in partnership with the British Academy. Five students, across SHAPE disciplines, will be supported in a year-long programme to use their disciplines to develop sustainability solutions for the Festival of Communities. They will be working closely with staff in the Centre for Public Engagement, supported by our Sustainability Coordinator and Policy & Strategy EO. The students will deliver their final presentations in early June, after exams.

We will be running a "Big Green Survey" to assess our students' attitudes towards sustainability and better understand what motivates participation in sustainability action/activities. This will be launched late March/ early April with financial incentives.

Our Sustainability Coordinator is the representative for the University at the London Higher Sustainability Network. At the last meeting, concerns were expressed from institutions across the board regarding sustainability training for staff and measuring demonstrated success. Discussions largely focused on engagement of key stakeholders and finding a unified language to communicate sustainability. We were asked to feedback on institutional projects, international recruitment and sustainability/scope 2 and 3 emissions.

Key external sustainability partnerships have been formed this year. We have re-established our relationship with the Canal River Trust and are now working directly with them to expand opportunities available to students, including vegetation management, litter picking, and canoe canal clean-ups. We are also working with Trees For Cities to put together more tree-planting workshops and talks and Fashion For Future (FFF) to deliver clothes swaps on campus.

Finally, Green Week took place in February, focusing on engaging students in environmental sustainability. 12 events/initiatives took place and included a planting session, canal clean-up, a personal development session and bike repairs on campus. We also launched a new webpage featuring vegetarian and vegan recipes submitted by students and staff.

Qmotion Sport & Fitness Centre

It has been a positive year so far for Qmotion. As of the end of January the gym had 2744 members, and this has risen to over 3000 during February. Our class programme featuring over 25 group exercise classes a week has also proved popular, with many sessions at full capacity. Membership retention has been strong throughout and we have continued to receive positive customer feedback, despite the cost of living pressures and popularity of the gym meaning space can be at a premium

Skills Award

We have had 210 session attendances so far which is just 5 behind the total from last year, with another 12 sessions remaining this semester. The session attendance rate has increased from 64% last semester to 72% so far this semester.

Employability

Radhika is currently working with the Alumni Engagement team as well as CCLS to organise the next Alumni Café event. This event is tentatively set to happen in the last week of March/first week of April with Alumni and students from CCLS attending.

Get Active

Get Active is a part of our recreational sport programme, offering a timetable of weekly sporting activities that students, staff and alumni can get involved with for just £2.50 per session. We offer a range of sports such as Badminton, Volleyball, Fencing and Basketball.

Since the beginning of the academic year, Get Active has had 4650 engagements across its range of activities. Our pop-ups that provide free and easily accessible activities such as badminton, table tennis and cornhole on Wednesday afternoons have engaged 1569 students. Due to the success of running a Women's Self Defence course in semester 1, this course has been renewed to run again during second semester.

Adi Sawalha
Students' Union President
28th February 2023