



## Senate Report

<b>Outcome requested:</b>	To Note
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>The report is an update from the end of September 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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<b>Senior Management/External Sponsor</b>	



# President's Senate Report

November 2023

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# President's Report

## Key Updates

### **Palestine and Israel**

Since the 7th October Serena-Amani Al Jabbar, Students' Union President, has been working with the University on their response to the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. The Director of Student Services was proactive in working with us, and reaching out to our Jewish and Israel Society and Friends of Palestine Society, to offer regular support meetings with Serena and a senior Students' Union Staff member. This along with the Campus Tension group that was set up is a much-needed response to most global crisis that occur due to the diversity of our student body and quite different support that is needed in each situation.

At these separate support meetings much time was taken up by both groups expressing their dissatisfaction with various aspects of the university statements on the crisis. Various aspects were poorly received by the different communities, for example, subsequent edits failing to recognise the Israeli Governments breaking of international law or removing the word Jewish from the 4<sup>th</sup> edit of the statement entirely, left students disheartened and questioning how sincere the support for them was. Serena had also provided similar feedback and how students were feeling when consulted on the University statements, however this was not considered in the subsequent revisions.

Within the Students' Union we have reminded our groups that they are free to express themselves within the law and to consider that many of our students communities, not just from Israel and Palestine, are impacted by this conflict, and to consider if their activity is conducive to creating a welcome University environment for all. With support from QMUL Security and other teams we have helped support groups from affected communities organise events with a short turnaround such as a variety of fundraising events on campuses, vigils and protests.

### **Course Rep Elections**

The Student Voice team made some minor but significant changes to the Course Representative election timeline this academic year. Firstly, the main election period was concluded over a working week earlier, in response to feedback from SSLC chair's during NSS consultations that 'it took too long to elect reps and delayed the holding of SSLCs'. The annual Course Representative Elections were promoted through our comms channels and stalls at our welcome fairs and in Library Square during Welcome Week. Concluding on 6<sup>th</sup> October this academic year, the team are pleased to announce that over 1200 voters participated, an increase of almost 500 on the year prior. Over 40% of course rep positions were filled in the first round, 6% higher than 22/23; and following the main election period a further by-election was completed to elect remaining positions. Any unfilled positions at this time are deferred to co-option via schools.

Course Reps have begun completing their training, and preparations are being made to host a conference where all course reps will be invited to attend, network and engage in enhanced levels of training. The Student Voice team is also grateful to the Faculty Engagement team from HSS, for their support in the promotion of the Course Rep elections and administrative support in providing details of new courses and positions.

### **Annual Student Meeting**

On 27 November, we held our Annual Student Meeting, which was attended by more than 140 students. The meeting was held online and was chaired by the Student Council Chair (one of our elected student representatives).

The meeting included a Q&A session with the Executive Officers, approval of affiliations and debates about two motions (one about dress code policies for students on healthcare placements and one about support for estranged students). Both motions were passed, and the Executive Officer team is now working to implement the policies.

### **Graduation Fund Applications**

In late October, Tahmid Khan, Vice President Welfare, and our team processed applications for the Graduation Fund. The applications for this round were for the January graduation season. The fund covers the cost of a cap and a gown (£25). Awards are given to those most in hardship.

This time, there were 521 applications in total – an unprecedented number. Decisions for all applications had to be made within three days. Based on the budget available and trends established from previous years, it was determined that only a maximum of 100 applications could be approved – less than a fifth of the total applications. The number of applications will likely increase for the spring and summer graduation seasons. It was evident from the applications that the cost-of-living crisis is impacting many students and that the current financial and operational arrangements for the fund are unsustainable.

Tahmid and the Students' Union team are investigating the current funding arrangements and have held meetings with senior members of the University to discuss how graduating students could be supported better going forward.

### **Black History Month**

This year we had a range of events and student-led content for Black History Month. We had successful events such as a book club with alumni Caleb Femi on his book 'Poor'. Our team also worked with the archives team and showcased a past student Orlando Marville with both an exhibition and an online feature. The campaign also comprised of student spotlights and other events across the month.

### **Islamophobia Awareness Month (IAM)**

This year's IAM is themed around storytelling, and we are featuring several of the organising committee members in website articles. Matthew Beach, Vice President Communities, chaired the student-led Organising Committee and Aisha Qadi, Vice President Science & Engineering, and Jovani Palnoni, Vice President Humanities & Social Sciences, have been working on organising events for IAM. The start of the month saw the open Friday Prayer event in Library Square, where Aisha and Jovani supported the event along with the staff team, liaising with the students who volunteered to support, set-up, and clean-up the event. The event was successful with a turnout of over 500 students passing through.

In addition, Aisha has been planning a hijab awareness stall event to raise awareness on the importance of the hijab, and tackling stereotypes that come along with it. Jovani has been working closely with students and societies on how they could be best represented as well as the approach they wanted to see with the month. This year also features updates to our own branding, with Aisha and Jovani leading on a refresh including new lanyards, pin badges and bookmark designs. Matthew also helped organise a talk by Hidayah LGBT+, which is a charity focusing on the intersectionality between gender, sexuality and Islam. The event went very well and supported a marginalised group of students to find their community and sense of belonging.

### **Garrod Building**

Week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> November saw several new Students' Union spaces open in the newly refurbished Garrod Building. These facilities, including the key social & study space in the refurbished Old Library, lounge & kitchen, welcome area, faith rooms, rep & staff offices and fitness facilities, are important to students' wellbeing and the continuation of the strong sense of community at the Whitechapel campus. Moving between buildings and the relocation of facilities, has taken up a considerable amount of time and resources so far, which has included the need to consult with and liaise with students, clubs and societies on various aspects of the project.

We continue to work with the university project team to resolve several snags in each of the spaces to ensure the building is finished to a high standard, and meet with them weekly on-site to monitor progress on this and the remaining spaces still to be completed, such as The Griff (café, kitchen & bar) that was due to open in time for Welcome Week, but will now open in early 2024. Amaan Abbas, Vice President Barts and The London, and the team have been working hard to ensure the facilities are furnished and equipped to a high standard, as much of the old building's furniture is in need of replacement. We have continued to work with faith societies to ensure the new spaces are usable for their needs, including the removal of CCTV in prayer spaces. We also continue to work with student groups and the project team to find suitable spaces in the Garrod Building for the storage of society and volunteering group items, as this provision is currently lacking and inadequate in the new spaces.

Our CEO and team have worked with various stakeholders across the university including the faculty, Estates & Facilities, Security, IT Services and QM Venues to develop the new partnership agreement for the Garrod Building. This partnership between the university and Students' Union will ensure we all work well together to deliver an outstanding facility for students, staff and alumni, and the best possible student experience. The partnership will be supported through monthly operational meetings between the Students' Union and key stakeholders.

Whilst we initially planned to open the spaces together, the delays to the project has meant we moved to a phased approach to ensure the new spaces were open and available to students as soon as possible. As we continue our move, a key priority for us will be gathering data and insight from students on how they find the spaces. Amaan, has been working to curate and host a series of pop-up events that will take place weeks commencing 27<sup>th</sup> November and 4<sup>th</sup> December. The aim of these is to further understand how students are adapting to learning, teaching and socialising in the new spaces since re-opening, find out what is working well and identify and resolve any concerns students may have from using the facilities. Multiple pulse surveys themed on different spaces are also planned to take place throughout the year. This data will form the basis of a report that we hope can go to the relevant teams in the university and Students' Union as an attempt to capture as much information to improve the student experience.

We are planning a launch event with the faculty that is due to take place in early 2024.

### **Constructions projects on campus**

The Students' Union presented a report on the student experience and the range of capital projects taking place on our campuses. Whilst the investment is clearly welcomed, the Mile End campus is increasingly feeling like a building site, with key works at two of the three main entrance points, with works at Westfield Way and the Queen's Building. From January, Godward Square and the west side of campus will also be severely impacted by capital works. These works have led to the loss of key green and social spaces and are impacting the current student experience. We are concerned of the impact this will have throughout the year, and for key activities such as Welcome, Open Day and student feedback surveys such as the NSS, PTES and PRES.

We hope to work proactively with the Estates & Facilities team and has proposed a series of mitigation measures and a review of the risk register to ensure the student experience impacts from these works is considered collectively, rather than in isolation limited to each project.

### **Strategy Stakeholder Launch**

In October we launched our new strategy, mission vision and values and the data that underpinned it to Queen Mary staff of all levels, our partners, and trustees. The event featured a presentation, followed by an exhibition featuring interactive stalls where guests could find out about some of our current work that helps deliver our objectives. We are currently collecting baseline data to inform our KPI targets, and in Semester 2 we plan to launch to students and begin work on updating and refreshing our overall brand and identity.

## **Student Voice & Education**

### **Postgraduates**

Thanks to support through the block grant we have recruited two student interns; Postgraduate Research Representation (PGRA) and Postgraduate Engagement Assistants (PGEA). Matthew has worked with the PGEA to confirm communication and deployment of the Postgraduate Consultation Group (PGCG), which had an extremely strong turnout of almost 70 PGRs. Matthew worked with the PGRA and PGEA to select the first group of 10 PGRs to take part in the PGCG, and is now finalising the first discussion topic questions. Matthew has also began drafting proposed changes to the Educational Manual with our team around meeting frequency expectations between PGR Subject Reps and their Schools/Institutes. He successfully chaired the first Postgraduate Board where students raised concerns around PGT engagement, cost of living, and tuition fees. Matthew is also finalising plans in collaboration with a Senior International Advisor to host a Winter International PGR Mixer and Meet & Greet of campus services. The event will take place in early December with contributions from QM Student Wellbeing Advisors, International Student Advisors, PhD Support Group Facilitators, Doctoral College and International Students House.

### **Employability Curriculum Group (ECG)**

Aisha has been planning a proposal to initiate the ECG group to focus on mapping employability principles within the curriculum and approaching employability within different perspectives, such as assessments. The proposal has received buy-ins and approvals from the relevant stakeholders involved and an equivalent to a terms of reference document has been sent out. The outcomes of the meeting will be presented to relevant forums such as the DOE forums when necessary.

## **Employable Education Survey**

As part of the initiation of an employability campaign in collaboration with Jovani, Aisha is working on releasing a qualitative survey to gather students' feedback on their experience with employability principles and skills gained in their course, how confident their assessments reflect those principles, as well as engagement with relevant employability support services available to them at the university, such as Careers & Enterprise and QM Academy. The first draft of the survey is in review and discussion. The survey will also be sent out to the specific services for feedback.

## **Sustainability in the Curriculum & Alumni**

Jovani is working on embedding sustainability in the curriculum and is working on a presentation on this as well as assessment and feedback, which is one of his main focuses this year. Jovani has also been working on launching an employability campaign and part of that is working with alumni, he is speaking with the Alumni team as well as current alumni and is looking forward to including alumni stories, alongside career pathways which is one of his key projects, showing the story of graduates and how they went through non-traditional routes from their degree to get to where they are today.

## **International Students**

Matthew continues to lobby the university for appropriate feedback channels to represent international students in the absence of relevant board meetings and a Vice President International. He has worked with the International Advisors in Advice and Counselling to set up meetings with our international representatives to enable them to relay feedback directly to the university in some mechanism. He is also in conversation with the team about potential plans to start up an 'International Café' where students meet every six weeks to discuss concerns as well as learn about careers, skills, networking, etc.

## **Welfare & Liberation**

### **Exercise Referral Programme**

We are proud to have partnered with the Queen Mary Advice and Counselling service to support the delivery of a pilot exercise referral programme for students who present with mild to moderate anxiety and/or depression. This scheme provides referred students free access to Qmotion Sport & Fitness Centre, timetabled exercise classes and Get Active sessions for 12 weeks. In addition to this, students will receive three 1-1 sessions with an exercise referral specialist to discuss lifestyle, formulate health goals and evaluate progress. Following completion of the programme students will have the opportunity to receive a discounted membership to Qmotion. We have received some extremely positive feedback so far from students reporting that the programme has had a positive impact on their physical and emotional health, with one student saying they have found the programme transformative.

### **Food Pantry Expansion**

Tahmid, has been working with Serena and the team to expand the QMSU Food Pantry service and secure sustainable funding for the programme. Funding has now been secured from the University to construct a new space and stock the Food Pantry in the long term. The new space will quadruple the storage capacity available and is expected to open by the end of November 2023.

The expanded Food Pantry will be fully and consistently stocked, which will assure students of the reliability of the service. Stock will be bought at wholesale price by the University on behalf of the Food Pantry service. Tahmid has been working with the Director of Campus & Commercial Services and his team to deliver the project.

### **Disability Awareness Fortnight**

Matthew chaired the student-led Organising Committee meetings across three major planning strands: panel discussions, social activities, and social media and web content. Confirmed events thus far include a winter holiday social, an educational and interactive session exploring teaching accessibility, a panel involving two staff/student duos discussing experiences of navigating studying and teaching, and a talk by Mathiew Rubery discussing his book on the history of neurodiverse reading. Matthew is also helping finalise a further panel discussion involving academics and PGRs showcasing their research into disability. He worked with the Doctoral College Communications Manager to syndicate a participation call that was well received. The team

has also been actively planning social media content around both physical and hidden disabilities, chronic health conditions, and mental health; as well as articles featuring committee members.

### **Improving Multi-Faith Provision**

Tahmid has continued to work with our team on a paper outlining a long-term strategy to work with the University to improve the multi-faith provision, which is significantly overcrowded.

To this effect, Tahmid has launched a large-scale data collection exercise to determine the Multi-Faith Centre (MFC) usage on Mile End Campus. Numbers of usage for male and female spaces will be collected at 10-minute intervals from 11:00 – 18:30 every weekday for at least three weeks. Large events like the Muslim Friday Prayer will also be head counted.

When complete, this data should provide an in-depth look at the usage trends and demands for the MFC. If the study is successful, Tahmid aims to replicate the study at the MFC within the new Garrod Building on Whitechapel Campus next semester.

### **Accommodation**

Matthew toured the Floyer and Dawson residences alongside Tahmid and Amaan. Matthew fed back to Residential Life about possible amendments to the interior design related to student satisfaction and is set to meet with their team at the end of the month to discuss improvements. He subsequently attended a drop-in session hosted at Floyer House by the Resident Assistants and spoke to them and students about their experiences living in the residence.

### **Qmotion Women's Gym**

Aisha has been working to expand and improve the Qmotion women's gym space, providing more space and added facilities. Aisha has been working collaboratively with our sports team to draft this proposal. The first draft of the proposal is ready to send out to the "Sticky Campus" project and Estates & Facilities.

### **Reforming the Financial Assistance Fund**

Tahmid is looking into the Financial Assistance Fund (FAF) policy and process to determine areas of reform. Students have regularly complained of a lengthy and complex process. Tahmid is a member of the FAF panel that evaluates applications to the fund weekly. He conducted a mystery shop of the process and discussed the findings with members of the Bursaries, Grants & Scholarships (BGS) team and Director of Student Experience.

Some findings were that the online form has no accessibility options and that information within the FAF policy is communicated ineffectively to students. As a result, Tahmid has begun working with the BGS team to improve and simplify the language of the FAF webpage, which had not been updated for several years.

Having gained a better understanding of the front-end process of the fund, Tahmid has now begun examining the FAF policy and holding discussions with stakeholders of the fund to ascertain whether a lack of clarity within the policy is resulting in issues with the delivery of the programme.

## **Student Opportunities**

### **Raise and Give (RAG)**

Student charity fundraising has had a busy start this academic year, with Student Groups already raising £30,000 across 20 RAG activities and Islamic Society Charity Week. This includes events such as movie nights, bake sales and football tournaments.

### **Societies**

After the success of the Welcome Fair, students must have been left feeling inspired by all the great groups we had on show as we have had over 6500 students join a society (with just under 8000 join any student group), over 10,000 society memberships sold and 50 new and restarting societies join us so far. The Welcome Fair was supported by our wider Welcome campaign and the Try Something New programme showcasing meet & greets, taster sessions and open trials offered by our student groups.

Our current groups have been excelling, with 204 events registered! Groups have really hit the ground running this semester and we are proud of all they have achieved. Thanks to our new large event process we are currently in talks with groups helping to plan over 50 large events for this semester and next semester.

As we look ahead to the next term, we are excited to be delivering a hybrid approach to our training with societies having the chance to have some real-life training sessions with the team, something we have not had since pre-covid! We will also be preparing for the January Welcome Fair, student group awards and student group elections.

### **Sustainability**

We have had a great start with sustainability engagement, with 26 students attending the first Sustainability Board of the year and some great conversations coming from it. The Sustainability Officers have effectively engaged with the university team on areas such as waste management and energy. Matthew led on the drafting of a letter to SET imploring the university to increase its support and voice to sustainability around Strategy 2030 and beyond. The letter was signed by all the Executive Officers as well as our Sustainability Reps. We are awaiting a formal response but have been told it was well received.

Queen Mary is now an organising university for the “London Student Sustainability Conference”, a collaborative effort between 10 universities to showcase student sustainability research, with our team attending weekly steering meetings. We have bid for Community Engagement funding to enable the development of our engagement with external sustainability organisations, increasing our capacity to deliver student opportunities.

Sustainability Week is taking place 13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> of November, with 15 different events happening, it's set to be a great week. Events include allotment sessions, a wardrobe refresh fair, craft sessions, sustainable careers events, the Big Green Canal Clean, campus facility tours and many more. It will also see the launch of the “Sustainability Climate Action Network” (SCAN), a university and Students' Union wide network, unifying student, and staff capacity for sustainability action.

Matthew has co-organised an event for Sustainability Week with the IHSS Environmental Futures programme director and brought arts organisation Sustainable Darkroom to campus teaching students about their work while learning how to make camera less photographs with medicinal plants growing around the Mile End canal. Matthew has sought tentative approval from the Sustainability team to create a webpage on their department website featuring the student-made prints as a way to increase biodiversity knowledge on campus.

### **Club Sport**

Club Sport has had a busy start to the semester with all clubs having returned to training and around 300 fixtures have taken place in LUSL and BUCS leagues. We have also had individual students sign up to BUCS events with more to come as we approach BUCS Nationals.

The Club Sport Board are currently working on approving funding through the Club Sport Development Fund, 23 applications have been received. The Financial Support Fund has received 5 applications so far this semester. This fund supports students getting involved with sport at Queen Mary where financial barriers prevent them from doing so and can cover membership, kit, and travel costs.

Training sessions took place in September and October for committee members. These workshops offered an opportunity to develop, learning about committee roles, responsibilities, and procedures. Additional Welfare training also took place in conjunction with the student engagement team, including ‘Consent’, ‘Liberation and Inclusion’, ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’, and ‘Active Bystander’.

A new role in the team which oversees student and external coaching and club satisfaction and development, has allowed the department to dedicate times towards visiting training and meeting coaches. This has enabled the team to observe how club sport sessions are being delivered, and improve the recruitment process for external and internal coaches to maintain high standards through additional support and training for club sport committee members. Additionally, we have been working with student coaches to develop their skill set and set them up on the Leadership Academy. In exchange for volunteering coaching hours this programme provides students an opportunity to get funding towards their coaching qualifications and therefore the ability to get paid work in the future.

The team have also been meeting with student representatives to discuss barriers to exercise and improvement that can be made for inclusivity in the department. This has led to consultations with Qmotion on how to best support trans and non-binary students within our current facilities, specifically looking at adding signage and information on our website to make policies clear for all students. We will also be trialling some quiet hours in the gym as part of Disability Awareness Fortnight to make our facilities more comfortable for



members with autism, high levels of social anxiety and those who prefer working out in a quieter environment. Through these consultations we have also been able to identify areas where Club Sport can improve on diversity and inclusion. We are working on a number of campaigns to raise awareness and give more opportunities for underrepresented groups in sport.

### **This Girl Can Week**

This is the first campaign of the year run by our sports department and will take place the week of the 13<sup>th</sup> November. During this week our clubs are opening up their training sessions for any women that want to take part and try a sport for free. Get Active are also offering two women-only sessions in Badminton and Basketball. The week is finishing with a women's takeover of Qmotion, which involves the gym opening after hours for women only to use all the facilities. As part of this event Get Active are running a one-off specialist class of glow in the dark yoga for a fun, alternative fitness class for women participants. Aisha has also been involved in supporting and organising events for the campaign to promote and celebrate women's participation in sport. [www.qmsu.org/thisgirlcan](http://www.qmsu.org/thisgirlcan)

### **Volunteering**

The Volunteering Service has had a busy start to the year, supporting 9 active Volunteering Groups, delivering 2 Give Volunteering A Go activities and providing a huge variety of Brokerage opportunities. The Brokerage service has 184 active charities and at present there are 157 volunteering opportunities available for students, across a variety of sectors and locations. 500 students have attended safeguarding training so far this year, allowing them to volunteer with one of our Volunteering Groups.

On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October our Volunteering Fair took place with 41 Community Organisations attending, alongside our Volunteering Groups and Departmental stalls. Hundreds of students came along and engaged with the different stalls on offer and signed up for various volunteering opportunities. Additionally, it was great to see Community Organisations networking with each other, staff and students.

### **Employability**

We have had 164 students register for the Skills Award through our website since the start of the semester. There are 16 skill sessions in total scheduled for this semester, with these focusing on transferable skills including Leadership, Time Management and Communication as well as one-day courses in skills such as Emergency First Aid. We have also scheduled two reflection sessions so far where students are helped to recognise the skills they have developed in the Skills Award and their other activities, and to enable them to present their experience to employers. We have had 78 individual attendances across the eight skill sessions which have taken place so far.

### **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 lead by a mixture of our dedicated clubs and 5 new student staff members.

Since the beginning of the academic year, Get Active has had over 600 engagements across its range of activities. The programme has introduced 3 new sessions including Dance, Yoga and Meditation and has supported Welcome Week and the October Open day by running free pop-up activities for students and visitors to take part in on campus. The programme has also introduced new ticket bundle options to help reduce costs and ensure Get Active continues to be fun and affordable during the cost of living crisis.

### **Social Leagues**

Social Leagues is part of our recreational sport offer at Queen Mary Students Union. We offer friendly intermural competitive sport across 7-a-side Football, 11-a-side Football, Basketball, Cricket, and Netball.

Since the start of the academic year, the Social Leagues programme has engaged 405 students in its weekly leagues. The programme has hired 7 new student staff members as officials and also an intern to provide administrative support. 4 out of the 6 leagues have sold out and the programme is looking to improve on this for the upcoming semester.

**Serena–Amani Al Jabbar**  
**Students' Union President**  
**30th November 2023**