# STUDENTS' UNION REPORT 2020-21




**Queen Mary Students' Union**
2020-2021 Report

Queen Mary University of London
Students' Union

# Introduction

Queen Mary Students' Union is a diverse, student-led organisation that is at the heart of the Queen Mary student experience. It is our responsibility to ensure all Queen Mary students voices are heard, valued and acted upon, whilst offering activities and services that allow students to get the most out of their time at Queen Mary.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in numerous challenges for both students' education and welfare and in their personal lives throughout the 2020-21 academic year. As a Students' Union, it was vital we did everything we could to continue to deliver for our students. We were ambitious in what we could achieve and are proud of how we worked together to transform our activities and services so they could continue to be offered both in-person and online.

This is the fourth Impact Report of our 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan was extended due to the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and a need to focus all our efforts to the immediate situation affecting our students. The report celebrates how our Executive Officers, part-time representatives, career staff and student staff went above and beyond and collaboratively worked with others in partnership to achieve many successes that embrace both our ambitious strategic objectives and those outlined in the University 2030 Strategy. These successes were despite several periods of challenging government restrictions and national lockdowns, inevitable financial challenges caused by a £2million drop in income from our commercial services and a reduced number of staff following a financially-driven restructure.

The stories showcased across the following pages are just a snapshot of our work but highlight how new partnerships, brand-new initiatives and our outstanding student-led activities have continued to engage thousands of students and positively impact on their Queen Mary experience. This report also aims to demonstrate how we have listened to our students to ensure their feedback is embedded into our work and that of the University to ensure we continue to evolve and improve so together, we improve students' lives.

## Our Mission

**Together we improve students' lives**

## Our Vision

**We want to be at the heart of the student experience**

## Our Values

**Student-led**
**Democratic**
**Transparent**
**Supportive**
**Inclusive**
**Accessible**
**Welcoming**
**Fun**
**Committed**





**Shamima Akter**
**President & Chair of the Board of Trustees 2020-21**

# President's introduction

2020-21 was an unprecedented and challenging year that brought disruption to all our lives. Despite this we have achieved so much for students and are proud of how our students, staff, University partners and external stakeholders all came together with the number one priority of supporting students and our local community during a difficult time. The voluntary hours put in by our student representatives and leaders, supported by our ever-committed Students' Union staff team, had a clearly visible impact in many ways, helping to improve students' education outcomes, retention, personal wellbeing and overall Queen Mary experience.

As we emerge out of the Covid-19 pandemic it is important we reflect on the lessons learnt during the past two years, the opportunities that have emerged and continue to challenge ourselves as a Students' Union to develop relevant activities and services for Queen Mary students. As we embark on a new journey with the creation of our new Strategic Plan, we will seek to build on our recent successes and tackle the challenges that remain, working together to improve students' lives.




**Executive Officers**
2020-21



# HIGHLIGHTS

**We are really proud of everything we achieved in 2020-21, we look forward to building on these next year.**

**2nd in the Russell Group for the National Student Survey Q26**

**432**
Course Reps elected into posts

**3970**
Voters in our Spring Elections

**52**
Welcome Week events

**9845**
Clubs & Societies members

**26% increase in Students' Union website views**

**439**
Teaching Award nominations received

**874**
Annual Student Meeting attendees

**1551**
Sports Club members

# SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

As a Students' Union, we are conscious of the direct and indirect environmental impact of our activities, and the corporate, social and legal responsibilities we have to reduce our environmental footprint for the benefit of our environment now and in the future. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we have worked hard to improve the sustainability opportunities offered through the Students' Union to improve the environment and biodiversity of our campus and wider community, whilst providing students with a range of opportunities to volunteer, build new skills and make a difference. This works also contributes to the University Environmental Sustainability Action Plan and Environmental Sustainability Policy, whilst working towards a 30% carbon reduction target over the next 6 years compared to the University 2018/19 baseline.



We were once again delighted to have received **Excellent in the Green Impact scheme**, a United Nations award winning programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practice in organisations. This section highlights some of our key sustainability achievements in the 2020-21 academic year.



## Re-Use

Our Re-Use scheme continued to run despite the pandemic and the abrupt end to the semester the prior academic year due to Covid-19, limiting the number of donations made to the scheme. Despite this we still re-homed 516kg of items to over 150 students who attended the Fair.

Towards the end of the academic year, student volunteers supported Queen Mary Residential Life and Estates and Facilities to collect unwanted items from students departing from halls. The Students' Union also organised student volunteers to support the clearing of Queen's Building offices as part of the move to Department W – a shipping container full of items was collected. Three shopping trollies worth of items were also delivered to Bow Foodbank during these collections, these following 400 items being donated in November and December from collections in the Village Shop.

## Mile End Canal adoption

In partnership with the University, the Students' Union formalised the voluntary adoption of the stretch of the Mile End canal with the Canal and River Trust who own the waterway. The framework creates a more strategic approach for the Canal Clean-Up volunteering events organised by the Students' Union, and opens up future opportunities to launch more substantial voluntary enhancement and biodiversity projects with student and staff involvement.

## Greening our campus

Student volunteers supported with the planting of trees and bushes throughout the year through our Green Mary volunteering opportunities. The summer months saw campus come to life with gooseberries, strawberries, salad leaves and wildflowers. Some of the produce grown was then used as ingredients in on-campus venues such as The Curve.

The Students' Union also offered regular allotment planting sessions, a foraging walk for Earth Day and seed, pot and plant giveaways as part of our Study Well campaigns. These in-person activities were very popular, with many operating at full capacity.

## Hedgehog Friendly

Student volunteers from the Green Mary group worked with the University Estates & Facilities team to achieve Bronze Hedgehog Friendly campus accreditation. Student volunteers were involved in building hedgehog houses on campus, online fundraising and spreading awareness about the challenges faced by hedgehogs through student-led blogs.

## Community Orchard

We worked on a joint project with the University Estates and Facilities team to enhance the biodiversity on campus through the creation of a community orchard. Our team of 20 student volunteers helped to plant 60 apple and pear trees and 200 gooseberry and raspberry shrubs in the areas surrounding student accommodation. The project provides support for local wildlife, colourful blossoms and will provide free fruit for those working and living on campus.



# Theme 1: Ensuring student voices are heard, valued and acted upon

## Embedding our new democratic structures

2020-21 saw the first year of our new expanded democratic structure that has allowed the Students' Union to deliver more granular representation. The structure introduced two additional Executive Officers, improved faculty and school-level representation and ensured a more balanced Student Council.

Faculty Forums and Council Subcommittees were also introduced to further empower specific student communities through devolved decision making and policy creation relating to areas such as liberation, postgraduates, international students and sustainability. New School Representatives have improved student representation at a local school level, ensuring more student voices are heard and local issues are tackled, ultimately increasing student satisfaction.

The introduction of faculty-based Executive Officers and a new VP Communities has allowed improved engagement with university partners and stakeholders and greater input into specific policies such as the Covid Mitigation Policy and new framework for Student Staff Liaison Committees. The introduction of student-led scrutiny panels has also allowed students to hold their elected officers to account and improved transparency.

## National Student Survey Success

We were proud to have performed strongly in the National Student Survey (NSS) for question 26; "The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests". 62% of respondents agreed with the statement, up from 56% the prior year, and significantly above the national benchmark of 54.3%. The score, 2nd highest in the Russell Group, was a testament to our work during the Covid-19 pandemic to listen to student concerns and act on their feedback, and highlighted how the new democratic structures have helped to improve faculty and school level representation. This demonstrates the power of working together to improve student representation at every level within Queen Mary.

## Highlights

**2nd**
in the Russell Group for NSS Question 26

**166**
student nominations in the Spring Elections

**874**
students attended the Annual Student Meeting

**1367**
student responses to our Covid-19 impact survey

**7**
delegates attended NUS National Conference

**3970**
students voted in our first-ever online Elections

## Our first-ever online Election

The Covid-19 pandemic meant our first-ever online Elections. We took the opportunity to rebrand and overhaul our communications for the first time in several years, introduced a new Elections website whilst also transitioning candidate support, training and events such as Candidate Question Time and Results Night online. Despite the lockdown restrictions at the time, 166 students nominated themselves for a variety of part-time education, welfare and activities positions and the full-time Executive Officer positions. 3970 individual students cast a total of 43796 votes, an increase on the previous two years.




## Record attendance at our Annual Student Meeting

Our Annual Student Meeting was held online for the first time. We saw a record attendance, with 874 students present. Attendees could ask questions and raise concerns with the Executive Officers and present their own motions for debate. A recurring theme was the impact of Covid-19 on students' education and welfare, alongside motions relating to improving support for students in private accommodation and reducing fees for international students. A record number of students joined from our international campuses, highlighting how an online meeting was more accessible for all our students across the globe.

## Course Rep Hub & Rebrand

We launched our new online Course Rep Hub to improve the visibility of Course Reps, whilst improving support for Course Reps, students and staff by making it easier to access key information and resources about the Course Rep system. The launch of the Hub coincided with a brand refresh to provide a recognisable and relevant identity for students and staff.

The year also saw other work to improve education representation at Queen Mary. A new Education Manual was introduced, Course Rep roles and responsibilities were reviewed and updated, a new SSLC training programme was launched at the Festival of Education and an annual SSLC Report was introduced to aid monitoring the effectiveness of SSLCs. We also worked with the University of London in Paris Students' Union to offer Course Rep training to students and provided support on the Covid Mitigation Policy work.

## Project Doctorate

We recognised a need to do more to improve the engagement of the postgraduate community who were underrepresented across Students' Union activities. Our student representatives developed Project Doctorate. Through listening forums and consultations, we gathered ideas to improve engagement. We also mapped out current representation structures and identified barriers to engagement. Working with the Doctoral College we streamlined the representation structure ready for the 2021-22 academic year.

We also held our first Postgraduate Fortnight celebrations that brought postgraduates together through a programme of social and academic events, in-person and online, in conjunction with the Doctoral College and Library Services. A bid to the University for a Postgraduate Internship role was successful, allowing us to build on the work of Project Doctorate in the 2021-22 academic year.

## Aldwych Group

New networks were developed through the re-established Aldwych Group made up of Students' Union Presidents. Our Executive Officers actively participated, helping to ensure direct student feedback into different areas of work of the Russell Group. Meetings covered various topics including the response to Covid-19, fees and the new freedom of speech legislation on Students' Union's and students.

## Annual Tell Us Survey

Our annual student feedback survey focused on the impact of Covid-19 on students' education and welfare. A total of 1367 students submitted their feedback which we presented back to the University and also used to inform and adapt our approach to our activities and services.

## University Strategy 2030

- Pillars of Education: Excellence in Student Engagement
- Objective 1: Greater student satisfaction
- Objective 4: Reduce student attainment gap
- Objective 8: Improved career outcomes

# LIBERATION CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

The University provided £20,000 of funding to deliver our annual programme of liberation campaigns that aim to improve engagement and participation from student communities traditionally underrepresented, whilst developing, enhancing and championing the international diversity of Queen Mary in line with the **University 2030 strategy**.



Students are at the heart of these campaigns through student-led organising committees that are supported by the Students' Union. Here are just some of the highlights from this year's campaigns!



## Black History Month

Our Black History Month programme aimed to celebrate Black British culture and black heritage with the aim of educating students on black issues and the diversity of black culture. We also highlighted the importance of activism and the Black Lives Matter movement. The month saw talks, panel debates, competitions and events, including an afroperuvian dance class, alongside social media features, culture lists featuring books, films, TV shows, podcasts and other resources.

## Antisemitism Awareness Month

As part of our Antisemitism Awareness Month activities and to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day we welcomed Harry Olmer BEM. Harry delivered a testimony as a Holocaust survivor where he shared his story and answered questions from the 160 attendees at the event.

## Disability Awareness Week

Our first Disability Awareness Week focussed on autism, dyslexia and Asperger's. As part of the week students could submit questions to individuals who discussed their experiences.

## Diverse-ish & decolonisation

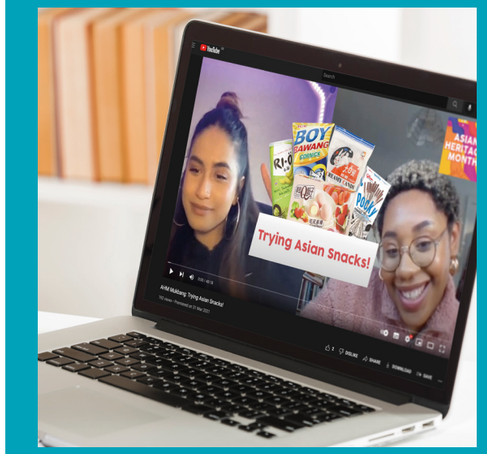
A key focus of the year was on decolonising the curriculum and anti-racism. Our new anti-racism forum "Diverseish" provided a safe open space for individuals to share their experiences and support and educate each other with the aim of supporting marginalised communities on campus and bringing people together to tackle racism. The project also raised awareness of the issues that feed into discrimination and prejudice through education and training for student leaders.

Our decolonisation project aimed to tackle the curriculum that can often be Eurocentric and fails to acknowledge a more diverse and factual version of historical events. We also provided feedback for the Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan with a report outlining our recommendations aimed at creating positive change on race equality and decolonisation at Queen Mary.

Other work included collaborating with the Careers & Enterprise service to reflect on and change the way the service supports black students and graduates. We held a series of focus groups to enable black students to share their experiences so informed improvements could be made.

## Islamophobia Awareness Month

Islamophobia Awareness Month focussed on mental health, Islam and sustainability, Prevent and Unity in the Muslim Ummah with events, the creation of awareness videos and the introduction of new islamophobia awareness training for student representatives and staff, delivered by the Muslim Student Council and Federation of Islamic Societies. This looked at identifying islamophobia, misconceptions, issues affecting members of the Muslim community on campus and support techniques.




## Asian Heritage Month

To celebrate the diversity of the Asian diaspora, we held Asian Heritage Month. We used the campaign to raise awareness of the issues faced by Asian people and to explore British Asian identity.

Student-led blogs covered topics such as South Asian landmarks in East London and Queer Tamils and their mental health, whilst we also inspired future leaders with our Asian Women in Leadership event.

We also had some fun online with our Mukbang-style videos featuring Asian foods.

## LGBT+ History Month

LGBT+ History Month held in February focussed on intersectionality. Student profiles, culture lists, playlists and online activities were held, whilst LGBT+ themed face masks and badges were distributed on campus. One event highlight was "Diverse-ish" that discussed the theme of intersections between sexuality, race and religion. Another was "Everything you need to know about LGBT+ Sex", a topic often overlooked in mainstream sex education.

# Theme 2: We will support students' education and welfare so that each student has the opportunity to fulfil their potential

## Be Kind campaign

Student wellbeing was a key concern throughout the pandemic where issues such as loneliness and isolation affected students. Our Be Kind initiative aimed to promote positive wellbeing and mental health through two strands of work. The first strand based on the NHS Five Ways to Wellbeing encouraged students to look after their own personal mental health and wellbeing through activities that helped them connect with others, get active, be mindful, learn and give back. The second strand "Be Kind to each other" was introduced to frame adherence with the on-campus Covid Code and government restrictions as an act of kindness to the community. By encouraging adherence in a positive way, it helped to encourage a behaviour change from students.

## Mitigating the impact of Covid-19

It was important that the impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic did not unfairly affect students' academic progression. We worked closely with the University to develop a Covid Mitigation Policy, co-led by our Executive Officers and University colleagues. We also established several workstreams to address specific themes such as exam boards, extenuating circumstances and assessment deadlines.

We also provided regular feedback on other education issues including the approach to blended learning, online exams and access to study spaces to further reduce the impact of Covid-19 on students.

## Sexual and Gender Based Violence

The Students' Union delivered new Bystander Intervention training for all our part-time elected student representatives and student group leaders. Students' Union staff also received training on how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence. A panel event was also held to discuss these issues. We also planned and delivered a student consultation on sexual and gender based violence through a series of listening events, this included engaging with other stakeholders such as Queen Mary Advice & Counselling and East London Rape Crisis. The Students' Union also submitted a response to the Office for Students consultation on harassment and sexual misconduct.

## Connecting Practices & Raising Concerns

Connecting Practice is a new programme we introduced to provide a more supportive environment for students on placements within hospitals in the School of Medicine & Dentistry. It consists of regular online huddles that allow students to share experiences and support one another in the presence of a medical lead. We also introduced new training on how to raise concerns and incidents of microagressions and discrimination in clinical setting. A new reporting platform was established so students could report any concerns or incidents that happen on placement.

## Highlights

**624**
students participated in our SMD mentoring scheme

**439**
Teaching Award nominations received

**6**
Diverse-ish Forums

**432**
Course Reps fully trained and in post

**190**
Course Rep Awards nominations




## Wellbeing Events Programme

To help encourage positive wellbeing we introduced a programme of wellbeing events utilising funding from Student Academic Services. Workshops included de-stress and re-centre, creative art therapy and meditation. Six weekly workout sessions open to all were also delivered online, and on-campus once restrictions allowed. Alongside this we also worked with Residential Life and Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies to deliver a series of wellbeing workshops for students.

## Financial Assistance Fund

Our research found that whilst students appreciated financial support offered by the University, there were difficulties with accessing support and the length of time the processes take. Students also seemed to struggle identifying the support available or whether they were eligible for support. To tackle this, we worked with the University on a review of the Financial Assistance Fund to improve the process for students and increasing promotion of the various funding options available. This saw a huge increase in applications for financial support from students, with the university bursaries team receiving additional redeployed staff from other teams to help process applications.

## Rent Reductions

The pandemic resulted in a student-led campaign to support students with rent issues in University halls and private accommodation. Despite this being a contentious topic at times, we aimed to work collaboratively with the University and students to resolve the issues and develop solutions. Through our mediated discussions rent reductions were secured and a series of maintenance issues tackled. We also worked with the London Renters Union to provide helpful resources to students in private accommodation, alongside an open letter to private landlords that students were encouraged to use. We also submitted evidence to the NUS to use in the All Party Parliamentary Group for students to ensure students concerns were being heard.

## Student immigration

The end of the Brexit transition period brought significant changes for EU, EEA and Swiss students, following recent changes from the Tier 4 visa to the new Student Immigration Route. We worked with University staff to support students who needed to use the new processes for student immigration. The Executive Officers also attended an All Parliamentary Group on Citizens Rights to present welfare issues affecting EU and international students to members of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

## University Strategy 2030

- Pillars of Education: Excellence in Education and Excellence in Student Engagement
- Objective 1: Greater student satisfaction
- Objective 4: Reduce student attainment gap
- Objective 7: Improved progression

# Theme 3: We will create and support social, cultural and recreational activities so that students will feel part of a community

## A great welcome for all

Despite the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were proud to deliver a programme of over 50 in-person, online and hybrid events as part of Welcome Week to ensure students received a great welcome to Queen Mary. Events included outdoor cinema nights, food and drink-led events, Escape Rooms, Quiz Nights, Picnics in the Park, Get Active, sport, crafternoon and art sessions and much more. Alongside this we created a bespoke programme in conjunction with Residential Life to ensure a great welcome for all those living in halls.

Our Welcome Market events acted as an alternative to our traditional Welcome Fair events, welcoming over 500 students to two outdoor markets featuring Students' Union and University services. Alongside this a new Online Welcome Fair event was attended by over 100 of our student groups and featured interactive video rooms, pre-recorded content and other features. There were over 6500 page visits to the Online Fair, with the event being repeated in January.

## Reward & Recognition

To reward and recognise the work of our Clubs and Societies we introduced a new accreditation and awards scheme based on previous student feedback. Groups were given the opportunity to submit evidence against set criteria on how they engaged with their members and ran their groups, based against a points criterion. We saw a 24% increase in Bronze, Silver and Gold trophy awards for groups, with 22 student groups winning a gold award, up 31% on 2019-20. For our individual and group awards we received 214 nominations, up 117 on the prior year. 6 of our student groups and 1 student were also shortlisted for the National Societies & Volunteering Awards, whilst 2 of our Student Media outlets won 2 awards at the Student Publication Association Awards, recognising their outstanding work to create a great student experience at Queen Mary.

## Highlights

**9845**
Society Members

**1551**
Sports Club members

**607**
Get Active participants

**150**
applications for our University Challenge team

**280**
social leagues participants

**52**
Welcome Week events




## Getting active

Our sporting programmes couldn't be delivered in the normal way, however our dedicated Sports Development team still delivered a programme of weekly pop-up activities on campus, alongside Wellbeing Walks. Activities included cornhole, table tennis and badminton and allowed students the chance to get outdoors and socialise with others. Over 600 students participated in these activities, with a further 40 students and staff joining our Couch to 5K programme that offered coaching and support. An easing of restrictions in Semester 3 allowed for the return of Social Leagues alongside online exams, over 150 students across 11 teams participated. On-campus activities were complemented by an accessible online programme open to all that included Yoga, PiYo, HIIT sessions and more.

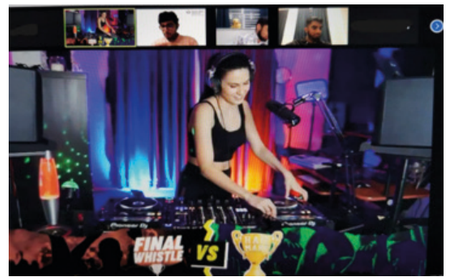
Our Sports Clubs still engaged over 1500 members, with in-person training and friendlies (in the absence of competitive BUCS competition) continuing outside of restrictions. Our Club Sport Marches On initiative saw 10 Sports Clubs provide a series of wellbeing challenges for students to undertake, promoting physical activity and positive wellbeing during the Covid-19 lockdown.

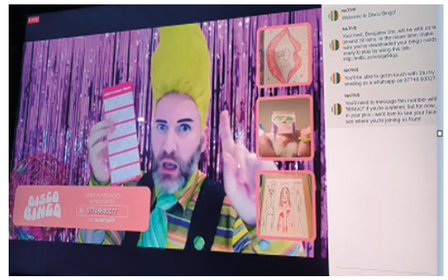
Read more in our Sport Impact Report

## Working together to deliver an outstanding events line-up

The pandemic brought us together with teams across the University to deliver a vibrant events programme for students that aimed to provide an outstanding student experience amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst tackling issues affecting students such as loneliness, isolation and Covid-19 fatigue. We formed the Covid-19 Events and Wellbeing Group which was essential in supporting the successful delivery of the events programme, particularly during lockdown and vacation periods with more students having to remain on campus. The group brought together people from the Students' Union, Residential Life, Student Life, Library, IT and Arts & Culture.

Semester 1 alone saw over 130 events with over 4000 students engaging in activities including African Drumming, exercise classes, life drawing, gaming nights, quizzes, Drag Bingo and graffiti workshops. We also ran seasonal events for events such as Oktoberfest and Halloween featuring pumpkin carving and a haunted maze. Online events included daily fitness classes, wellbeing workshops, speed meeting, escape rooms, arts & crafts sessions and even online club nights!




## Nothing's going to stop our student groups

We were amazed by how flexible our student-led Clubs & Societies were to adapt to the challenges of Covid-19, delivering for 9845 student members. They showed resilience and a commitment to continue fostering a sense of community amongst students, helping to shape a positive student experience and improve student wellbeing, at a time when it was more important than ever to do so. Our staff provided direct support throughout the year, adapting events, ensuring health & safety compliance and providing training and guidance to give student leaders the best support possible. A flavour of the activities run include language workshops, quiz nights, guest speaker events, craft sessions, photography walks, treasure hunts around London, cheese & wine nights, sport activities in the park and many more.

## Training Excellence

Our student leader training was significantly adapted to be delivered online. It was a great opportunity to review our training and development programme for student leaders and introduce new ways of training. New guidebooks, self-guided learning material, bite-sized video content and live online workshops were created to ensure student leaders had the best support possible to deliver excellent activities for students through Clubs and Societies.

## Studying well despite the pandemic

Our Study Well programme continued in 2020-21 despite the Covid-19 pandemic. This year the programme was extended over the summer period for the benefit of postgraduate and medicine & dentistry students, with specific events taking place for these students such as Tea & Walk, a plant giveaway and sporting activities. Free fruit and hot drinks were also distributed from Students' Union outlets for those studying.

## University Strategy 2030

- Pillars of Education: Excellence in Student Engagement and Excellence in the Learning Environment
- Objective 1: Greater student satisfaction
- Objective 7: Improved progression
- Objective 8: Improved career outcomes

# Theme 4: We will empower students to shape their own future

## Employable Me

A new series of networking sessions and workshops was introduced that aimed to help students better understand how their unique skills and experiences can impact their employability, skills and future in the workplace.

We also wanted to support students by improving their understanding of the transition from university to the workplace. Employable Me was developed with support from the Careers Service and Queen Mary Alumni, with over 300 students participating and 22 alumni given a platform to share their experiences and knowledge. Sessions focussed on issues in the workplace including female empowerment, race and sexuality, gender and religion and imposter syndrome. A session on a degree not defining your career was also run.

## QMentoring

We worked with the Careers & Enterprise service to improve the promotion and awareness of the QMentoring Scheme that aims to help improve students interview techniques, explore work experience opportunities and network with potential employers.

Our focus on the programme helped to increase uptake by 60% with the programme able to grow and offer places to 160 students.

## Supporting our talented athletes

Our Talented Athlete Programme continued with the Students' Union providing facility access and ongoing support to our talented athletes, including during lockdown periods when government guidelines meant indoor facilities were restricted to use only by high performance athletes.

A highlight of the year was one of our talented athletes Connie Hayes finishing in the Top 10 at the BUCS 25-mile TT cycling race.

## Highlights

**300+**
students engaged in Employable Me

**270**
participants in virtual Community Foundation sessions

**90**
Student Staff

**15**
student-led volunteering groups

**22**
alumni participated in Employable Me

**24**
student groups raised money through our Adopt a Charity scheme




## Community Foundation

Our sport leadership and workforce development programme was rebranded as the Community Foundation.

The Foundation adapted to engage over 270 participants in virtual sport sessions whilst also providing free activity packs for local young people at 4 schools in Tower Hamlets which included sport equipment, healthy snacks and ingredients in place of our normal Easter Sports Camps.

This work was extended to the summer holiday period with a £500 grant from the Community Connections Fund. We also conducted a sport consultation with 12 local primary and secondary schools to improve support.

To support our student volunteers, we developed a new online induction process, placed a greater emphasis on personal development opportunities and introduced a new training menu.

## Supporting the NHS

We also took steps to protect student wellbeing throughout their volunteering, ensuring students could continue to engage with their education whilst working and volunteering in the NHS.

We also supported the initial vaccine rollout through our Volunteering Service, offering students outside of the School of Medicine & Dentistry an opportunity to volunteer. 60 students volunteered their time with the East London NHS Foundation Trust and St John Ambulance to help steward at vaccination sites.





## Making a difference in our community

Making a difference in our local communities is a key pillar of our Be Kind to Your Mind campaign. We worked to promote covid-secure and online opportunities for students through our partner charities in the community.

Several donations were also made to the Bow Foodbank to help these most in need in our community during such challenging times. The work of our volunteers was recognised through an online campaign during Student Volunteering Week that highlighted the impact of our students in the community.

## University Strategy 2030

- Pillars of Education: Excellence in Student Employability
- Objective 1: Greater student satisfaction
- Objective 4: Reduce student attainment gap
- Objective 5: Increase alumni engagement
- Objective 6: Recruitment that enables us to achieve the 2030 Strategic Objectives
- Objective 8: Improved career outcomes

# Theme 5: Behind the scenes during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic put a significant strain on the Students' Union's financial position and meant some difficult decisions were taken to reduce the number of people within our staff team.

Despite the challenging environment both in and out of the workplace, our team continued to go above and beyond to innovate, adapt and be creative in our approach so we could continue working together to improve students' lives.

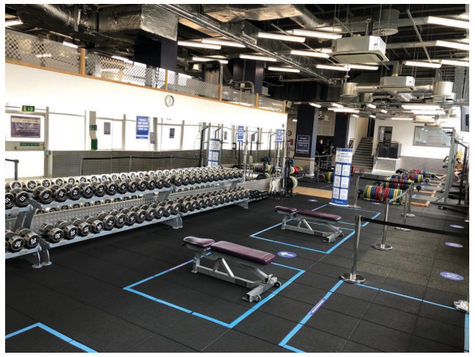
This section highlights some of the behind the scenes projects that enabled the Students' Union to continue delivering for students.

## Adapting and re-opening our services

We put in place several measures to ensure our spaces were safe for all whilst meeting the covid-secure requirements outlined in government restrictions. We produced detailed risk assessments for each of our spaces that were updated regularly, produced a huge range of Covid signage and messaging in-house, created safety videos for students, rolled out track & trace, introduced online ordering and changed the layout of our spaces to allow for social distancing. We also ran a Be Kind campaign to encourage people to practice safe behaviours to look after others in our community.

We established numerous workstreams to develop alternative ways of delivering our services, for example adapting our Welcome Fair into a new outdoor Market event, creating a programme of new online events, transitioning training for student leaders to new online platforms and offering online volunteering opportunities for students through our partner charities. Mitigations were also put in place to keep spaces open in a covid-secure way, for example the Multi-Faith Centre continued to facilitate Friday Prayer in a way that was safe for all attendees. These are just some examples from many that ensured we continued delivering for students.





## Sharing our expertise

Our experiences developing online and hybrid events enabled us to support other University departments to develop their events during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, we were delighted to work with the University Arts & Culture team to deliver QM Conversations Week providing logistical support with marketing, the online event platform itself, streaming and moderation. Conversations Week saw 17 events take place focussed on interdisciplinary conversation between artists and academics, engaging hundreds of students and staff.




### Digital Development

Our new Students' Union website launched offering an enhanced user experience, simplified navigation, new functionality and improved accessibility, improving the online experience for students. New sections included a new Advice & Support area, improved profile pages for part-time representatives, new Committees Hub for student groups and an enhanced events page. The year also saw the introduction of a new online events platform, mobile ordering in our on-campus venues and the transition of training for student staff and student leaders to new online platforms.

# STRATEGY 2030

The Students' Union is committed to working collaboratively with the University to achieve the ambitious goals outlined in the University 2030 strategy. As demonstrated through this Impact Report the work of the Students' Union plays a critical role in delivering the strategy from co-creating the pedagogical approach and informing education policy to supporting student wellbeing and helping students to fulfil their potential and get the most out of their Queen Mary student experience through extra-curricular activities.

2020-21 saw the Students' Union build exciting new collaborations and innovative partnerships across schools, faculties, professional services teams and key stakeholders in our local community, where we have worked together to help achieve the objectives of the 2030 Strategy. This report highlights the critical role the Students' Union has played in delivering on objectives outlined in the four pillars of education and student experience excellence that underpin the University 2030 Strategy.

## Excellence in Student Engagement

- Supporting students in their learning and making sure they have a clear voice in the development of the University.
- We will continually seek feedback from and work with our students to ensure that the curriculum, pedagogic approaches, assessment and feedback support the learner journey.
- A range of extra-curricular opportunities is provided to engage students in skills development that will support their ability to achieve their own goals, learn and understand different cultures, and understand and contribute to addressing societal challenges.

## Excellent in Student Employability

- We will ensure our students are supported in obtaining the careers to which they aspire.
- Opportunities for students to engage with our local communities, through volunteering and working in partnership with local organisations.
- Support for all our students to recognise, record and see the relevance of their wide-ranging higher-level skills development so that they can effectively develop and market themselves to future employers.
- Opportunities for our alumni who live all over the world and are leaders in a vast array of fields to engage with our students to broaden their minds and employability opportunities.

## Excellence in the Learning Environment

- Work closely with our Students' Union to ensure that our campuses are vibrant and promote students' health and wellbeing, engagement and a sense of community.
- Ensure that everyone at Queen Mary lives and breathes our core values and behaviours that underpin the Queen Mary ethos in all that we do.

Alongside the contributions outlined in this report we have also worked directly with the University to contribute to the following University initiatives;

## Listening to the student voice

The Students' Union worked with the University Communications and Marketing team to support the promotional campaigns for the survey season covering the National Student Survey, UK Engagement Survey, Postgraduate Taught Engagement Survey and Postgraduate Research Survey. Our School Representatives also selected nominated charities for NSS donations to go to, these being the Whitechapel Mission, Young Minds and Cancer Research.

The Students' Union was delighted to increase the score it received for Question 26 from 56% to 62%, also above the national benchmark of 54.3% and scoring 2nd highest in the Russell Group.

## Helping to open the doors of opportunity

We provided support delivering the online offer-holder and main Open Day events. We created an online student experience area for prospective students and their influencers to find out more about the Students' Union and extra-curricular activities through live Q&As, chat, image galleries and video content. We also provided content for the regular communications to applicants, whilst our Clubs and Societies supported Open Day activities with performances and demonstrations.

Our community outreach in the local community through our Volunteering Service and Community Foundation is also helping to open the doors of opportunity and showing young people in Tower Hamlets the benefits of higher education and Queen Mary.

## Humans of Queen Mary

We worked with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences to co-create the Humans of Queen Mary project. The project shares human stories of staff and students at Queen Mary with the aim of reminding the Queen Mary community of our shared humanity in a world where people can be dehumanised by the online way of working that was required during the pandemic. The project also contributed to the Queen Mary Values in Action framework and ongoing work on Professional Values & Success in the University.

## Giving students a voice at a national level

The Students' Union responded to several national consultations throughout the year to ensure Queen Mary students' voices were heard at a national level. This included responding to new proposals from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) consultation on group complaints from students and submitting a response to the Office for Students as part of their consultation on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

We also consulted with students and stakeholders to gather their feedback to support the production of the new student submission component of the Access and Participation Plan for Queen Mary.

## New Student Forums

We worked with the University IT Services team and Library Services team to pilot new student forums and liaison groups to ensure student feedback is being directly input into the service delivery plans for IT Services for infrastructure and services and in the Library through their ongoing work and as part of developing the new Library Services Strategy.

## Student Voice at the heart of Queen Mary

The Students' Union has actively participated in a wide range of new initiatives, task and finish groups and working groups across the University to ensure student voice is at the heart of decision making and is incorporated into all projects that contribute to the 2030 Strategy. Students are normally represented on these projects by the elected full-time Executive Officers and attendance requires a significant amount of pre-work to prepare for meetings and to ensure student feedback is highlighted.

**Here is just a flavour of some of the University projects we have been involved in this year:**

- Online Exams Project Board
- Module Evaluation Analysis workstream
- Assessment and Feedback workstream
- Inclusive Curriculum Working Group
- Advisor Training Working Group
- Paris Strategy Group
- Residential Strategy Group
- University of Sanctuary Group – improving the support given to refugee and asylum seekers
- Estranged, care-experience and independent students support
- Apps4Learning project – recording videos and incorporating into the annual Study Well campaign
- Supporting the process of awarding undergraduate scholarships
- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) – a project to connect and streamline University mental health services with NHS services.
- Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan
- Development of a Suicide Prevention Policy and providing feedback on the Drugs and Alcohol Use policy with suggested changes

# Contact details

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