

Students' Union Strategy

Queen Mary Students' Union
2023-24

Students' Union Strategy

Please note that this version of the strategy is a temporary version aimed at staff. While this version contains the final wording of the strategy, the layout and explanatory text will be updated for the final version. The final (student-facing) version will be released as soon as possible.

Mission

As a Students' Union, it is crucial we have a clear, unifying mission that explains why we exist and what our purpose is. The mission will ensure we are all working together in the same direction and is:

We Listen.

We Act.

We Improve Students' Lives.

We Listen: We are proud to be a student-led and democratic organisation. Understanding all our members, listening to their priorities and responding to their ideas for change and feedback is essential to ensuring we are effectively advocating, supporting and championing all our students.

We Act: As a Students' Union, we will always respond to our students and take swift action on the things that matter to our student community. We will call out actions and behaviours that do not align with our values and facilitate campaigning to ensure we are active in creating educational and societal change.

We Improve Students' Lives: Everything we do as a Students' Union should have a positive impact on our students' lives, both now and beyond into their individual futures. Whether it's supporting our student groups to run aspirational activities, providing unforgettable experiences through our events programme, making change happen with our part-time officers, or offering jobs and affordable services through our commercial outlets-- we'll always aim to do the best for our students and improve their lives.

Vision

Our vision states our over-arching ambition of where we wish to be and what we will work towards as a Students' Union, which is:

Our Vision is 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 throughout their time at university and into their future lives.

Values

Our values describe who we are and how we'll go about achieving our vision through our work and what we offer. They direct and influence the way we operate as an organisation, the attitude and behaviours we champion and our culture.



Student-led

We exist for students. We empower students to have their say, lead and create change together. Students are at the heart of our decision-making and by always listening to them we're able to pro-actively respond to the changing priorities and needs of our students.

Honest

We are always open, transparent and respectful, consistently being fair and honest with students and our partners. We strive to freely share information, whilst always listening to feedback, to continually improve what we do.

Supportive

We provide support, guidance and a helping hand to our students during their time at university, ensuring we foster an environment that is caring and reassuring to all. When we're not able to directly support, we endeavour to work in partnership with other University and external services to make sure we always get students to the right place to be supported.

Inclusive

We embrace our vibrant and diverse community at Queen Mary, celebrating individuality and freedom of expression, whilst fostering a sense of understanding and respect. We listen to the voices of all students, address inequalities and remove barriers to participation to ensure everyone can grow and thrive whilst at university. When our students have differing opinions, we always seek to be fair and balanced in our approach.

Ethical

We are ethical and socially responsible, demonstrating our integrity across all that we do. We take responsibility to reduce our impact on the planet, learning from others on integrating ethical and environmental good practice across our services, whilst making sure students have the support to do the same in their own lives.



Strategic Pillars

Our strategic pillars bring the work of the Students' Union together and span across all that we do. They are evidence-based and have been created from the insights we have collected from our students, student representatives and staff. The Strategic Pillars are ambitious and highlight our priority areas, outlining what we will focus on and what our outcomes will be across all of our campuses over the coming years.

Pillar 1: Building an authentic student voice

Where we are now

We currently rely heavily on our student representatives to ensure students' voices are heard, valued and acted upon. As the main link between students and the Students' Union, our representatives can feel overwhelmed in their positions of responsibility, alongside their education and personal commitments. Too often the focus is on the headline issues, substituting individual nuances for overarching themes. As a result, we currently have an incomplete and fragmented snapshot of our students' university experience, which can lead to students not feeling represented or listened to.

Our future

Transforming into a more curious, inquisitive and determined organisation with an enthusiasm for discovery will help us succeed in the pursuit of honest and reflective student insights. We'll explore different channels and methods to collect useful, authentic data from our students, becoming better listeners and more able to respond to what students are telling us. Collating and sharing student feedback will help the organisation thrive as we build richer, genuine and honest connections with our students, who will feel valued as a result.

How will we do this?

We'll need to shift our perception of student voice, improve our use of data and insight and get smarter with technology. We will need to evolve and adapt to account for changes in how society communicates and shares information, whilst broadening our aspirations for student feedback and data collection. By challenging the status quo on how we listen and what we hear, we'll make it easier for more of our students to have their say and collect stronger feedback to ensure evidence and insights underpin everything that we do.

Pillar 2: Supporting meaningful connections

Where we are now

Higher education and the way students engage with their education and wider aspects of the student experience continues to evolve. As learning and university life adapts to a hybrid environment, students find themselves questioning how to establish meaningful connections and friendships when so much of their time is spent online. Our current social, cultural and recreational activities offer an environment for natural friendships to develop and grow, however many students are still struggling to make these connections and feel isolated as a result.

Our future

Acknowledging that students now face different and unique challenges will see us taking a fresh perspective and approach to the opportunities we provide. We'll adjust our existing beliefs and expectations on what social connections look like, and not assume students have the inherent skills or confidence to seek out



connections naturally. Handled with compassion, we'll create opportunities that encourage students to meet new people and develop lasting friendships, whilst supporting the development of strong and inclusive student communities.

How will we do this?

We'll need to take a more proactive approach to helping students build their communities, removing the pressure and expectation on students to establish these alone. University is about exploration and trying new things, so a wide-reaching, eclectic range of activities is essential to ensuring every student finds their perfect community. Guiding and supporting students as they navigate their way through these opportunities will be placed in equal importance to the activities themselves, with the Students' Union playing an active role of responsibility in supporting how students grow and nurture connections.

Pillar 3: Resonating with every student

Where we are now

With a diverse student population, we have a vast and varied collection of unique communities. Collectively, this provides students with a fantastic opportunity to explore, learn and experience many different cultures; individually however, these communities often feel underrepresented and unsupported. When we channel our support into a community we see students thrive and feel valued as part of the Students' Union. However, we can rely too much on our busy student leaders to provide this support, resulting in intermittent engagement and a lack of overall impact. Bespoke interventions and opportunities provide some personalised support to our different student communities, but focus is required to explore how we can consistently take this further.

Our future

Connecting with our individual student communities is an essential part of creating equity across the Students' Union. Prioritisation and resources should be carefully balanced, establishing what we need to confidently provide an extensive range of activities and communications that resonate with students, and have a positive impact on their experiences at an individual level. We'll build strong, informed relationships with each community of students by taking ownership of our responsibility, and alleviating our reliance and pressure on the students themselves. By doing so, we will reduce the engagement gaps between our student communities and increase the overall number of students who engage with the Students' Union.

How will we do this?

We'll ensure each student feels seen, heard and informed, blending targeted, relevant information to them alongside wider all-student activities and communications. Across the organisation we will evolve our thinking to accommodate the needs of our different student communities, building a stronger connection to them through a diverse range of opportunities. We will also demonstrate our recognition of the value and importance each of our student communities have in making up our brilliantly eclectic community.

Pillar 4: Prioritising students' mental health

Where we are now

Whilst university should be an exciting time for learning and discovery, the current student experience is one that can be filled with stress, anxiety and feeling overwhelmed. Our representatives suggest students feel the education system itself is often built on foundations likely to foster poor mental health. Irrespective of whether you're reading data from national studies, or analysing trending topics on social media, our representative's

anecdotal evidence is compounded and it's starkly evident that a growing number of students are desperately trying to cope with their declining mental wellbeing.

Our future

By changing how we work and what we offer, we can confidently offer a proficient, accessible and supportive experience to our student leaders and students alike. We'll identify how our student staff and representatives can individually improve their mental wellbeing within their specific roles, and equip them with the tools to confidently deliver this without compromising their own health in the process. Building partnerships with relevant organisations will see us address the underlying structural issues students face, alongside sustained campaigning more generally for educational and societal reform.

How will we do this?

Holding a mirror up to ourselves, we'll reflect on how our own structural barriers and how we do things can impact students' mental health. Working collaboratively with students and other partners will help us become a stronger support system, using our unique areas of expertise and interest to create a collectively impactful community thriving on communal support. Sharing experiences openly and listening to students' current challenges will form the catalyst for relevant, varied support that we will continually adapt to the needs of students to ensure we have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

KPIs

1. Increase the % of students that give feedback at least once per academic year
2. Increase the % of students that say they feel the Students' Union listens to them
3. Increase the % of students that say the Students' Union has provided them with opportunities to connect with other students
4. Increase the % of students that say they feel part of a student community supported by the Students' Union
5. Increase the % of students that say the Students' Union is relevant to them
6. Reduce the engagement gaps between demographic groups, and in doing so, increasing the overall % of students that engage with the Students' Union
7. Reduce the % of students that say feeling stressed or overwhelmed is one of the biggest issues they are facing
8. Increase the % of students that say the Students' Union has a positive impact on their wellbeing

