

## **Should the Union Lobby the University to support and invest in a Queen Mary Nightline service and to more broadly improve the Mental Health service offered to students?**

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### **What do you want?**

QMSU should lobby the University to fund and support students and reps forming a Queen Mary specific Nightline service. Furthermore, when student reps and sabbatical officers request for better mental health support for students, QMSU should prioritise these projects and help and support representatives in lobbying the University to achieve the goals of students and sabbatical officers.

### **Why do you want it?**

During the academic year 2021 – 2022, QMSU conducted a survey, where students were asked many questions about their Queen Mary experience. The following key themes and issues were identified from student responses: 1. 44.4% of the students that responded reported “Feeling stressed and overwhelmed”. 2. This was the most frequently selected issue across all students.

As a part of this survey, students were also asked for suggestions about an improvement/change/new idea that would make their experience better. These were the comments made by students:

1. They suggested better access to therapy
2. Better access to mental health support (ie. counselling)
3. Better help for mental illness
4. Diversity amongst counsellors
5. Better access to counselling (ie. having appointments when needed)
6. Easier accessibility to mental health services Having regular mental health checks (both personally) through academic advisers or course representatives
7. Students keen to see more practical and tangible steps being taken with regards to student mental health and discrimination
8. Mental health support for not just students struggling with suicidal thoughts
9. Structured support for students struggling with mental health issues
10. Encouragement to talk to someone – often when students are overtly stressed, they lock themselves away even if help is available. So, encouragement and advertisement is needed about support available
11. Need for 1 to 1 sessions to deal with stress and overwhelming feelings

12. Seminars on mental well-being for students from working class backgrounds about the different types of students from wealthier backgrounds that they would meet and how to cope with feeling inferior or lacking

13. Students have reported that when they have needed mental health support, they have been put on a waitlist, which does not feel very encouraging

There is a major need for improvement in mental health support and a serious structural change in the mental health support offered to struggling students.

A Nightline service is a student run peer-to-peer listening service, where students can anonymously call, drop-in or text or instant message to their peers to talk about their problems.

Queen Mary Nightline service is physically based on/near Mile End campus, accessible to all students from all our London campuses. The service would also offer telephone and instant messaging services accessible to all students whether based or not based in London.

It is a safe space where student volunteer listeners can attend phone calls/respond to instant messages from distressed students and also speak to students in person.

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This project is a peer-to-peer listening service, accessible to all students (including but not limited to BL students, CCLS students, Mile End students, PGTs, PGRs, UGTs etc.). Ideally there will be partnership support initiatives with faculties delivering Psychology, Psychiatry and health care. Co-creation with academics, undergraduate and post graduate students.

Why is the current set up insufficient?

Advice and Counselling do a great job, but they are not immediate. Involves filling a form out and waiting for a few days for response and many times mental health issues come with urgency that cannot be dealt with by advice and counselling. These are also oversubscribed and students do not always get the attention/number of counselling sessions they need from this service

Report and support helps with reporting bullying, harassment or even suicide issues, however, it is not in real time. Moreover, the website signposts users to 999 or campus security for urgent problems

Campus security are for urgent issues. So, if a student is in the process of committing suicide or has already done something dangerous, then campus security are a useful resource, however, they cannot provide long term solution/preventive solutions. They can give reactive solutions, not proactive solutions

Moreover, given the rapid increase in the student recruitment, there is a need for more investment in this area.

### **What impact will this have?**

1. Peer-to-peer service, where students of QM help other students at QM
2. Students will be able to walk in at night, if they feel depressed, to talk to volunteers
3. It is hoped that the service will be at Queen's Building in the centre of the campus or Scape building. This will help provide for easier access and will also be easier to promote the fact that we have this service available to students
4. Where there is a gap in how volunteers can help, they can signpost to other services like, Samaritans, report and support, Advice and counselling, NHS etc., creating more awareness about other mental health services available to students
5. Volunteers will have the opportunity to improve their CVs and skills
6. Other universities like Warwick, Exeter, Durham, Gloucestershire etc. have a successful drop in service Nightline. With QM adopting this model, we will be able to retain a competitive edge in the mental health support we offer to students
7. Accordingly, whilst a Nightline (listening) service is no replacement for improvements in accessibility of counselling and therapy sessions available to students, we believe this would be a positive first step in facilitating better and accessible mental health support to students.
8. Furthermore, since it will be run by student volunteers, it would be economical as well, making this an ideal solution.
9. Finally, this is also an ideal opportunity for Queen Mary and QMSU to co-create on improving student experience at Queen Mary.
10. Finally, QMSU should not stop lobbying the University to invest in tackling Mental health issues of students and should continue lobbying the University to invest in different Mental health strategies and projects.