

# Sport impact report 2020-21





# Welcome

Queen Mary University of London is a premier academic campus-based university in London, with a diverse range of students, containing a current population of approximately 27,000 students.

Here at Queen Mary our aim within the sports department is to offer something for everyone, regardless of their age, background or level of ability. We want everyone to feel able to engage within sport and physical activity.

The purpose of sport and physical activity here at Queen Mary is;

- To improve the health and wellbeing of our students
- To improve the student experience at the university
- To improve individual's development, and the development of communities
- To improve the reputation and standing of the university through the performance within sport

## Improving health and wellbeing

Sport and physical activity has long been used as a tool to improve mental, physical and social wellbeing. Physical activity is proven to have a positive effect on wellbeing, with higher levels of activity associated with improved quality of life and wellbeing, as well as reduced anxiety, depression and body satisfaction. Studies also show that exercise has a positive influence on depression, whereas physical self-worth and physical self-perception, including body image, has been linked to improved self-esteem. The evidence relating to health benefits of physical activity predominantly focuses on intra-personal factors such as physiological, cognitive and affective benefits, however, that does not exclude the social and inter-personal benefits of sport and physical activity which can also produce positive health effects in individuals and communities.

BUCS (British University and College Sport) have completed research and written a paper on student minds, and how to support student mental health through sport and physical activity. Taking part in sport and physical activity is a major part of many students' time at university, and gives institutions an opportunity to support students' physical and mental wellbeing.

**6**  
guest speakers at  
the 'Inspirational  
Women in Sport' talk



**6**  
Talented  
Athletes

**60+**  
Clubs took part in  
online welcome fairs



**7**  
online events for 'This Girl Can  
Week' with 256 participants

**310+**  
Community participants with  
virtual sport sessions

**£2,400**  
in-kind sport  
training provided  
to female students

**280**  
students/  
staff/alumni  
involved in the  
social leagues





This also underlines how empowering sports staff and student leaders to provide peer support networks within student-led sports clubs, can provide students with a shared identity, increased self-confidence and improved mental health and wellbeing. This is something that the Students' Union will be looking to develop and understand over the coming years by;

- Increasing the knowledge our staff and student leaders have regarding student mental health and wellbeing
- Developing an understanding on how to design sport programmes for students experiencing mental health difficulties and how participation can enhance peer to peer support.
- Understanding best practice from universities working to improve mental health through sport.

## What has the pandemic meant for sport and wellbeing for students?

The global outbreak of Covid-19 resulted in the closure of gyms, stadiums, pools, dance and fitness studios, physiotherapy centres, parks and playgrounds. Many individuals were therefore not able to actively participate in their regular individual or group sporting or physical activities outside of their homes. Under such conditions, many tended to be less physically active, have longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns as well as worse diets, resulting in weight gain and loss of physical fitness.

The WHO recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week. The benefits of such periodic exercise are proven very helpful, especially in times of anxiety, crisis and fear. There are concerns therefore that, in the context of the pandemic, lack of access to regular sporting or exercise routines resulted in and continues to present challenges to physical health, including subsequent commencement of, or exacerbating, existing diseases that have their roots in a sedentary lifestyle.

Lack of access to exercise and physical activity can also have mental health impacts, which can compound stress and anxiety that many will experience in the face of isolation from normal social life. Self-isolation, possible loss of family or friends from the virus and the impact of the virus on economic wellbeing and access to nutrition has exacerbated these effects, so it is essential that over the past year and moving forwards we continue to do all that we can to ensure that students have the opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity as much as possible. Young people have been particularly affected by social and physical distancing, considering sport is commonly used as a tool to foster cooperation and sportsmanship, promote respectful competition, and learn to manage conflict. Without sport during the pandemic, many young people lost the support system that such participation provided.



Get Active session



Qmotion Instructor



Frat and Bat held in Drapers Lounge



Additionally, community sport settings are gaining momentum as an efficacious site for the delivery of mental health and wellbeing interventions, which clearly underlines how broad and expansive the potential benefits of sport are. Therefore we ensured that we began using virtual training where possible as a method for leagues, coaches and young people to remain engaged in sport activities while remaining in their homes or rooms on campus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had and will continue to have very considerable effects on the sporting world as well as on the physical and mental wellbeing of people around the world. Sport education is a powerful means to foster physical fitness, mental wellbeing, as well as social attitudes and behaviour while populations were locked down.

The university student population already exhibits high levels of psychological distress in non-pandemic settings, which has worsened as a result of the pandemic. For most students, participation in organised sport has been associated with academic success and psychological benefits, including heightened happiness, stress relief and the reduction of depression and anxiety risk. Therefore with the removal of university sport due to COVID-19 restrictions, many students felt deprived of this much-needed outlet, which is a major component of their personal and educational identities. In addition to the direct impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic places on students, their mental, social and physical health may also be affected indirectly through the reduction of many positive influencers that accompany access to team sport.

## QMSU Sport during the pandemic

The pandemic has had a great impact on sport and its delivery, which has in turn impacted on everyone's wellbeing and mental and physical health.

The 2020-21 academic year saw an expected decrease in the number of people who were able to safely participate in our programmes and sessions, with some of our programmes simply not able to run, whilst others were able to go ahead but with significantly reduced legal capacities. With this in mind, we reviewed our staff structure and made several changes. The changes that were made were financially driven, but we also took the opportunity to realign key responsibilities for some staff, to ensure that we could continue to sustain and embed our sports programmes within the Students' Union offering, rather than focusing on their growth and development during the pandemic with fewer student numbers on campus.

As we move forwards, we are looking to offer more student internship roles, to support students in their studies whilst developing their employability skills through an enhanced student workforce offering. We will ensure what we are

offering is to the highest standard possible, and that all our programmes are sustainable and offer what our students want, whilst focusing our resources to where they are needed and have the greatest impact.

Physical and mental wellbeing is always high on the agenda, this has been and will continue to be our main focus moving forward, ensuring that we are offering opportunities for students to participate within sport and physical activity. We will need to be agile with the everchanging landscape locally, nationally and within the higher education sector, and we need to ensure our offering is flexible, and can adapt when necessary.

The table below illustrates the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on sport at Queen Mary during the 2020-21 academic year. As expected, participation numbers have significantly reduced compared to previous years, but it is important to highlight that as soon as government restrictions were lifted, we always ensured we found ways to engage lots of our students through different activities within each programme. Online activities, such as daily fitness classes, also helped to keep students engaged throughout the lockdown periods.

**Fig. 1 Table below denotes the % change of engagement in each of our sports programmes over the last academic year**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	% Change
<b>Club Sport memberships</b>	2809	2722	1551	-43%
<b>Qmotion memberships</b>	3513	3222	1514	-53%
<b>Get Active participants visits</b>	8882	9112	607	-93%
<b>Social League participants</b>	680	639	280	-56%
<b>Community Foundation Volunteers</b>	123	100	20	-80%



# Qmotion Sport and Fitness Centre

**Qmotion Sport and Fitness Centre at Queen Mary is set in the heart of the Mile End campus. We are proud to be an independent gym, providing great customer service and excellent facilities to Queen Mary students and staff.**

We place a huge emphasis on maximising participation and customer satisfaction for our members, and understand the importance of providing a safe community space to allow them to improve their physical and mental wellbeing and to socially interact with their peers. Qmotion is at the centre of everything that we do within sport, as alongside providing gym facilities and activities, the gym and staff also support all our Sport programmes in some shape or form, whether it be in-kind funding for facilities and staffing or allocating funds to support our Talented Athlete programme.

The pandemic led to a great deal of uncertainty for gym goers, with numerous closures throughout the last 18 months and the unfounded bad press relating to infection rates within gyms, resulting in many people deciding to not return to gyms, and to continue with how they trained during lockdown at home, online or outdoors.

All gyms were negatively impacted by the pandemic, but our team worked hard to ensure that when Qmotion could reopen we had everything in place to do this safely, to help reassure our members and engage with them effectively again. Our main priority was and always will be the safety of our students and staff, and this was demonstrated by our actions and development of new Standard Operating Procedures, where we went above and beyond our competitors. Our Covid-19 measures and clear signage were praised by Queen Mary Estates / Health & Safety and by our returning members, and was used as an example model to be followed by other Students' Union areas when re-opening.

We used some of the time during the pandemic to work with our Marketing and Communications department to refine and refresh our social media channels. Not only did we work to improve the visual presentation of our communications, but we also used competitor research to ensure we were speaking effectively and competitively to all our current and prospective members.



Refresh of Qmotion's Social media pages

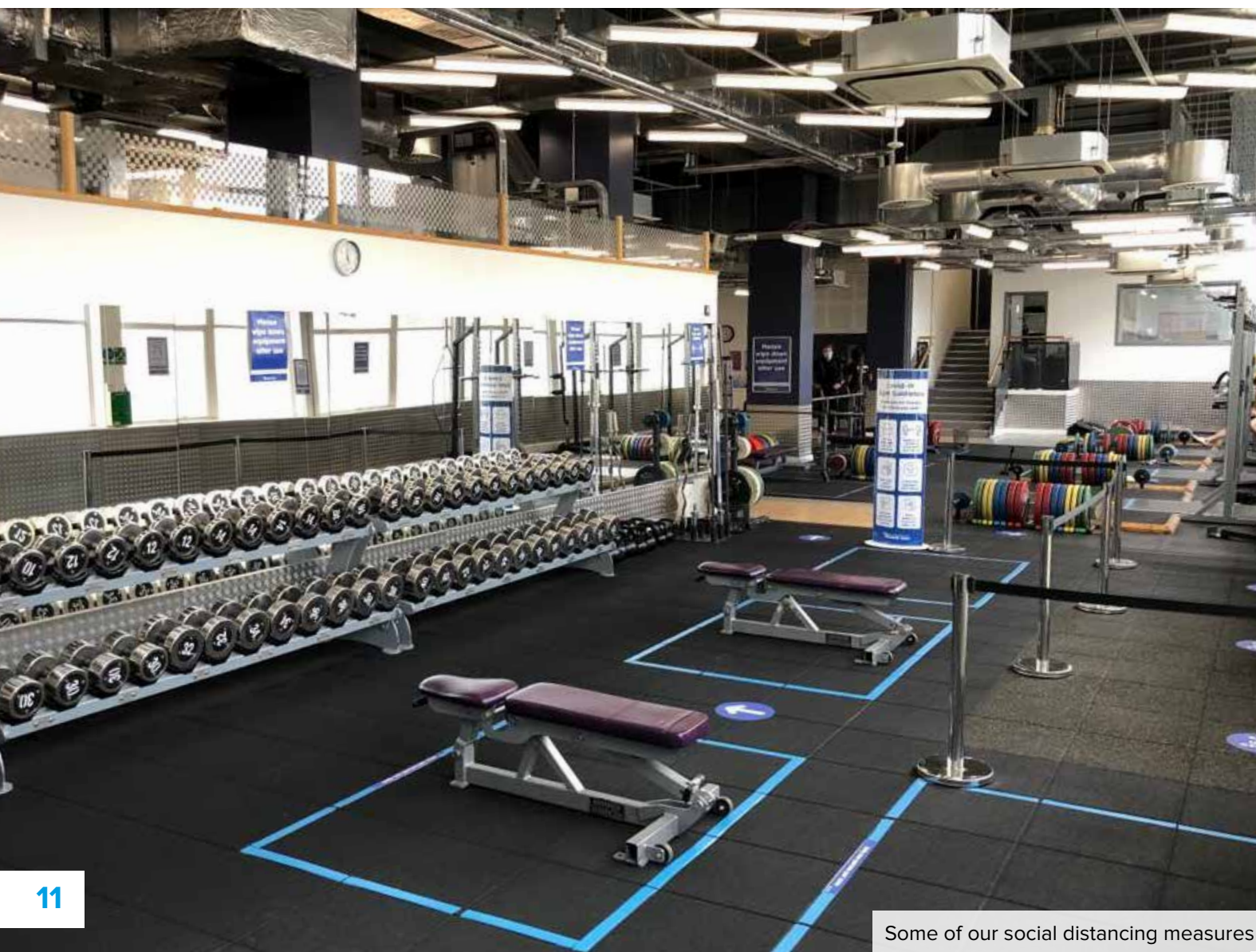


Qmotion Sports Hall hosting Get Active sessions





Covid-19 safety guidance animated video



Some of our social distancing measures

Following the first national lockdown, Qmotion re-opened on 27th July 2020 with numerous restrictions still in place. To ensure social distancing, we redesigned the gym layout and moved equipment, whilst re-purposing our studio spaces as overflow areas from the main gym area. This helped our members to train safely and visibly see the changes we had made to make them feel comfortable returning to a gym environment.

We also introduced a new cleaning system, which allowed us to regularly sanitise all equipment, touchpoints and changing rooms throughout the day, we have continued with this new system into the new academic year. We required face coverings to be worn at all times, unless actively training, and we ensured our staff felt comfortable in making sure that our members adhered to this.

Following further closures due to subsequent lockdowns we re-opened again in April 2021. Since then, we have seen a decrease in members and visits compared to previous years of around 50%. This has been due to less students and staff on campus, some people being concerned to return to gym spaces and many people continuing their new, adapted training methods. We are now working hard to ensure that we create a space and community that students and staff want to return to in the 2021-22 academic year, as this will support them to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

## Re-opening Qmotion during the pandemic

- We developed online fitness and workout plans for students to follow alongside live daily online fitness classes including Yoga, Pilates, Legs, Bums & Tums and Cardio.
- Our Covid-19 measures and clear signage were praised by Queen Mary Estates / Health & Safety and by our returning members, and was used as an example model to be followed by other Students' Union areas when re-opening.
- We sent regular communications to our members to keep them updated during the pandemic through emails, social media and the creation of a new Covid-19 safety guidance animated video.
- We introduced a new cleaning system, which allowed us to regularly sanitise all equipment, touchpoints and changing rooms throughout the day.
- We required face coverings to be worn at all times, unless actively training, and we ensured our staff felt comfortable in making sure that our members adhered to this.
- To ensure social distancing, we redesigned the gym layout, moved equipment and re-purposed our studio spaces as overflow areas from the main gym area.



# Club Sport

**Club Sport is the part of our sporting programme that manages Sports Clubs at Queen Mary Students' Union.**

It represents the student-led, structured, mainly competitive side of sport. There are now 70 Sports Clubs, all managed by student committees who work with our Sports Development team to provide the best experience for students.

It has been a different year for Club Sport with the pandemic resulting in many events and activities not being able to run. Student engagement was down 43% on the previous year due to this, however it was pleasing to see 1551 students purchase a membership as part of Club Sport. These students engaged in and ran weekly online events, wellbeing initiatives, fundraising opportunities and training sessions wherever possible.

The Club Sport Board has done incredible work this year in making difficult decisions when leagues and training have had to be cancelled. The Board has also ensured funds such as the Financial Support Fund have enabled students to still get involved in sport where possible, whilst the Club Sport Development Fund has allowed projects and resources to become available to aid the growth and development of Sports Clubs.

Several brilliant projects and campaigns have been undertaken by our Sports Clubs who have worked within the local community and beyond. All this work was celebrated at our annual Sports Awards ceremony, which we hosted online again. The event celebrated and recognised the achievements of our clubs and individuals, as well as the countless weekly fitness sessions, quizzes, socials and events our clubs have run to keep their members engaged and part of a community through the difficult times of the pandemic.

This year, we were also able to offer more Personal Professional Development sessions than in previous years. We have enhanced the training offered to our sports clubs, in turn helping to improve the student experience within the training and personal development aspects offered to our student members.

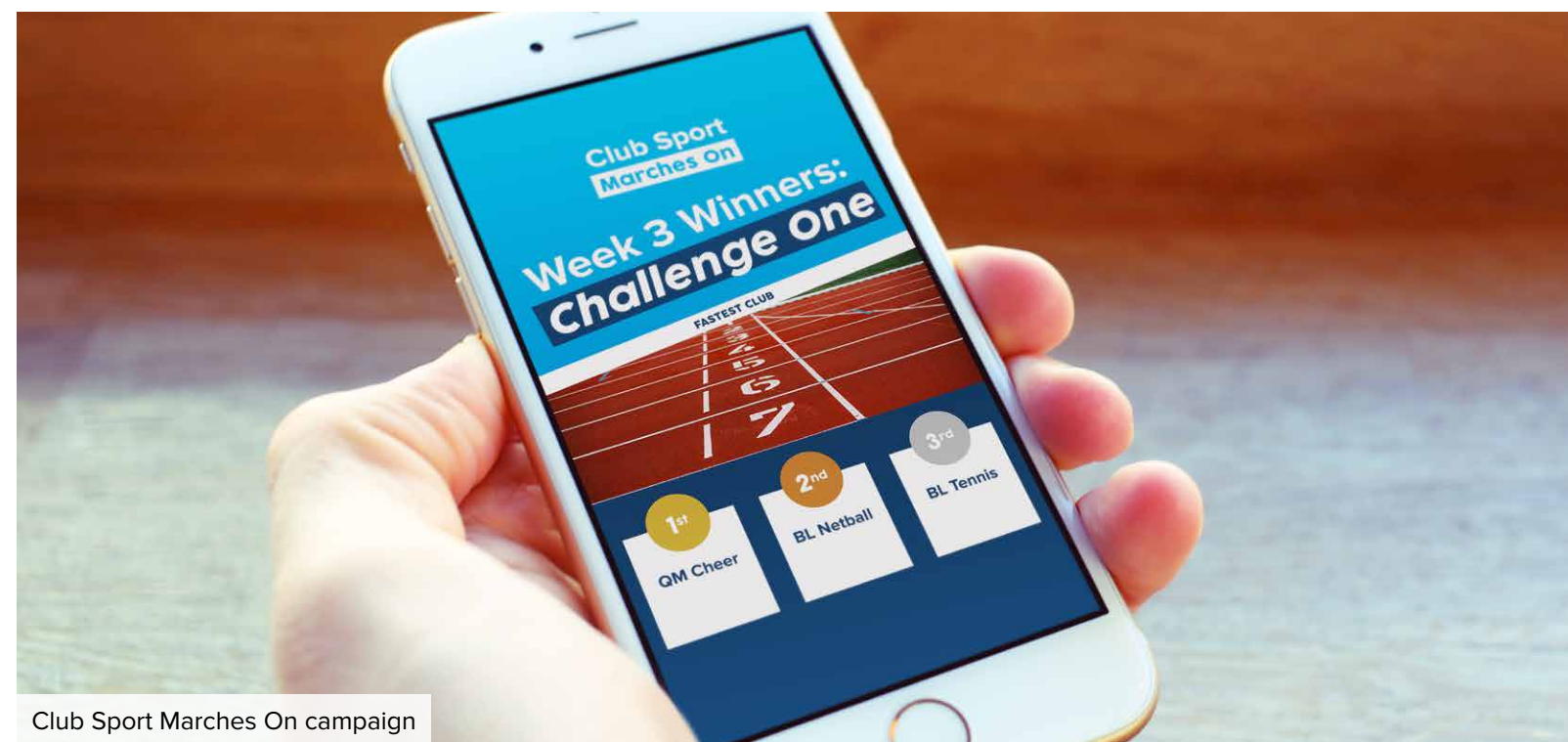
Unfortunately, Covid-19 resulted in the cancellation of all BUCS and LUSL leagues, except outdoor cricket in Semester 3. Our internal varsity event was also cancelled. However, these cancellations provided us an opportunity to deliver new events and target groups we have not engaged before. Our new "Club Sport Marches On" offer provided a month of fitness and wellbeing challenges throughout March, engaging 24 clubs and over 100 students each week. A positive point to highlight was following the easing of government restrictions in October 2020 and then April 2021 onwards, we



BUCS Swimming championships



Rainbow laces, supporting LGBT equality



Club Sport Marches On campaign



Football match held at Chislehurst Sports Ground





Outdoor Women's Hockey training at the Lee Valley Hockey Centre (Olympic Venue)

ensured that our clubs had access to training and friendlies where possible, with our main focus on ensuring these sessions were safe, monitored and enjoyable. This has been the priority this year for both students and staff working within Club Sport.

## Highlights

- 60 clubs took part in the Online Welcome Fairs in September 2020, 35 clubs took part in the January 2021 Welcome Back Fair.
- 310 people attended our September 2020 Big Hello event that we held online this year compared to 250 last year. We had a further 180 attendees at the June 2021 Big Hello event compared to 120 the year before.
- We introduced 6 new coaches, to our now 50 coach team.
- 6 Club Sport Board meetings deciding important BUCS/LUSL decisions, Club Sport Development Fund allocations and ways to engage club sport members during lockdowns.
- 25 clubs managed to have 5 or more outdoor training sessions despite lockdowns and restrictions in Semester one.
- 14 clubs returned to training after restrictions lifted on 31st March 2021, and it was safe to do so outdoors, most for a minimum of 5 weeks.
- 3 Personal and Professional Development sessions successfully run online (one sponsorship workshop, anti-racism training and an employability workshop).
- 45 clubs involved in our Sporting Focus programme this year compared to 43 last year.
- 2 weeks' worth of drop-in sessions each semester with clubs to support them with any issues or concerns they have with the programme looking so different this year.
- The Annual Sports Awards took place online on 27th May 2021 to celebrate the amazing work our students have done this past year despite the pandemic.
- Club Sport Marches On' a new initiative of a month of wellbeing and fitness challenges saw 24 clubs taking part, which engaged over 100 students each week.
- Clubs arranged internal and external friendlies for the weeks following restrictions easing.
- 5 clubs ran weekly online fitness sessions open to all students, staff and alumni throughout lockdown.
- 2 clubs entered outdoor cricket leagues for BUCS/LUSL in semester two.



# Get Active

**Get Active is the Students' Union's recreational sport programme at Queen Mary. It provides opportunities for students, staff and alumni to take part in sport in a fun, flexible and social environment.**

The programme aims to remove barriers to participation by providing fun, convenient and affordable sporting opportunities to all students and staff. Get Active is built around making it as easy as possible for participants to take part in "turn up and play" recreational sessions where everything is provided for them. Emphasis is also placed upon encouraging participation amongst students who are currently inactive and from groups currently under-represented in sport. Ongoing regular research and feedback is used to guide the development of the recreational sport offer.

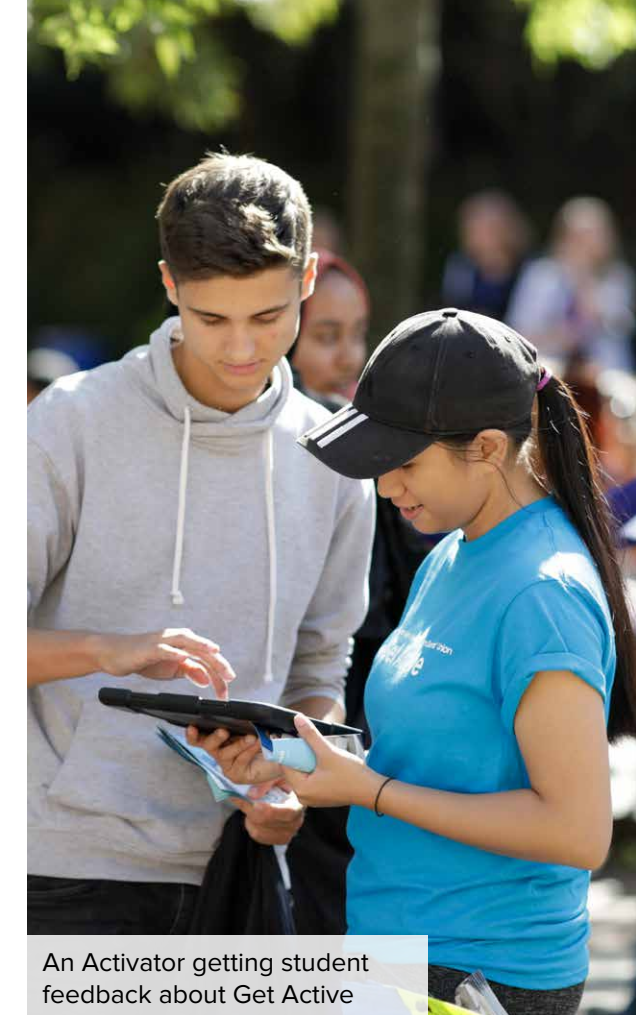
Covid-19 had a severe impact on the Get Active programme due to the closure of indoor sport facilities, such as our on-campus Sports Hall that was closed throughout the whole 2020-21 academic year. We therefore attempted to move several activities outdoors, as soon as government restrictions allowed, as well as providing some regular activities online. We engaged with those students that were still on campus by providing Get Active Pop-Ups each week across all our London campuses, helping students to get active and out of their rooms. Over the course of 10 weeks (April-June 2021) we had over 600 students engage with the pop-ups.

## Highlights

- 'This Girl Can Week' saw 7 online events delivered by students and staff, engaging with 256 participants over the course of the week which is an increase on 19/20 figures. This included an 'Inspirational Women in Sport' talk with 6 guest speakers discussing their journey within sport to encourage female participation.
- Our 'Couch to 5k' online programme ran over a 9-week period, engaging 42 students, staff and alumni each week. The course involved optional phone calls every 3 weeks to discuss progress on the course, a weekly newsletter and participation in a Strava group where members shared how they were finding the course as well as tips, tricks and encouragement for others.



'This Girl Can week' campaign



An Activator getting student feedback about Get Active



Get Active pop-up student participant



# Community Foundation

**Our Community Foundation aims to support students in developing skills and employability through sport whilst providing a benefit to young people in the wider community through increased access to sports opportunities.**

Two of the main objectives for this programme are: to support the development of Queen Mary students as sport leaders and increase participation in sport within the local community. We aim to have a positive impact on the local community by providing a sense of social cohesion for all involved. The programme also prepares our students for life beyond Queen Mary, allowing them to develop in a wide variety of life and employability skills through a breadth of training and personal development opportunities that are offered.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to focus our efforts on developing the student sport workforce. We anticipated that the government restrictions would limit community outreach through our programme but we wanted to ensure that interested students were still provided with a platform to engage and develop skills in opportunities outside of their academic studies.

To make our programme more accessible, we adapted our induction process to ensure that this could take place digitally. We also introduced additional online resources this year with a specific focus on skills development. We now offer Introduction to Leadership videos and supplementary resources, a Training Menu for students to express interest in training opportunities and a Skills Audit for students to identify their perceived skill-level before and after engagement with the programme.

Although there have been fewer opportunities to engage the local community with our traditional offer, we ensured that the student experience was at the forefront of our programme changes. We have involved students in the shaping of our offer, developed opportunities to enhance employability and encouraged innovative ideas for engaging others. We have also offered significantly more staff time to speak with students this year and offer our support through training, mentoring and general meetings during this difficult period.

## Highlights

- 245+ expressions of interest from students through our new Training Menu.
- 310+ community participant engagements with virtual sport sessions.
- 12 local schools involved in our school sport consultation.
- 30 free activity packs including sports equipment and healthy snack ingredients were distributed to local school children.
- Introduction to Employability Skills workshop delivered by QMSU Sport staff.
- 11 - record number of student groups accepted onto the Social Cohesion Sport Programme.
- £2,400 in-kind sport training provided to female students.
- £11,300+ in grant funding secured for student-led projects and further training.



Community Sport event in a local school



# Social Leagues

**Social Leagues, are the Students' Union's intramural league programme which has been developed within our recreational sports programme. They aim to help meet the needs of all levels of participation within Queen Mary.**

These leagues are a perfect way for our students to enjoy competitive sport and make new friends on our campuses, whilst participating in sport and physical activity. The Social leagues are open to all Queen Mary students, staff and alumni, with teams usually entered representing halls, academic subjects, sports clubs, societies or groups of friends.

For the 2020/2021 academic year, Social Leagues ran for a duration of 10 weeks. The leagues would usually have run for a length of 25 weeks, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all social sport activities were cancelled at different points in the year.

## Highlights

- 3 Leagues operated - Football 7-a-side, Football 11-a-side and Netball – partially ran in Semester 1 and the exam semester.
- 280 students/staff/alumni involved in the leagues.
- 7 student staff employed as referees & umpires.
- 1 Sport Development Apprentice working on the programme.
- £5000 funding secured to run a women's football league and employ & upskill student staff in 2021/22.



Warm up for our social leagues



Winners of one of our social leagues



Winners of another of our Social Leagues



# Performance Sport

**Performance sport is the highly competitive sport offer at the Students' Union which includes our newly launched Talented Athlete programme.**

The performance programme previously produced 1 BUCS Cup, 2 BUCS league wins and 3 athletes representing Queen Mary at Nationals. This included two top 10 finishes, one top 20 finish and two top 3 finishes in BUCS leagues. This year due to the pandemic, little competitive sport has run, only one athlete competed in competition boasting a top 10 finish.

During the pandemic and after the initial lockdown, mitigation was put in place by the government and UK Sport to allow elite athletes to be able to train in some capacity outside of their own homes, so once Qmotion re-opened we allowed our talented athletes to use our facilities where possible so they could start to try and get back to some form of normality with their training, which also helped to improve their mental wellbeing.

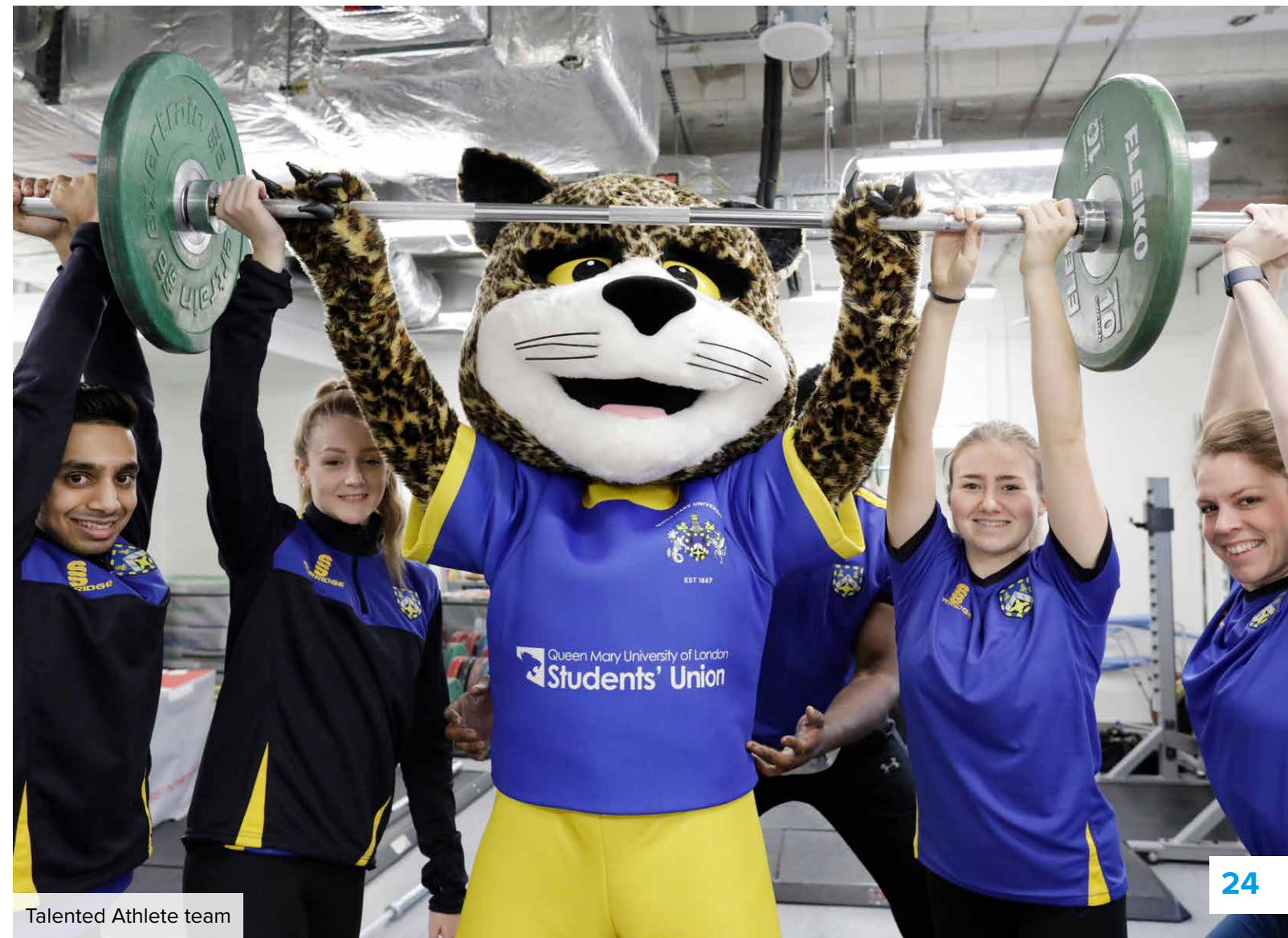
We also utilised the lockdown period to research and then start our journey with the TASS – Dual Accredited Scheme. TASS refers to the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme, a Sport England funded partnership between talented athletes, education institutions and national governing bodies of sport. The scheme helps athletes in education to get the very best from their sporting and academic careers without having to choose between the two. The TASS Dual Career Accreditation Scheme recognises an education institution's commitment to Dual Career Support for students. We are currently working closely with the university to complete the necessary steps to become part of this scheme by the end of the next academic year.

## Highlights

- Talented Athlete Programme launched for the first time – replacing the Elite Athlete Programme.
- 2 new athletes invited to the programme for 2020/2021.
- 1 athlete placed top 10 in the BUCS 25 mile Time Trial in cycling.
- Weekly support meeting offered to all athletes.
- QMSU upskilled 2 x staff members as Dual Career Coordinators to better support athletes within our talented athlete programme.



Safee Hamid, Economics, one of our Talented Athletes who competes in Badminton



Talented Athlete team



# Looking forward

QMSU Sport will be looking to rebuild over the 2021-22 academic year, to ensure that sport at Queen Mary gets back to where it was before the pandemic, ensuring we provide students with what they want and need in and around our campuses.

It is important to recognise the power of sport within our society, and therefore understand it is essential to include sport and physical activity in our recovery plans post Covid-19. Sport and physical activity can contribute valuably within education, sustainable development, social inclusion and health.

Once we have reached our goals of re-establishing and embedding sport back into the Students' Union offering, we will then look to return our original strategic targets of developing all our sporting programmes whilst increasing student participation and maximising the student experience by positively impacting on our students time at Queen Mary through sport and activity.



Open day Get Active activities

The new Sport England strategy “**Uniting the movement**” will focus on the five themes outlined below, we will be looking to embed these in our plans moving forward;

## Recover and reinvent

Helping sport and physical activity to recover from the far-reaching effects of the coronavirus pandemic and reinventing as a sustainable network of organisations providing opportunities for everyone. This support will be informed both by the specific financial challenges facing partners as well as the insight collected through our in-depth research projects, allowing support to be targeted where it is most needed and where the greatest opportunities are.

## Connecting communities

Focusing on sport and physical activity’s vital role as part of the fabric of the nation and its ability to make our communities better places to live and bring people together.

## Positive experiences

For children and young people: an unrelenting focus on putting enjoyment at the heart of the experiences of children and young people’s involvement in sport and physical activity, recognising that this is the foundation for a long and healthy life.

## Connecting with health and wellbeing

Strengthening further and better than ever before the connections between sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing, so more people can feel the benefits of an active life.

## Active environments

Maximising many of the lessons that the pandemic has brought, identifying our role in creating and protecting the places and spaces that make it easier for people to play sport and be active in their local areas.





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