

Public facing statement - Closure of Westfield Nursery

We have taken the difficult decision to close Westfield Nursery in August 2024. We recognise the value of the Nursery to the staff, students and local residents who have used it in the past and who are currently using it. In reaching our decision, we have taken this into account along with several other competing factors.

Since the pandemic, the work patterns of our parents and carers have changed significantly. This has led to substantial changes in what is required of the service, including fewer days' care per week and longer opening hours per day than we are able to provide. This has led to a considerable drop in the number of hours of care required for the children attending the Nursery, meaning the service is underutilised and consequently has been operating at a significant financial loss for two years.

Continuously operating at such a loss has created a challenge to Queen Mary's obligations, as a registered charity, to use our assets and resources to undertake and support our core charitable activities of teaching and research.

We are very sensitive to the impact of the decision to close our Nursery is having on the parents and carers of all our registered children and are doing all we can to help them find alternative arrangements.

We are engaged with QM's parents and carers networks. We will listen to alternative ideas and where we can, we will seek to mitigate the impact of the closure.

FAQs:

What alternatives have been explored?

The nursery has operated with financial challenges for many years, although this has been compounded since the pandemic and changes to working practices. A number of areas have been explored in recent years in order to try to ensure the facility's future viability:

- We increased the fees in 2022 which resulted in some parents and carers removing their children from the nursery. We explored increasing prices further in 2023 but at the time, for local residents, we were already one of the most expensive service providers in Tower Hamlets. (We provide discounts on the service for Queen Mary staff and students, which has made the cost more competitive for these users.)
- Even if we were to increase fees further by 5% with the nursery operating at full capacity, we would still operate at a deficit of over £100,000 which is not sustainable. This figure doesn't account for annual staffing and utilities cost increases, which would also increase the overall deficit.
- We have explored extending our start and finish times but there was no evidence to suggest this would help to match demand or improve current occupancy levels, given our pricing

Why were parents, carers and guardians not provided with more notice about the closure of the nursery?

In coming to the decision to close the nursery we have had to balance the need and desire to give parents and staff as much time as possible to prepare for the closure and make alternative arrangements, alongside the operational regulatory requirements to maintain strict staff to children ratios. We were conscious that any notice to review the nursery provision would likely result in staff seeking alternative employments, and potentially compromising our overall levels of staff cover which we need to maintain to remain open. The timescales proposed through our current consultation with nursery staff have been determined with this in mind: we have not taken this decision lightly and are putting in place measures to support parents and staff.

What support are you providing to staff and students currently using the nursery?

A range of options have been offered to staff and students so that support and reasonable adjustments can be explored and put in place. These include in-person briefings, details of financial, emotional and wellbeing assistance and advice on relevant policies to support them.

Queen Mary is also offering a financial support package to staff and students who have children currently attending the nursery to aid them in the transition to alternative childcare arrangements. Details of the package is being provided to those affected.

What support are you providing for community users of the nursery?

The university has provided parents, carers and guardians currently using the nursery with as much notice as practically possible in relation to the pending closure of the nursery so that they are able to look for new childcare arrangements.

In light of the upcoming election and potential for a new government, would any future policy change the approach to closing the nursery?

The only mention of nursery provision is by Labour who – [in their manifesto](#) – say they “will open an additional 3,000 nurseries to transform life chances. As an initial step, Labour will open an additional 3,000 nurseries through upgrading space in primary schools, to deliver the extension of government funded hours families are entitled to.” This is not a basis for university planning.

Published 17.06.24.

FAQs added 01.07.24