

Dear Student,

I would like to update you following further comments made by the Students' Union in relation to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), known as the 'furloughing scheme', and their comments about the way we work with students to deliver our Strategy. I will be writing later in the week with a further update about campus re-opening and our educational offer for next term.

I realise that times are incredibly difficult for many of you and your loved ones at the moment. In the UK and across the world people are worried about the future: about their health and wellbeing and also their financial stability. Many people are worried about their future employment, and I realise that is a particular concern for those of you who are graduating. Your Queen Mary education will stand you in good stead for your next step, but I fully understand that many of you will be worried about what the future holds. Our [careers service](#) is there to support you, as are our [wellbeing services](#). In addition, if any of you are currently struggling to make ends meet, do have a look at our [financial assistance fund](#).

In relation to the SU's request to furlough its staff, the University provided a financial commitment to Queen Mary Students' Union's (QMSU) on the 16th April to ensure it can pay its student workers their normal wages, as if its commercial outlets were still open. We believed this was fair and would be acceptable to the students concerned.

QMSU believes that it could claim more through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and pass this on to student workers. This is based on a formula used by the scheme to calculate the salary for workers on zero hour contracts, which are the contracts that the QMSU use. The formula does not take account of significant overall reductions in shift patterns in SU outlets out of term time, and (for some outlets) through the exam period. I understand the QMSU has told its student workers how much they might have received using the formula for zero hour contracts in isolation. I completely understand students' anger at being told they are eligible for a higher payment than the University is offering. However, QMSU should also have taken account of guidance issued by the Department for Education '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): financial support for education, early years and children's social care](#)', which states that '*HE providers should not seek to furlough a higher proportion of their wage bill than could reasonably be considered to have been generated through commercial income*'. This indicates that our approach is right: student workers should not receive more than they would have been paid, had the outlets been open. We have now taken external legal advice on this matter and that has reiterated that our position is correct.

I am extremely sorry that some students have been told they are entitled to higher wages by the QMSU than they will receive. If we had allowed the QMSU to go ahead and access the furlough scheme, it is very likely that the government would have required QMSU to pay the extra monies back, potentially with additional penalties, if it had realised that we had not followed the guidance.

We will continue to ensure that the QMSU receives additional funding from the University to cover their workers' wage costs as if Covid-19 did not occur.

In relation to the comments made by the QMSU about the role of students in developing our Strategy: I, and the rest of the Senior Team, are very concerned about these comments. Co-creation of our student experience with students is a central theme in our Strategy. A live example at the moment of this co-creation is the central role of the Student Staff Liaison Committees in enabling students to transition to learning and assessment online. We will continue to discuss the issues raised by the QMSU in the coming days to understand fully their position.

Look after yourselves and your loved ones. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact me at [principal@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:principal@qmul.ac.uk). I will write again later in the week.

Best wishes,

Colin

Professor Colin Bailey, CBE, FEng, BEng, PhD, CEng, FICE, FStructE, MIFireE  
President and Principal | Queen Mary University of London | Mile End Road | London | E1 4NS

