

Update from the Principal: 2 February 2022

Dear student,

We hope this email finds you well, and you are enjoying Semester 2 – or if you have just joined us on one of our January start programmes, the first few weeks of your course. Please do take advantage of all our University and campuses have to offer: there are plenty of [places to study](#), a vibrant programme of [social and sporting activities](#), and of course [resources to support your wellbeing](#). In addition, remember that as a Queen Mary student you have full access to [LinkedIn Learning](#), which is a really easy way to gather new skills and knowledge at your own pace, to further enhance your career prospects.

As a University, we have had a fantastic start to the calendar year with our graduation ceremonies for the classes of 2020 and 2021. Do have a look at the pictures – they were amazing events! We graduated over 7,500 students, and had a total of over 22,000 guests across the 10 days of ceremonies.

On a much less positive note, we are very sorry to tell you that the trade union UCU has achieved a mandate for industrial action at our University, and had advised us of 10 days of strike action and also that its members will be asked to undertake action short of a strike. Action short of a strike means working to contract, and not undertaking any ‘voluntary’ activities. The trade union balloted its members on two issues: pensions, and pay and working conditions. Roughly 400 of our staff voted for strike action at Queen Mary in each ballot, which is less than 10% of our workforce. One of the other campus trade unions, Unison, re-balloted their staff on the same issues and did not achieve a mandate for industrial action.

We are so sorry that we are, once again, facing industrial action. We want to reassure you, however, that we will do everything we can to mitigate the impact felt by you, our students: our first priority will always be to protect your education and experience, above all our other activities as a University.

As you can see, the numbers of staff voting for industrial action are relatively small, and in some Schools and Institutes the impact of the industrial action will be minimal. In others, where there are more members of the trade union, the industrial action will be more evident. We are putting in place mitigations to enable planned educational activities to carry on so that learning is not lost. If classes do need to be rearranged, you will be contacted locally by your School/Institute. We guarantee you will not be disadvantaged in relation to your assessments as a result of the current industrial action.

Whether or not there are many trade union members in your School/Institute, you may see a picket line on [strike days](#) outside the University premises. You will be able to cross the picket line freely to enter the University. There are strict rules about the behaviour on picket lines. Nobody can stop you, or any staff or visitors, entering the University. If you see any behaviour that is concerning on the picket line, or feel you cannot cross it, please contact Security immediately on 020 7882 3333. Please also be advised that only Queen Mary staff can join the picket line – no staff from other universities are allowed to join, and no students (from Queen Mary or any other university) should join either.

Finally, in relation to the issues at the heart of this industrial action, there is more information in the links below. We are sorry to say that significant misinformation has been circulated. On the pensions issue for example: we know that a good pension is really important for our staff, and we will continue to lobby for the best possible scheme for our staff, that is affordable and sustainable. Some reform of the pension scheme is inevitable – the scheme simply isn’t viable at the moment. The

trade union is significantly over-estimating the cuts that staff will see; even with the proposed changes, the scheme will be significantly better than pension schemes available to anyone working in the private sector. In relation to equality of pay: there have been claims that we pay women less than men. This is simply not true: it is illegal to pay women less than men for the same work. At Queen Mary, we are doing better than most in narrowing the pay gap, which is the difference between the average earnings of all men and women within an organisation. We have made good progress so far with closing this pay gap, and are committed to eliminating the gap completely.

Do have a look at the information below if you have any further questions. We know staff across the University are united in our commitment to deliver an outstanding education to you, our students. We are sure we can work together across the University to ensure we continue to provide a world-leading education and experience for you.

We will write to you again when there is a further update to share. If you have any questions, have a [look at the FAQ](#), and then talk to your Advisor, or contact the Student Enquiry Centre or me at principal@qmul.ac.uk.

Best wishes,

Colin

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Further information:

On USS pension scheme

- Material from the [information briefing sessions](#) held by an independent pensions expert from Mercer in October, and by using the USS [pension modeller](#), which helps USS members see the potential impact of the changes upon them individually, based on their own circumstances.

On pay and working conditions:

- Sheila Gupta has recently written blogs with current information on [gender inequality](#) and [fixed-term and casual contracts](#) at Queen Mary
- There is further information on our [EDI webpages](#).