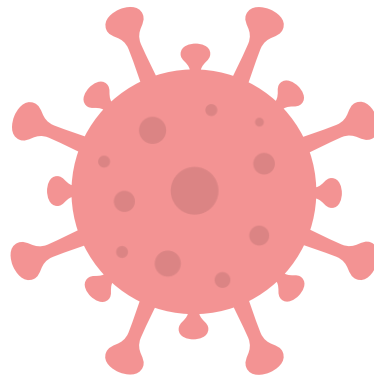
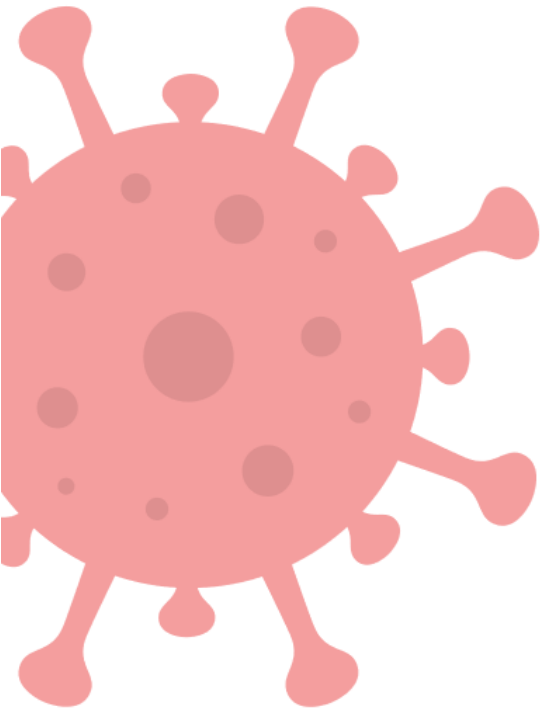
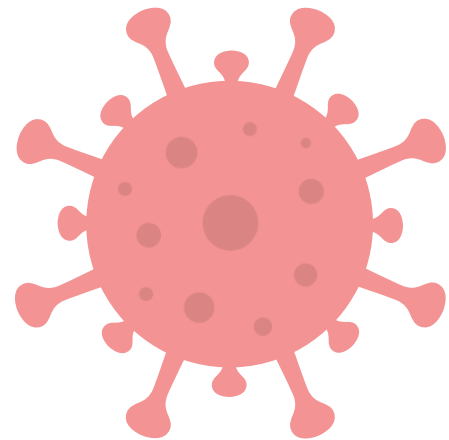




Students' Jury on Pandemic Learning

Final Report • March 2021





Overview

In March 2021, Queen Mary University of London's School of Law reached the one-year mark of its transition to online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the prospect of the pandemic continuing to restrict the ways in which teaching and learning could take place in the 2021-2022 academic year, the **Students' Jury on Pandemic Learning** was convened in order to provide student input on the School's continued management of legal education throughout the public health crisis.

The process drew inspiration from democratic innovations like Citizens' Assemblies, Citizens' Juries, and other "deliberative mini-publics" in order to invite informed, deliberative, and representative student views. Twelve students were selected through a democratic lottery (through stratified random selection) in order to ensure a Jury that was descriptively representative of the student population. The Jury heard from and engaged with a variety of stakeholders and experts, reflected on their own views, and, with the support of independent facilitators, deliberated with one another about the best interests of the School community. In the end, the Students' Jury agreed upon thirteen recommendations that it wished to put forward to the School of Law leadership, and provided insight into why it believed those recommendations to be important, and what supporting actions could be taken to realise them.

This report briefly elaborates some of the features of the Students' Jury process before outlining its recommendations in full.

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The Mandate

The Students' Jury was tasked with exploring and responding to a broad question, central to the School of Law's planning:

“Given potential pandemic challenges, how should the School of Law approach teaching and learning in the 2021/2022 academic year?”

While the Jury was prompted on specific sub-questions, including whether the School should attempt a return to in-person teaching and, if so, how to do so, they were invited to respond to this question in a way they saw fit.

The Students' Jury

The Students' Jury was made up of twelve (12) law students chosen by democratic lottery to reflect the student body as a whole. The result was an even gender balance and proportionate representation of student demographics within the School of Law, including with respect to programme year, specialism, disability, fee, and racialised statuses. After selection with support from the Sortition Foundation, all twelve invitees accepted the initial invitation to serve as a Juror.

Aleksander Kanton

Cristina Lecluyse

Patrick Smith

**Andrew Kennedy
McFarlane**

Etienne Wingert

Salini Chekuri

Anna Stephens

Huzaifa Naveed

Talia Shugarman

Aris Messios

Mahmuda Kamalee

Zhan Su

After reviewing introductory material, the Jury met for five separate online sessions, which took place over the course of two weeks in March 2021. Over the course of these sessions, the jury reflected on their own experiences, heard from a variety of experts and stakeholders, collectively decided upon and prioritised questions, shared their ideas, and deliberated on future directions for the School of Law. Throughout, facilitation was provided by independent facilitators from partner organisations, outlined below.

Organisation and Support

The Students' Jury was a collaborative project, situated within the School of Law at Queen Mary University of London, but heavily supported by individuals and organisations outside the University.

Queen Mary University of London supported the project through a Westfield Fund for Enhancing the Student Experience grant and provided logistical support, especially by Gulsh Khatun. Dr Jeffrey Kennedy and Karoline Leitgeb served as Project Leads.



The Sortition Foundation supports the use of sortition (random selection) in political decision-making. They, with, special thanks to Philipp Verpoort, were responsible for the juror selection process, advised on the process, and supported facilitation.



Democratic Society works to support democracy and to create opportunities for people to take part in it. They, with particular thanks to Mel Stevens who served as the Host and Lead Facilitator, advised on the process and provided facilitation services.



Other partners offered advice on the process and provided support in other ways.

Democracy in Practice focuses on school-based democratic experimentation, innovation, and capacity-building. They, with special thanks to Adam Cronkright, advised on the process and provided facilitation support.



Professor Simon Pek, University of Victoria, advised on the process and provided facilitation support.

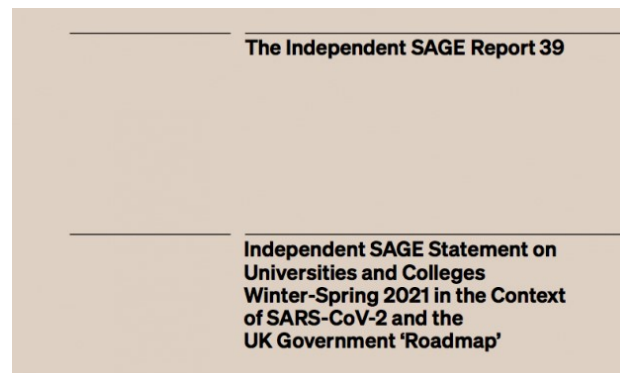
Dr Malcolm Oswald of **Citizens' Juries c.i.c** provided early advice on the project.



Speakers

Jurors heard from and were able to ask questions of a variety of experts and stakeholders, both from within Queen Mary and from outside, on what they believed the Jury should consider in making recommendations.

Presenters included the following, in order of appearance.



Peter MacLeod

Principal, MASS LBP

Professor Penny Green

Head of Department, School of Law,
Queen Mary University of London

Professor Jonathan Griffiths

Director of Education, School of Law,
Queen Mary University of London

Dr Isobel Roele

Lecturer in Law, School of Law, Queen
Mary University of London

Dr Manoj Dias-Abey

Lecturer in Law, School of Law,
University of Bristol

Dr Mark Carrigan

Cambridge University and The Post-
Pandemic University

Professor Diana Laurillard

Chair of Learning with Digital
Technologies, UCL Learning Lab,
University College London

Larissa Kennedy

President, National Union of Students

Vicky Blake

President, University and College Union

Professor Elizabeth Stokoe

Professor of Social Interaction,
Loughborough University, and
Independent SAGE

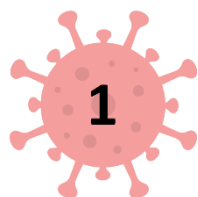
Dr Deepti Gurdasani

Senior Lecturer in Machine Learning,
The William Harvey Research Institute,
Queen Mary University of London

Jury Recommendations

In all, the Students' Jury made thirteen (13) recommendations while providing an indication of why they believed these to be important as well as. The recommendations are as follows, grouped according to theme, and not ordered according to importance.

Online Teaching & Learning



In-person lectures and tutorials should be voluntary for both students and staff. Staff should be provided the flexibility to teach according to their preference and need: either in person or exclusively online.

Why is this important?

- There is no one-size-fits all approach that can address concerns of students and staff and ultimately decisions about one's own education and well-being should be a personal and voluntary decision. While mitigations should remain in place, human interaction considerations must be better balanced moving forward. Decisions in these respects, and the risks they entail, must be evaluated by each individual. Queen Mary is built on values of human rights and equal opportunity; leadership in this area requires serious attention.
- The importance of human contact should not be underestimated. This will likely be the only means of direct, face-to-face student-staff interaction.
- The pandemic has created a digital divide. The quality of teaching and learning has become a function of access to technology and training rather than subject matter expertise. Many lack proper equipment, networking infrastructure, and teaching environments for online learning, creating an unfair playing field for both students and teachers.
- This gives students the option of blended learning while avoiding staff having to prepare two different versions of the same curriculum. It also respects the needs of teachers who cannot or do not feel safe coming to campus.
- This recommendation assumes current pandemic levels. With a dramatic resurgence, choice may not be possible. Should the pandemic abate, more voluntary opportunities, academic and extra-curricular, should be made available.

Supporting Actions

- Tutorial groups should be organised according to expressed preference or need, either in terms of teaching online or in-person with safety measures in place. Options should be made clear and should be transparent about what they entail.
- Safeguards, protocols, and assurances must be put in place to ensure that in-person activities remain voluntary. The pandemic has impacted groups differently, with staff on precarious contracts, women, BAME communities, junior staff, and the clinically vulnerable being disproportionately affected. This has extended to online learning. No individuals, staff or student, should be forced to participate. The rationale for allowing choice is to address the ongoing unfairness and inequality across diverse groups of people, not exacerbate it.



If there is to be any in-person teaching, risk assessments must be carried out and shared with both students and staff ahead of time.

Why is this important?

- This is important in order to avoid false sense of security in School spaces.
- Informed decision-making about risks requires staff and students to have the necessary information.
- It allows for students to know that the University has their best interests in mind when they return to campus, rather than seeing them as customers (see Recommendation 5).

Supporting Actions

- In-depth risk assessments should be undertaken by the School of Law and the University. These should consider avoiding overcrowding buildings, proper ventilation, and the relevance of risk groups.
- Assessments should be shared with both staff and students well ahead of time.
- Engage with both staff and student representatives by consulting the University and College Union (UCU) and Student Union (SU).



Consider implementing “consolidation cycles”—periods of time at the end of each semester to revisit and consolidate the learning that has taken place. This might instead include three cycles, two being for teaching and the third for consolidation.

Why is this important?

- This would help students affected by the pandemic catch up and maintain their learning. It provides a routine so that information and material does not get lost.
- It provides staff a loose skeleton on which to build their routine and curriculum.

Supporting Actions

- Consolidation need not follow this exact structure, which only offers a model approach to a uniform plan for the term.



The School should reconsider the way that students are assessed, maintaining and increasing the use of flexible assessments, coursework, and 24-hour, open book exams.

Why is this important?

- This helps ensure equity amidst unforeseen and changing circumstances.
- The current exam-based approach adds greater pressure on students. Changes to assessment may not require changes to teaching method, and may lead to greater student morale and a more accepting approach to online teaching.
- It would help ease the pressures and stresses accompanying one final exam and facilitate students getting an in-depth learning experience on portions of modules rather than 'cramming' of year-long course materials.
- The whole style and approach to learning has changed, and so the usual methods of assessment no longer make sense.
- It allows for a more well-rounded assessment.
- It provides greater flexibility for students in different time zones or those affected by COVID.

Supporting Actions

- A reduction or elimination of exam-based assessment.
- Assignments could follow tutorial formats, e.g. students being given a general topic of examinable material on which to prepare coursework.
- The increased workload in terms of marking accompanied by an increase in coursework and open-book assessment can be offset due to the fact that with the latter, teaching can be reduced to a simpler form (e.g. shorter, more manageable lectures).
- Continue the use of 24-hour exams where exams are needed.

Transparency and Inclusion



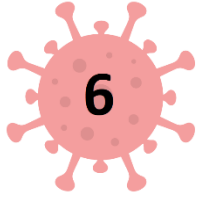
The School must be transparent and treat students as students rather than customers. Students' well-being should come before financial benefits. Inform students of decisions as early as possible, especially regarding whether teaching will be online or in-person, and explain these decisions fully and clearly.

Why is this important?

- This enables students to make realistic plans regarding their academic studies and the way they approach this. Students also need to make plans and decisions in advance, including dealing with visa, travel, accommodation issues.
- It also supports students' mental well-being, as false assurances and unrealistic hopes can later create feelings of frustration and hopelessness amongst the student community.
- This can also reduce lengthy communication between students and the School with respect to finding answers to questions they may have about process, their studies, and the impact of policies, thereby reducing staff workload as well.
- Transparent accounts help students to better reconcile with the idea of online learning, better appreciate their education, and better empathize with their tutors and other staff.

Supporting Actions

- Have a dedicated section on QMplus with announcements on COVID restrictions and learning adjustments.
- Email updates should not just reference government restrictions but actually provide the university's reasoning and any research that informs it.
- Have a video update at the beginning of the Fall semester detailing why the School is educating the way it is, providing statistics or even segments from experts and stakeholders.
- Ideally, information regarding September teaching should be released in June or July rather than very late in August.



The School should use a diversity of methods to regularly seek out student involvement and feedback in making decisions about student learning.

Why is this important?

- When the implications of decisions affect students most, it is unfair to make decisions for students without having their input.
- Both staff and students alike experience a variety of issues which the School should be interested in finding out more about.
- Decisions which reflect the involvement of all the students will have an outcome that is more satisfying and inclusive. It helps students feel a part of the School.
- Student representatives are not always the most effective method because not everyone is involved in the decision-making process.
- Any programme during this time has to be adaptable to students' needs as the year progresses.
- This is a time of experimentation and any approach should be closely monitored.

Supporting Actions

- The School of Law should develop a means of students voting on decisions that impact them, posted, for instance, on the School of Law website. Because such decisions impact students, students should have a weighting opinion.
- Stay in contact with different groups of students and staff to get real feedback through accurate questions about their experiences. This would ideally not take the form of a questionnaire. Check in throughout the year.
- Be empathetic and listen to students. Ask for their recommendations.
- Repeat the Students' Jury annually. Providing students the opportunity to voice concerns in such a democratic process would be an amazing initiative. Unlike wide scale voting or survey attempts, which do not get much traction and have low turnouts, the Jury allowed students (although a limited number) to take time, gain insight, and make informed judgments about our education. The fact that it is a more exclusive group will incentivise students to get involved, either through election or random selection, as was done this year.

Workloads



The School of Law should strongly consider the implementation of workload modelling for both students and staff, implementing a policy that provides realistic timetabling regarding what can be done in “humane hours”. There should be an acknowledgement that time required for in-person teaching and learning does not directly equate to the same time virtually.

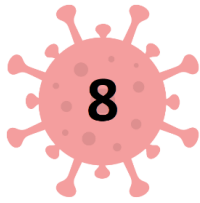
Why is this important?

- This provides realistic expectations between students and staff and can bring about more confidence in one another.
- It addresses the feelings of overburden and exhaustion being experienced by staff and students in relation to their excessive workloads.
- It allows students to maintain a stable and consistent working pattern resulting in effective workload management and perhaps even better long-term results.
- It is important to consider the mental health impacts of the pandemic, as the line between home and work have been blurred. Having a clear structure may alleviate some pressures that were present before, but have been heightened since the start of the pandemic. The pandemic has imposed new stresses on both students and staff in regard to caregiving and family commitments (e.g. homeschooling). Workload modelling would provide much needed flexibility to people who have other commitments.

Supporting Actions

- Implement a realistic policy on weekly working hours, i.e. that students should not be given more than X amount of work hours per modules which includes reading, seminars and lectures. Each element is to be realistically quantified to ensure that students are not receiving significant amounts of work per week per module.
- Consult students, teaching staff, and unions to determine “humane” work hours.

Technology



The School should require a consistent use of online resources and stick to one platform for all modules.

Why is this important?

- Both staff and students will gain time by consistently using the same online platform, and will progressively master it rather than knowing several less well.

Supporting Actions

- Require all teaching staff to use the same platform—either Zoom or MS Teams, as Blackboard Collaborate’s connection is poor.
- Organise training for teaching staff on the use of that platform.



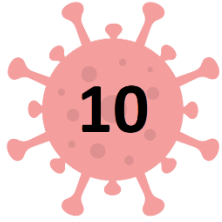
The School should ensure that online technology and resources, including QMplus, are accessible, function properly, and are clear.

Why is this important?

- Daily technology failures are frustrating and should be avoided, particularly when education is centered around online resources.
- It should be clear where students will be able to consistently find resources.

Supporting Actions

- Ensure that QMplus organisation is consistent (i.e. assessments, readings, pre-recorded lectures, etc).
- Take steps to ensure better access to materials through the library and other resources.



The School should take steps to address the digital divide, both for staff and students.

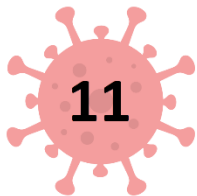
Why is this important?

- The quality of online education is often being determined not by teaching staff, but rather the technology they or the students are using.
- The University cannot offer teaching of the highest possible quality with insufficient technology in place. This directly impacts students and their learning.
- Some technology does not function well with all platforms (e.g. MS Teams).

Supporting Actions

- Ensure that teaching staff have appropriate technology to conduct their classes.
- Prioritise high quality audio and video by procuring appropriate equipment.
- Ensure that the activities students undertake are not technologically challenging.

Student Support



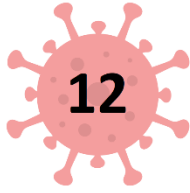
Should the School again teach online, it should increase the level of student virtual interaction.

Why is this important?

- Students are isolated, and students' well-being and mental health must be considered. This is particularly the case for first year students.
- Discussions are an important means of and skill for studying Law.

Supporting Actions

- Create study groups and recommend or create group chats.
- Insist less on "office hours" and facilitate more frequent and/or flexible time spent one-on-one on MS Teams.
- Better promote "buddy systems" for incoming students to establish links between those who have already been through online education. Check in to ensure that the scheme has involved actual contact between "buddies".



The School should increase support and improve mitigating measures for students affected by COVID, including post-COVID and “long COVID” impacts.

Why is this important?

- This acknowledges the human impact of COVID and is important for student well-being. It helps reduce concerns about physical and mental well-being as well as academic concerns.
- Current Extenuating Circumstances (EC) procedures do not account for realities, including unforeseen or unforeseeable impacts of COVID. Those suffering or recovering from COVID are unable to complete complex administrative processes.
- Current processes are mentally straining when the emphasis should be on well-being rather than certainty of planning.

Supporting Actions

- Where a student has tested positive, this test result should be sufficient to constitute an Extenuating Circumstance, and an application should not be required.
- Ensure that a designated person follows up with affected students, checking in with them and determining whether they are struggling in their return to routine and/or managing their workload.
- When making an EC application due to COVID, students should not be expected to anticipate a “deadline” of when they will be able submit their assignments.

Staff Support



Staff should receive more support from the School of Law. Pressure put on teaching staff and administrators should be reduced as much as possible to increase physical and mental well-being.

Why is this important?

- The mental health of staff should not be forgotten. The current system is putting them under high pressure and there is insufficient support.
- Tutors are the ones directly interacting with students.

- Alleviating problems directly connected to teaching staff would enhance their teaching, providing higher quality education for students.

Supporting Actions

- Allocate funds to staff support.
- Provide sufficient assistance with material and technical issues as well as training with respect to online teaching and use of online platforms (e.g. QMplus) with an emphasis on simple and clear education.
- Allow them flexibility with respect to teaching in individual classes, their offices, and lecture rooms rather than at home.
- Do not require teaching staff to teach in multiple ways, i.e. in-person *and* online.
- Undertake appropriate workload modelling (see Recommendation 7).
- Provide staff with safe contracts.