



# Library Services Impact Report 2024/25

# Introduction

It has been another year of growth and development for Queen Mary University of London Library Services. We have continued to have an impact on learning, research and reputation building activities, ensuring that we are embedded across the University. We have also seen positive growth in our KPIs and our NSS results, demonstrating a sustained improvement.

Developments of note this year have included the launch of the Academic Skills Centre and the redesign of our web presence to enable all users to access our resources and services online, and our first Customer Service Excellence accreditation, further showcasing the exceptional services we are proud to deliver.

Our physical campus development has continued at pace, with the Preservation and Enhancement project at Whitechapel which has seen the building undergo some major structural improvement works to enhance the fabric of the building. Our determination to minimise impact to our library users meant we remained open throughout the works.

Our Access and Participation Plan-funded Library Student Partners initiative has expanded this year, supporting students with transition into university life. This reflects Queen Mary's values and demonstrates our commitment to supporting every student from day one.



This year also saw a significant staffing change, as I took up the role of Director of Library Services. I have been appointed to generate further impactful changes to the service. I bring a strong background of digital transformation, customer focused service delivery and continual enhancement processes to Queen Mary Library Services.

Finally, Library Services is made up of talented and driven staff who work to improve the experience of all users across our whole offer. I would like to thank the team for all their efforts over the past year, serving 1,200,000 visitors at Mile End, doubling the number of users at Whitechapel, and for always working to develop our offer and improve the library for everyone.

**Anna Semmens**  
**Director of Library Services**

# Education and Student Experience

## Academic Skills Centre

The new Academic Skills Centre makes it easier for students to access expert help, build confidence, and succeed.

What's new and improved:

- A dedicated QMPlus hub offering flexible, on-demand learning resources.
- A single contact point for faster, clearer support.
- Expanded drop-in sessions at Mile End, boosting attendance by 59%.
- A smart Support Finder tool to guide students and staff to the right help.
- Co-designed services with student partners to meet learners where they are.

99% of students providing feedback found our sessions useful, and 95% felt more confident afterwards. With strong partnerships across Queen Mary, we're proud of our impact and committed to growing our reach and helping every student thrive.

### What we delivered in 2024/25

**2595** enrolments in our QMPlus hub

**236** embedded workshops delivered

**500+** elective workshop attendees

**296** one-to-one appointments

**1018** hours of PASS engagement

**238** attendees to our drop-in sessions



## AI for student learning

Following its successful launch in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, the QMPlus AI resource to provide a basic understanding of constructive and ethical AI use was extended to students in Science and Engineering, Business and Management, CCLS, and all pre-sessional cohorts, with nearly 5,000 students engaging with the content and 1,171 completing certificates.

Over 80% of respondents were satisfied with the content and activities, noting both the practical applications of AI and a clearer awareness of its limitations and ethical considerations.

Participant feedback: *'I thought it was useful to understand that not all aspects of using AI is bad ... but rather, a helpful tool that should be used with understanding and awareness.'*

## AI literacy workshops for staff

Library Services training sessions on generative AI (GenAI) to staff and postgraduate research (PGR) students cover tool evaluation, ethical use, academic integrity, limitations, and the transformative potential of GenAI in higher education and research, with a strong emphasis on critical and responsible engagement.

To date, eight sessions have attracted 139 participants. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants valuing the interactive, hands-on approach and the opportunity to reflect on wider implications while exploring new tools and functionalities.

## Welcoming our users

During Welcome Week, the library team revamped its student engagement approach, creating a welcoming, interactive, and memorable experience.

Through fun activities like a roulette wheel, scavenger hunts, and prizes, combined with practical support such as tours and inductions, students explored Library Services in an enjoyable way while connecting with wider campus services.

Visits to the Welcome Week stall rose by over 400% compared to the previous year.

This success strengthened student-staff relationships, fostered a positive study environment, and showcased the creativity and expertise of frontline colleagues. This work gained sector-wide recognition, with invitations to present at a national library conference, influencing broader discussions on student engagement and service development.



## Collaborating and working with our student community

### Library Student Partners

In January 2025, we recruited five Library Student Partners (LSPs) as part of our Access and Participation Plan (APP) funded work to support student transitions. The LSP roles were developed to include students as collaborators in the development of initiatives to improve student experience.

The LSPs have refreshed the Get Ahead webpages that support student transitions into university, helped establish practices for future collaborations, and created a series of events to welcome new students to Queen Mary in 2025/26.

The LSPs also developed the *Life as a Student* board game to give Year 12 students an engaging, hands-on introduction to university life. The game simulates a semester where players face realistic academic and personal scenarios, explore support services, and discuss timely topics with fellow players.

*Life as a Student* shows the power of creative, student-led approaches in demystifying higher education and supporting widening participation goals. Although it was created for a specific Year 12 event, due to its success it is being used in upcoming Access to Queen Mary and Get Ahead events.

**812** students played the *Life as a Student* game over six days

**91%** agreed that the game helped them understand what university life might be like

**93%** of participants said that they enjoyed playing the game

**90%** said they learned about services or skills that could help them to succeed



### Student collaboration on exhibition at Mile End Library

This year, we launched our first student-curated exhibition in collaboration with School of the Arts PhD candidate Tong Zhao: Zeng BaoSun: A Modern Chinese Woman and the Legacy of an Educational Pioneer. Zeng, a Westfield College alumna, was the first Chinese woman to earn a University of London degree (BSc, 1916), and later founded a women's school in China.

The Archives and Special Collections team supported the project with curatorial guidance, historical records, and preservation expertise, while Tong contributed original translations of traditional Chinese texts. Her research has informed updates to how we catalogue Chinese-language materials, including the way we refer to Zeng BaoSun, enhancing access for future researchers.

We also hosted exhibition tours as part of the Student Union's Asian Heritage Month celebrations. Reflecting on the experience, Tong shared: "*It's like a sense of belonging... You're connecting with individuals you've never met, learning their life journeys while on your own.*"

## Our digital footprint

As part of the Library Services Enhancement Project, the Digital Transformation initiative has focused on refreshing and improving key aspects of our online presence. This work was informed by feedback from students in the School of Business and Management, as part of the Consult Programme, who acted as consultants and reviewed our digital services. Taking their insight and feedback on board, we have improved our online presence to include more precise, more accurate, and up-to-date information.

We streamlined website content to improve usability, removing outdated pages and broken links, reducing the total number of webpages, and enhancing the site's appearance. On our online bookings platform, we added photographs of the group study rooms and provided further details about available equipment and room access. These updates enable users to plan and book their study spaces more effectively. We also added direct links to one-to-one support sessions and workshops, bringing together key services in one easily accessible location.

## Spaces

### Developing our library spaces

This year we have continued to invest in library spaces across our campuses, ensuring they remain safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments that support student wellbeing, academic success, and sustainability.

At Whitechapel Library, major structural improvements were delivered to safeguard the building's long-term future, including critical repairs. The roof and drainage systems were focused on, and one of the stained-glass windows was restored off site at heritage specialists. The library remained fully operational throughout, with close coordination between Library Services, Estates, and Security ensuring minimal disruption during peak periods.



The apse area was transformed into a Wellbeing Zone in response to student feedback. The space now features soft furnishings, individual study pods, planting, and a Time Out reading-for-pleasure collection designed to encourage mindful breaks from academic work.

Accessibility enhancements have also been made, after receiving user feedback that the library was hard to navigate for those with accessibility needs. Following the updates, one user sent in unprompted feedback, praising the site for its overall ease of access, demonstrating that improvements have created a more inclusive environment.

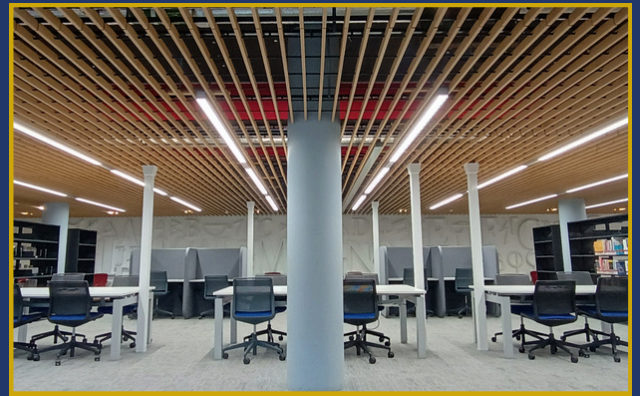
At West Smithfield Library, the basement study area underwent a refresh that balanced sustainability with comfort. Existing furniture was repaired and reused while new planting and artwork create a more inviting and functional study environment. The Barts Collection has been moved into the ground floor reading room, highlighting the collection to users and creating a studious atmosphere.

Following a comprehensive usage review, the Teaching Collection at Mile End and the DVD holdings have been incorporated into the main collection to allow for increased study space on the ground floor, and better browsability of texts. Reading list materials are now more effectively supported through online lists in Talis Aspire, which integrate a variety of formats and provide flexible access to core content.

The vacated ground floor space has been transformed with inclusivity and wellbeing in mind. The Calm Zone provides a supportive environment for neurodivergent users who may prefer to study in spaces with fewer distractions. Within this area, a dedicated calm space was introduced, offering fidget toys, sensory items, and a low stimulation setting for students needing a break from study pressures.

Alongside this, we have included our exhibition cases and have expanded the Time Out Collection, which is closely aligned with EDI celebration months and highlights diverse voices. Developed in response to student and staff recommendations, the collection reinforces the library's role as a space that values representation, belonging, and wellbeing.

Following feedback, we have updated signage to reflect the zoning of study spaces across all library sites to guide users in how to choose the best study space for their needs. We have also made some changes to the zoning of spaces within Mile End Library. These changes were received positively, with noise complaints in some areas decreasing by 78%. Enquiries at our information points or queries to our library colleagues regarding noise also reduced by 35%.



# Research

## Discovery of rare book

We have rediscovered within our collections a first edition of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. This volume is of particular interest as it contains the original 'whale-bear' story which is revised over later editions, and the misspelling of the word 'species' on page twenty, which identifies it as a first edition, prior to this being corrected.

As we continue to catalogue our rare books and understand these collections better we can utilise them more effectively for research and education.

## Open Access

Open access continues to grow strongly year after year. In the past year alone, the number of deposits to the institutional repository increased by 18%. Thanks to new publishing agreements, we've been able to make open access possible for many more researchers — including those without dedicated funding for publication costs.

As a result, the number of unfunded papers published open access has surged, contributing to a 108% overall increase in supported outputs. This marks a major step forward in making research more accessible and equitable for all.

## Preparing for REF 2029

Library Services has been actively gathering feedback from pilot research assessments across all faculties, focusing on user experiences with output selection, reviewing, and reporting.

The trial revealed specific challenges around Practice Research, which have been escalated to REF data and strategy groups, where Library Services staff play an active role.

These activities are helping to shape preparations for the REF2029 submission, ensuring systems, processes, and support are responsive to researcher needs while guidance continues to emerge on user experiences with output selection, reviewing, and reporting.



Academic feedback: “The Open Access team and, Chloe in particular, have been always... [a] great help. Very rapid response and clear guidance. Always sorted any issues quickly and effectively...”

# Recognition

## Customer Service Excellence Accreditation

We are delighted to share that our service has been awarded Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation for the first time. This is a significant achievement that recognises our commitment to providing outstanding service across all areas of our work.

The CSE accreditation is an externally moderated national standard, which rigorously assesses how well organisations understand and meet the needs of their customers. Achieving this accreditation demonstrates that our service meets 57 criteria for delivering exceptional customer service to staff, students, visitors, and the wider Queen Mary community.

We are especially proud to have been awarded a Compliance Plus in recognition of the excellence of our website, following the work noted above on our digital footprint.



## Notable events

### Exploring Black History in Queen Mary Archives

In collaboration with Queen Mary Students' Union, the Archives hosted its second Liberation Month event, in October 2024, spotlighting Princess Tejumade Alakija, an Ife Princess from Nigeria who studied at Westfield College in the 1940s. The event showcased original records and untold stories from Queen Mary's Black history.

94% of attendees said that they learned something new and 88% rated the experience highly, feedback praised the engaging display and access to rare archival materials. Attendees asked for more events like this, highlighting growing interest in uncovering and celebrating diverse heritage.

### International Women's Day: Charting Diverse Career Trajectories

In March 2025, the Library EDI Group hosted a panel discussion featuring women from diverse fields at Queen Mary.

The presenters shared their career journeys, offering insights and practical advice for navigating the world of higher education and beyond, and feedback on the event was overwhelmingly positive.

*"It was wonderfully inspiring and personal. I found the stories really useful in understanding that the challenges I face (as a women in academia, as a single mum) are shared.... I wish we could have more sessions like this!"*

*"I was struck by the openness of the panel and the various ways their career paths and choices have been affected by their gender... [they] were very frank in their reflections, and I found it gave a healthy context to my own swirly career."*

## Professional Engagement and Sector Leadership

Staff across the team contributed actively to the wider library and information community through a variety of leadership, advisory, and collaborative roles. Highlights include participation in key national groups such as RLUK, SCONUL, and CSGUK; leadership positions in sector task groups and professional networks; and contributions to sector-wide initiatives on topics ranging from AI and information literacy to workplace standards and neurodiversity.

Several team members also held treasurer or committee roles in professional bodies, delivered lectures, and supported mentoring and buddying schemes. Notably, Sarah Molloy, Head of Research Support, is a co-investigator on the AHRC-funded Enact project, working with national partners to scope a practice research repository.

In addition, Paula Funnell (Academic Skills And Liaison Librarian) has a published chapter 'Student Perspectives on the Impact of GenAI' in the *Institutional Guide to using AI for Research* (2025) and Dan Herbert (Library Building Development Manager) has published a chapter in *Assessment Methods to Conduct Successful Library Evaluations* on his work improving the user experience at Whitechapel Library.

