

A Students' Jury on Pandemic Learning

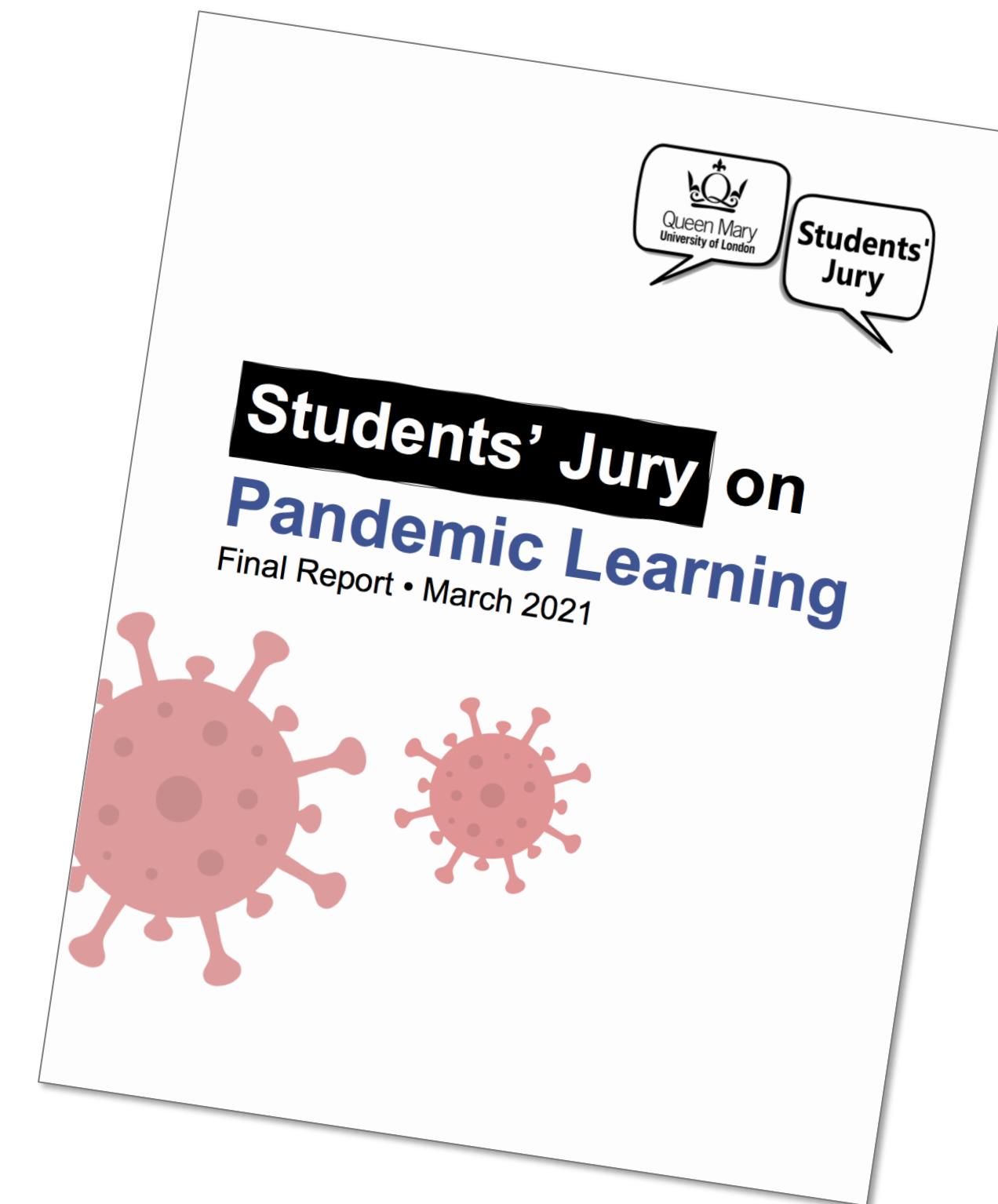
Democratic Innovation in the School of Law

Democratic innovations like Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Juries have proliferated globally and established new avenues for inclusive, thoughtful, and effective democracy. Drawing inspiration from these "deliberative mini-publics", the School of Law pioneered a **Students' Jury on Pandemic Learning** in March 2021 to solicit informed, deliberative student input on legal education during the continuing public health crisis.

Twelve undergraduate students were randomly selected through a 'democratic lottery' to ensure that the Jury was descriptively representative of the student population. They then engaged with a variety of **stakeholders and experts** (e.g. teaching staff, public health and digital education experts, and national staff/student union national presidents), reflected on their own views, and deliberated with one another about **the best interests of the School community**.

Co-Creating a Learning Environment

As captured in their Final Report, the Students' Jury agreed upon **thirteen recommendations** and provided insight into *why* those recommendations were important and *what* supporting actions could be taken. These recommendations were presented to the School of Law leadership and at several staff forums, and went on to inform subsequent pandemic planning among management and staff. Student recommendations focused on a variety of issues like transparency, flexibility, support, inclusion, and workload for both staff and students alike.



"Now I feel part of the University, a lot more than I did before. [The Jury] had a big impact on making me feel part of the community."
– Student Juror

Civic Experience and Legal Education

Among other revelations, a subsequent empirical research project has demonstrated that participation within this exercise in deliberative democracy gave rise to **important civic experiences among student jurors**. This included jurors experiencing:

1. Increased **knowledge** and **deliberative capacities**, such as genuine listening and articulating views
2. A more **collective identity and orientation**, including greater empathy and sense of community
3. Increased **political confidence and readiness to participate**, both inside and beyond the university

Future Impacts

The Students' Jury experience has since helped inspire discussion and action regarding similar initiatives at other universities, including an upcoming project at the LSE Student Union.

The Value of Civil Society Collaboration

Importantly, the Students' Jury project involved close collaboration with a number of democracy-focused civil society organisations which brought their expertise and added independence to student learning and deliberations.