Disability Action Committee

1 December 2016
14:00 – 16:00
Boardroom, Faculty Building, South Kensington campus

Minutes

Present:
Mr John Neilson  
Chair and College Secretary and Registrar (JN)
Mr David Ashton  
Academic Registrar (DA)
Ms Dawn Beaumont  
Faculty IT Support Manager (DB)
Ms Mary Bown  
Head of Disability Advisory Service (MB)
Mr Kevin Cope  
Head of Building Operations (KC)
Dr Lorraine Craig  
Academic Tutor and Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching, Earth Science & Engineering (LC)
Ms Emily-Jane Cramphorn  
ICU Deputy President (Welfare) (EC)
Professor Sue Gibson  
Director of the Graduate School (SG)
Ms Wendy Gould  
Deputy Faculty Operations Officer, FoM (WG)
Ms Ailish Harikae  
Secretary (AH)
Ms Laura Lane  
Manager of the Graduate School (LL)
Ms Claire O’Brien  
Director of Occupational Health (CO)
Ms Leyla Okhai  
Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (LO)
Ms Sarah Shemilt  
Chair of Able@Imperial (SS)
Mr Jon Tucker  
Faculty Operating Officer, ICBS (JT)
Professor Denis Wright  
Director of Student Support (DW)

Agenda Item

1.0 Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed the committee to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies were received from Michael Bearpark, Janette Beetham, Benita Cox, John-Paul Jones, Louise Lindsay, Richard Martin, Myra McClure, Kate Nash and Roddy Slorach.

2.0 Minutes and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were deemed to be an accurate record of events.

2.2 There were no matters arising.
2.3 The action tracker was considered. The following points were noted:

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 3.4)** MB confirmed that the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) website was in the process of being updated to reflect the latest guidance on the Disabled Students Allowance and would be live soon.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 4.3)** KC told the committee that DisabledGo had updated its database for South Kensington, as well as including the medical campus buildings. DisabledGo had been mentioned in the Provost’s recent email communication to staff and Comms had added more links to the College website. Staff organising conferences and events were being encouraged to share links with participants. Within Estates Facilities, lunchtime presentations on DisabledGo were being planned to raise awareness.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 5.2)** It was noted that MB would cover student declaration rates in her update under agenda item 6. KC reminded members to make use of the LCD screens and poster boards to help raise awareness and encourage disclosure.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 5.3)** It was noted that sickness absence guidance for PhD students would be covered under agenda item 3.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 5.4)** AH confirmed that the action plan had been adjusted to mention the use of inclusive technologies.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 5.7)** It was noted that LO would provide an update on the actions agreed by the Mental Health Steering Group under agenda item 5.

- **(re: 14 June 2016, minute 7.3)** It was agreed that AH and LO would approach the Business Disability Forum with a view to a representative attending the next meeting.

  **Action: LO/AH**

- **(re: 11 March 2016, minutes 9.2 and 9.3)** It was noted that interruption of study would be covered under agenda item 3.

- **(re: 4 November 2015, minute 5.4)** The Chair asked AH to follow up with Estates Facilities in a year for an update on the addition of useful contact numbers to College ID cards.

  **Action: AH**

### 3.0 Sickness absence guidance for PhD students

3.1 SG thanked the committee for bringing the issue of sickness absence guidance for PhD students to the attention of the Graduate School. She explained that the Graduate School had done some work on provision for PhD students with sickness absence, which had included the areas of well-being and interruption of studies. There had been a feeling that
the rules on the latter were unclear and inconsistent, so a group had been set up to look specifically at this and the Guidelines for Interruptions of Studies document was the outcome. SG and her team were working hard to disseminate this more widely to departments and tutors. She hoped that it laid out the framework in a more straightforward manner. There was now a feeling that attention needed to be given to financing interruptions of studies, especially where these arose from ill health. She confirmed that the Graduate School would be focusing next on this matter.

3.2 LL said that the Graduate School’s priority had been getting the procedure up-to-date. The priority now was reminding departments that the policy was available. LL went on to explain that an interruption of studies stopped the clock on a PhD student’s studies, who would then not be charged a fee during the interruption, but would not receive a stipend. She said that she and SG planned to look at the difficulties around this next year. SG added that there were hardship funds and different arrangements in different departments, and that the Graduate School would now be looking at what was available to students and how decisions were taken.

3.3 DA said that from the point of view of the Registry, the Guidelines for Interruptions of Studies document was excellent and very welcome. He suggested that consideration should now be given to any gaps in provision and support. He wondered what support was available to students returning from sickness absence to ease back into their studies, or to students with ongoing mental health problems.

3.4 LO said that a big concern was living costs, as many students did not have family to support them during a period of interruption of studies. EC agreed that premature returns could also be driven by financial concerns.

3.5 MB made the point that, when students returned after an interruption of studies, they might have a shorter timetable to complete their PhD and be under more pressure. CO flagged that there was no parity in the way adjustments were put in place for staff and PhD students. For staff, phased returns to work were possible after a period of sickness absence, but this wasn’t possible for students, and departments expected studies to be completed within a fixed timeframe.

3.6 DA suggested that it might be useful to consider all the implications of taking an interruption of studies (academic, administrative and financial) and to cover them in the guidance so that students were clear on these from the outset.

3.7 DW asked SG if the implication of clause 4.4.1 in the Guidelines document was that the student support fund would support students during interruptions of studies. SG said that the approach varied across departments and was something the Graduate School hoped to harmonise. The function of the fund, however, was to help students to stay. DA agreed that, without an active status, it was hard for students to access any kind of support. EC said that students could withdraw completely from their studies if they were not able to take an interruption of studies.

3.8 DW made the point that the funding source could have a large impact. Wellcome funding,
for example, considered recipients as members of staff, and an interruption of up to six months was possible, but this was not the same with other funders. SS mentioned that one difficulty students faced was that the minimum length of interruption of studies was a month. However, students with chronic health conditions might need shorter, more frequent periods of time off due to fluctuations in health. EC agreed that the interruption of studies process considered students to be either ‘sick’ or ‘well’, but with chronic conditions this was difficult to apply - and with mental health conditions, people might not be ‘better’. DW made the point that attention should be given to helping students return with a proper care package. MB agreed that, through the DSA, support like mentoring or taxis could be made available. MB asked whether the policy could make it explicit that students could access support through reasonable adjustments and SG said this would be given consideration along with the financial aspects.

3.9 JN thanked SG and LL for attending. He asked them to attend again later in the academic year to report on their progress.  

Action: AH

4.0 Review of Disability Action Plan 2016-17

4.1 Action 1: Increasing disability declaration rate for staff and students

MB confirmed that all new students had been welcomed by the Disability Advisory Service during the settling-in period and that there had been a good response to the communication. Talks had been held across departments and campuses to encourage students to use the DAS, with particular attention given to improving communication with postgraduate students. MB added that the DAS would follow up with KC about using LCD screens for communications. On the staff side, LO advised that a survey on workplace adjustments had been carried out by EDIC in partnership with the Business Disability Forum in October 2016. 55 responses had been received and 70% of respondents were staff with a disability. One of the main adjustments had been working from home. LO confirmed that the full report would be available for discussion at February’s meeting.

4.2 Action 2: Consulting with disabled staff and students

EC told the committee that an election would be held by Christmas for ICU’s next Disabilities Officer. A student had expressed an interest in taking on the role and an election now needed to be held. JN asked if there were any relevant ICU initiatives planned for the year ahead or issues to note. EC said that interruption of studies was a recurring topic of discussion.

4.3 Action 3: Training, Learning and Development

LO confirmed that uptake of the Equality and Diversity e-learning module had increased by 133 since April 2016, largely thanks to Angela Williams (Training and Development Co-ordinator, Estates Facilities), who had mandated the training for staff in her area. KC added that completion of the course was now included in induction and PRDP discussions for staff in Estates Facilities. LO said the course would be included in the
Imperial Essentials programme and was being regularly promoted in the eLearning newsletter, but that more positive encouragement was needed. LO confirmed that the next Calibre course would start in January 2017, and that two taster sessions had been held this term. On the student side, DW confirmed that the Annual Welfare Seminar would be held on 22 March 2017 and that the keynote speaker would be Dr Richard Graham, Clinical Director of the Adolescent Department of the Tavistock Clinic. Dr Graham was a specialist in Technology Addiction and would speak about the influence of social media.

4.4 Action 4: Learning and Teaching Experience

MB confirmed that a new SpLD (Specific Learning Difficulties) tutor (0.4 fte) had started in September 2016 and was working with Autism Spectrum and other SpLD students.

4.5 Action 5: Improving support and awareness for those with disabilities

LO advised that EDIC was working closely with Comms to promote Celebrating our Diversity Week, a week-long celebration of diversity taking place from 30 January to 3 February 2017. Events would include an exhibition of Imperial’s diverse staff and their contributions, featuring staff with disabilities. There would also be a panel discussion, involving successful role models. Able@Imperial would be promoted throughout.

4.6 MB told the committee that DAS was working hard to raise awareness of the benefits to students of accessing support. Periodical dyslexia roadshows and similar events had been effective. JN noted that 540 students had declared a disability to the Registry but not to DAS. MB said that this was occasionally because students made mistakes on their UCAS forms. However, it was more often because students didn’t feel they needed any support or were concerned that accessing support would have a detrimental effect on their studies. She said that the gap was getting smaller each year and that DAS sent periodical, targeted emails to these students (e.g. with invitations to talks or open sessions).

5.0 Mental Health Steering Group – Update on Recommendations

5.1 LO told the committee that the Mental Health Steering Group, a time-limited working group established in October 2015 to raise awareness and embed best practice on mental health, had made a number of recommendations to the Provost’s Board. These included: holding action enquiry groups on mental health as part of a wider programme of action enquiry following the Gender and Institutional Culture research; improving awareness of mental health first aiders through signage in departments and coloured lanyards; working towards having five trained internal mental health first aid instructors; making student counselling available at Charing Cross campus; and making adequate support available at White City for its first cohort of undergraduates. She said that the Health and Safety Consultative Committee (HSCC), chaired by Louise Lindsay, would oversee the actions arising from the Mental Health Steering Group and lead ongoing work on raising awareness.
5.2 DW made the group aware that he was waiting for the Faculty of Medicine to provide a suitable space for student counselling at Charing Cross. He also advised that there had not been any requests for counselling there as yet, but expected that once the service was available it would generate interest. He said that, overall, there had been a 30% increase in students wanting counselling at the College, reflecting the pattern more generally across HEIs. It was therefore important that resources were used effectively. He added that the counselling service had grown to meet increasing demand and that a second student mental health advisor would start in January 2017. WG said that she would follow up with Martin Lupton on space at Charing Cross.

**Action: WG**

5.3 LO reported that there were now more than 200 trained mental health first aiders across College. LO and CO had developed an online form that would be circulated to first aiders in December 2016 to capture data on whether people were using their skills and what kind of ongoing support they felt would be useful. LO mentioned that consideration was being given by the HSCC to running an awareness-raising campaign like the Barclay’s *This Is Me* campaign.

5.4 LO asked whether the committee felt that it would be of use to invite a Mental Health Champion to be a member. JN felt that since Benita Cox was both a champion and a member of the DAC, this would not be necessary.

**6.0 Update from the Disability Advisory Service**

6.1 MB told the committee that an internal Reasonable Adjustment fund had been set up to replace the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), which was being phased out by the government. This approach to funding adjustments was faster and more equitable (international students, for instance, could now access support in the same way as home students). As of 1 September 2016, Disability Advisory Service staff were carrying out support assessments to assess what reasonable adjustments students would need to support their studies, and were producing a ‘Suggested Reasonable Adjustments’ document for each student. The DAS could arrange support like note takers, lab support or taxis and purchase equipment through the fund, but had decided not to purchase laptops or standard software, as these were still available through the DSA and through College IT support.

6.2 MB reported that study mentoring support was going to be made available at Silwood Park campus, where a room had been confirmed.

6.3 KC flagged that the space and timetabling policy was now available for comment. He had suggested that consideration should be given to the accessibility and suitability of rooms and MB agreed that some rooms were better than others. It was agreed that MB would arrange for a link to DisabledGo to be added to the DAS website. DW mentioned that some departments were now fully covered by Panopto and EC said students found this resource very helpful. DW said all tutors were being encouraged to use it.

**Action: MB**
6.4 LC commented that, since the DAS had taken over support assessments, the turnaround of assessments had been very fast. MB agreed that advisors were doing assessments within a week, which she then quality checked. The main delay was students not giving final sign off. JN asked whether this was because they were nervous about seeing their support needs in print. MB said she felt it was because they were busy. LC suggested that students with learning difficulties might also be slow to respond to emails.

7.0 Action on Disability – Project Search Initiative - Update

7.1 KC told the committee about Project Search, a collaborative programme between West Thames College and GSK that allowed a group of twelve young people to gain work experience at GSK and become ‘job ready’. Imperial had been approached by Action on Disability about the most recent cohort of participants completing the programme, a talented group of young people who would often be excluded by a standard recruitment process. KC said that Estates Facilities had taken on two participants and that the process was relatively simple. Project Search had provided support to Imperial as the employer and to the participants, who had received coaching throughout the settling-in period. The HR team had supported Estates with the recruitment process.

7.2 KC went on to talk about the two Project Search recruits, Helen Stubberfield, who had taken on a part-time role as Receptionist, and Ali Shah, who had taken on a full-time post as Stores Assistant. Both were based at Hammersmith campus. Reasonable adjustments were made to support Helen and Ali and build their confidence, but both were settling in well and doing an excellent job. KC urged other departments to embrace the scheme, even for maternity leave or temporary opportunities.

7.3 LO wondered whether Helen and Ali would be willing to speak about their experiences. KC agreed that once they had settled in fully, this would be a good idea. SS suggested that the PAs mailing list might be a good place to raise awareness of the scheme. JN thanked KC for an excellent example of positive action.

8.0 Disability Confident

8.1 LO told the committee that the Two Ticks scheme had been replaced by the Disability Confident scheme. The new scheme had three levels and Imperial was currently at level two and would be audited annually. The College needed to ensure that all staff involved in the recruitment process knew about the scheme. The core actions included: actively looking to attract and recruit disabled people (of which Project Search was an excellent initiative), providing an inclusive recruitment process, offering an interview to disabled people who met the minimum criteria (as with Two Ticks), being flexible in assessing people, making adjustments and encouraging suppliers and partners to be Disability Confident. LO said she had met with procurement in relation to suppliers. The scheme required organisations to promote a culture of being Disability Confident and LO said that Imperial’s policies, the staff survey and the work of Able@Imperial were vital here, as were the Calibre Programme and the Dyslexia Champions initiative.

9.0 Update from Able@Imperial
9.1 SS told the committee that, due to time constraints, Able@Imperial would not be running any events for Disability History Month. However, the network was hoping to host a session early in 2017 in partnership with KC and DisabledGo. SS said that ICTV had contacted Able about doing a piece on the Autism Spectrum. MB suggested that SS might want to involve Disability Advisor Charlotte Green, who was a specialist in this area.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 28 February 2017, 14:00 – 16:00
Faculty Boardroom, Level 4 Faculty Building