Disability Action Committee

14 June 2016
10:30 – 12:00
Boardroom, Faculty Building, South Kensington campus

Minutes

Present:
Mr John Neilson           Chair and College Secretary and Registrar (JN)
Ms Dawn Beaumont          Faculty IT Support Manager (DB)
Ms Janette Beetham        Staff Dyslexia and SpLD Advisor (JB)
Ms Mary Bown              Head of Disability Advisory Service (MB)
Mr Kevin Cope             Head of Building Operations (KC)
Ms Ailish Harikae         Secretary (AH)
Mr John-Paul Jones        Head of Communication (JJ)
Ms Louise Lindsay         Director of HR (LL)
Ms Claire O’Brien         Director of Occupational Health (CO)
Ms Leyla Okhai            Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (LO)
Ms Paula Phillips         Executive Officer, Faculty of Medicine (PP)
Ms Sarah Shemilt          Chair of Able@Imperial (SS)
Mr Roddy Slorach          Joint Trade Unions and Disability Advisory Service (RS)
Mr Jon Tucker             Faculty Operating Officer, ICBS (JT)
Ms Jennie Watson          ICU Deputy President (Welfare) (JW)
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 James Balloch, Michael Bearpark, Benita Cox, Lorraine Craig, Wendy Gould, Richard Martin, Myra McClure and Kate Nash.

1.3 The Chair welcomed Janette Beetham, Staff Dyslexia and SpLD Advisor and new Disability Action Committee member. Janette said she had joined the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre in January and that her role involved carrying out needs assessments, raising awareness and helping staff to develop coping strategies. A Senior Associate of the British Dyslexia Association, Janette had experience of working with a range of organisations and with staff in a variety of roles.
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 The action tracker was considered. The following points were noted:

- *(re: 11 March 2016, minute 2.2)* LO said that Network Chairs had been involved in developing the wording for the communication to staff and that this would be distributed shortly.

- *(re: 11 March 2016, minutes 9.2 and 9.3)* No further update was available.

- *(re: 4 November 2015, minute 4.1.2)* KC confirmed that he had reminded the team about adding assistance numbers to College ID cards, but that a timeframe for implementation was not yet available. ID cards were printed using a special type of printer, which was expensive to use and replace. He hoped that by August 2017 it would be feasible to start adding the information.

- *(re: 22 May 2015, minute 9.3)* SS said that there were no further updates.

3.0 Update from the Disability Advisory Service (DAS)

3.1 MB advised the committee that there were 1350 student declarations this year (819 to the DAS and 531 to the College but not directly to the DAS), representing a declaration rate of 8.4% (up 0.9% on last year). Declarations by international students were significantly lower than declarations by home students, as was the uptake of SpLD tutorials. The dyslexia/SpLD team was working to increase awareness of the support available across student groups (e.g. through its newly established twitter feed, group and ‘drop-in’ sessions). Mental health issues were now referred to the Student Counselling and Mental Health Service (SCS), although the DAS and the SCS would continue to work closely on referrals. Funding had been agreed for an additional 0.5 FTE study skills tutor to provide support for students who did not fall under the SpLD umbrella (e.g. autism spectrum students). Interviews were scheduled for July with a view to the tutor starting in October.

3.2 MB said the College would be opting out of the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) process and would provide the majority of support in-house. The DSA no longer funded note-takers, so the College would provide this support through Penopto and department note-takers. DSA funding for lab support and general campus support had also been withdrawn and SpLD support was very likely to follow. Students would have the option to apply for DSA support or to combine this with College support. However, there would no longer be accommodation available for external supporters coming into College. Imperial was the first HEI to take this approach, but Cambridge University and the Royal Agricultural College were likely to follow. It would mean less time wasted on DSA administration, faster provision of support and equality in what was available to home and international students.

3.3 There was concern about what the withdrawal might mean for data collection (e.g. by
HEFCE) or funding. MB said that the HEFCE Disability Premium Allocation was based on numbers of students applying for the DSA, but that Imperial had never been very successful at getting this allocation.

3.4 JJ asked what the pre-arrival message should be for new students. MB said that students would be assessed internally on arrival and should not apply in advance for the DSA. JJ suggested that Andrew Tebbutt and Elizabeth Nixon should be updated to ensure consistency across communications to new students.

**Action: MB**

3.5 JB said that changes to the DSA provided an opportunity to be more proactive about providing support, benefiting the whole community. DW agreed that using technology like Penopto was of benefit to all students. MB said that the DSA opt-out was part of a wider goal of becoming more inclusive. RS hoped it would help remove the stigma about accessing support and encourage more international students to come forward.

4.0 **Initiatives to promote DisabledGo - Discussion**

4.1 KC told the committee that DisabledGo had updated the information on their website about the accessibility of buildings and teaching rooms. He felt there was a need to raise awareness of the service. There were very few links to DisabledGo on the College site and most users were accessing the system through search engines. KC thought that lunchtime briefing sessions within Estates, presentations to Department Disability Officers and exhibition stands would help promote the service, but asked for further suggestions from the committee.

4.2 JJ suggested carrying out an audit of all the links to DisabledGo across the College website to ensure that they were standardised. He also suggested that information on DisabledGo could be included in HR and student recruitment information. JT said it would be useful to include non-expert testers when assessing the links. SS suggested speaking to ICT about search engine optimisation and visibility. LO said that Faculty Web Officers could be made aware of DisabledGo so that links could be added to their pages.

4.3 JJ suggested that he and KC meet again to discuss DisabledGo now that work on the website had been completed. JN asked JJ and KC to update the committee at its next meeting.

**Action: KC. JJ**

5.0 **Disability Action Committee Plan 2016-17 - Discussion**

5.1 JN thanked those who had contributed so far to the plan.

5.2 The following points were made in relation to section 1, *Increasing disability declaration rates for staff and students*:

- MB said she would like to send a communication about the benefits of disclosing to all new students, not just those who had made a declaration. DW added that it
would be beneficial to write to students in early September and again in late October, to tie in with visits to departments. It was agreed that MB would approach Andrew Tebbutt, Director of Student Recruitment and Outreach.

**Action: MB**

- KC proposed that LCD screens across College should be used to encourage disclosure.

**Action: KC**

5.3 The following points were made in relation to section 2, *Consulting with disabled staff and students*:

- SS said she had been approached by a PhD student who had found it difficult to access guidance on sickness absence and funding, which is why SS had proposed this item for the committee plan. MB agreed that it was difficult to extend a stipend during periods of sickness absence, meaning that students had no income in the interim. RS said there wasn't a consistent, College-wide approach or support mechanism- some departments provided assistance and others did not. JT noted that in the Business School, matters were dealt with as hardship cases by the relevant programme manager. He suggested that an approach be made to Laura Lane, Manager of the Graduate School, in the first instance.

**Action: AH**

5.4 The following points were made in relation to section 3, *Training, learning and development*:

- LO asked the committee to encourage uptake of the Equality and Diversity e-learning module in their areas. She mentioned that Estates were making it mandatory. LL said that it would be featured in Imperial Essentials and CO said it would be mentioned in the staff *Health and Well-being* pages. It was agreed that increasing uptake to 1,000 by May 2017 was a realistic goal for the committee plan.
- LO said that guidance on reasonable adjustments and SWELL (stay well) plans should be incorporated into existing courses (e.g. Two Ticks, courses on Dyslexia and SpLD) rather than developing a new course.
- RS suggested that raising the profile of Disability Equalities Training should be included as an action. The course, which covered disclosure and barriers to disclosing, had been delivered to a number of groups (including the Registry and Department Disability Officers) and feedback so far had been very positive.

5.5 The following points were made in relation to section 4, *Learning and teaching experience*:

- DW felt that the wording of the action on ‘proactive processes and practices relating to disability’ should be improved.

**Action: DW, AH**
5.6 The following points were made in relation to section 5, *Improving support and awareness for those with disabilities*:

- JJ suggested that Comms should build profiles to improve the image of equality.
- JT suggested that reference should be made in the committee plan to the launch of the Staff Supporters Scheme.

5.7 It was agreed that the actions proposed in section 5, *Raising visibility and acceptance of mental health*, should be agreed at the next meeting once the Mental Health Steering Group had reported on its findings and recommendations.

**Action: AH**

5.8 JN asked the Secretary to update the committee plan to reflect the suggestions made above. A column should also be added to record ongoing actions.

**Action: AH**

6.0 **Update from Able@Imperial**

6.1 SS told the committee that the lecture on 22 May by Steve Silberman, author of *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*, had been very successful. 100 people had attended, including staff, students and external guests. SS hoped to arrange another event with Steve Silberman, specifically for managers, later this year or early in 2017.

6.2 SS said that a note had been circulated via *Staff Briefing* to make staff aware that becoming an Able committee member need not be a long-term commitment and that staff could take on roles for a limited period. She said Able was planning to work with I600 and Imperial As One to re-launch the staff networks at the start of next term.

6.3 SS reported that she had participated in this year’s Calibre Programme and had found it to be an excellent programme. As a result of the course, she was taking forward a project on leadership and disability, for which executive sponsorship would be very useful. She had mentioned this at the last Equality and Diversity Committee and there was a willingness to help.

7.0 **Any Other Business**

7.1 CO reported that Adrian Dorrington, Chief Fire Officer, had finalised new PEEP (personal emergency and evacuation plans) templates and that these were now available on the Estates webpages (with links from the EDIC website). The templates included guidance and worked examples for staff, students and visitors. The Fire team would support the process but line managers and Safety Officers would be responsible for implementation in their areas. Copies would be retained by the Fire team, DAS and EDIC. The Return to Work meeting checklist now included a prompt about PEEPs, as did the induction checklist. LL highlighted that PEEPs do not just apply to permanent restrictions, but also to acute conditions that affect mobility (e.g. a broken leg).
7.2 Further to discussions at the last meeting on errors in the HESA 2014-15 return, AH advised the committee that HESA were unwilling to accept an amendment from Malcolm Edwards and his team on the number of full-time first degree students receiving the Disabled Students Allowance. HESA had emphasised the importance of ensuring that data are correct when the student return is made.

7.3 LO advised the committee that EDIC was hoping to coordinate a joint event with the Royal College of Music and the Business Disability Forum for Dyslexia Awareness Week (3-9 October 2016). LO suggested inviting the Business Disability Forum to speak at the next committee meeting.

Action: AH

DATE OF NEXT MEETING
Thursday 1 December 2016, 14:00 – 16:00
Faculty Boardroom, Level 4 Faculty Building