Disability Action Committee

4 November 2015
10:00 – 12:00
Faculty Boardroom, Faculty Building

Minutes

Present:
Mr John Neilson Chair and College Secretary and Registrar (JN)
Mr James Balloch Deputy Academic Registrar (JB)
Dr Michael Bearpark Reader in Chemistry, FoNS (MB)
Mrs Mary Bown Head of the Disability Advisory Service (MB)
Mr Sean Conner Digital Media & Communications Officer, FoE (SC)
Mr Kevin Cope Head of Building Operations (KC)
Dr Lorraine Craig Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching (LC)
Ms Maria Ellis Digital Partner, Central Services & ICBS (ME)
Ms Bernadette Gahan Deputy Chair of Able@Imperial (BG)
Ms Wendy Gould Deputy Faculty Operations Officer, FoM (WG)
Professor Joanna Haigh Co-Director, Grantham Institute (JH)
Mr John-Paul Jones Head of Communication (JJ)
Ms Allish Kerrigan Secretary (AK)
Ms Louise Lindsay Director of HR (LL)
Mr Richard Martin Faculty Operating Officer, FoE (RM)
Professor Myra McClure Senior College Consul (MM)
Ms Claire O’Brien Director of Occupational Health (COB)
Ms Leyla Okhai Equality & Diversity Manager (LO)
Ms Sarah Shemilt Chair of Able@Imperial (SS)
Mr Roddy Slorach Joint Trade Unions (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 Mr Dean Pateman, Ms Dawn Beaumont, Dr Benita Cox and Ms Trudy Breuss.

2.0 Minutes and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were deemed to be an accurate record of events.
3.0 Review of the DAC Plan 2015-16

3.1 The Disability Action Committee Plan 2015-16 was considered. The following updates were noted:

Increasing disability declaration rate for staff and students

- LL explained that there had been an increase in general updates to staff records following a communication from Heads of Department, but that this had not led to an increase in levels of declaration of disability.
- DW advised that data for students was not yet available for October 2016. He noted, however, that the declaration rate was increasing year on year and that the figure for June 2015 was 7.5%, just below the STEM average. Information about declaration had been included in the e-induction for new students and the Disability Advisory Service contacted all students who had declared a disability before the start of term.

Consulting with disabled staff and students

- LO advised the Committee that revised guidance around the use of the Bradford Index and Wellness Recovery and Action Plan plans was being developed by HR.
- KC said that Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans needed further follow up and discussion. Since declarations were increasing, he felt that demand was also likely to increase.
- JW told the committee that ICU's Disabilities Officer had worked with MB and the Disability Advisory Service to develop and circulate a questionnaire to all students who had declared a disability. The Chair asked JW to share the findings at the next meeting.

Action: JW

Training, Learning and Development

- LL told the committee that new PRDP documents had been launched. These encouraged line managers to take the opportunity to enquire about health concerns and reasonable adjustments.
- LO advised that the equality and diversity e-learning course was now live but was not being widely accessed. She encouraged members to promote it in their teams. JN added that the course would be promoted in Staff Briefing. It would also become a core elective of the ILMDP and be included in the Imperial Essentials programme.

Learning and Teaching Experience

- KC told the committee that DisabledGo was going to review all teaching rooms in terms of accessibility and resources. Eventually, information would be published on the DisabledGo website, ideally with photographs. KC said he had been working with MB and LO to address accessibility issues as they arose on a case-by-case basis. He said there wasn’t a central budget available for adjustments, but that he put funds aside for this purpose.
• DW explained that a report had recently been made to Senate on Disability Advisory Service activities over the past year. Some of the highlights included: the recent revision of exam arrangements, the availability of Penopto and issues around how long recorded lectures should be stored. The Chair asked DW to provide a list of appropriate proposed actions for inclusion in the DAC Plan 2015-16.

**Action: DW**

**Communicating actions on disability College-wide**

• SS advised that planning was underway for Disability History Month. LO confirmed that Steph Cutler had been invited to speak on 16th December about her experiences of living and working with a disability and encouraged members to attend.

• JJ advised that Reporter andStaff Briefinghad carried stories on Impact. Moving forward, it would be useful to publicise student activity. DW suggested that the annual Student Welfare Event could be covered. The Chair proposed that regular meetings between Comms and ICU would be useful.

**Action: JJ, JW**

**4.0 Update on ICU Mentality Campaign**

4.1 JW told the committee about Mentality, a campaign run by Bethany Davison, a student from Physics, in the previous academic year. Its aims were to raise awareness of mental health and the support services available at Imperial, as well as to reduce stigma by making it as easy as possible for students to get help. The report’s recommendations were:

1. To develop a clear document to signpost students to relevant services

   The new Student Space website had fulfilled this purpose, but JW said that ICU had not collected student feedback on the resource as yet.

2. To improve the provision of counselling

   Although out-of-hours support was already available through Nightline and the Samaritans, JW said that work was needed to raise awareness of these services, possibly by printing contact numbers on the back of ID cards. The provision of counselling at other campuses was another concern raised by the report and JW said she would be working with Rosie Summerhayes (Student Counselling Service) to identify the need for counselling at other sites.

3. For College to make student mental wellbeing a strategic priority

   JW said that Imperial had taken a close interest in the campaign and mentioned that a commitment to wellbeing was included in the new strategy. The Mentality society was in the process of deciding next steps. Training of personal tutors, wardens and ICU club and society volunteers in mental health first aid was also underway.

4. For the Counselling Service to follow up on missed appointments

   JW said it had since been established that this was already happening.
4.2 KC said that including useful telephone numbers on ID cards was feasible, provided that these were public support lines. DW said the idea had been discussed several years ago, but that costs were felt to be prohibitive. JW suggested that it could be rolled out year-on-year for new starters.

4.3 JT said that tutors and line managers often struggled to understand the physical or medical causes of distress. CO said that, in her experience, it was very rare for workplace mental health problems to be purely down to biological reasons, although there was evidence that people with physical health problems were more predisposed to mental ill health. She explained that mental ill health could often be a reactive problem, not solely medical. KC said the important thing was for managers to support people, not to identify the biological causes. DW added that the underlying issues were not always clear. It was agreed that the role of managers and tutors should be to signpost professional support, not to attempt to diagnose conditions.

5.0 Update from the Disability Advisory Service

5.1 Under changes to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), MB explained that students were now required to contribute £200 towards the cost of computers provided by the DSA. Consideration would also be given to installing assistive software on students’ own computers. BIS wanted to reduce cost, increase value and increase transparency. The Disability Advisory Service had found that, once enrolled, some students had difficulty funding this contribution.

5.2 As of 2016, funding for any non-medical support for students (such as note taking in laboratories) was also likely to be withdrawn. Further guidance was expected from BIS in December. Until now, the College had been exempt from obtaining quotes for non-medical support, but this exemption would be removed. BIS felt that institutions providing support through directly employed staff represented a conflict of interest, even though external providers tended to charge more and were often not so well-qualified. MB said that there were practical difficulties around providing suitable rooms at College for external assessors, but that sending students elsewhere could exacerbate anxiety. KC asked whether he could help with the provision of rooms (e.g. under-utilised rooms in the library). MB said that the assistive technology centre in the Library was already used extensively but that there were some concerns around ‘ownership’ of the space.

5.3 RS said the College should take proactive steps to ensure support could be provided despite the withdrawal of funding. He highlighted the importance of ensuring equality of provision for international students. DW said that salary support dependence on the DSA had already begun to be reduced and that this would continue to be addressed. He noted that EU and overseas students were not actually eligible for DSA support. A central College student support fund would actually be more equal. KC suggested that there might be scope to approach alumni about funding for disabled students. JN agreed that the Provostial Fundraiser should be approached.

5.4 DW updated the Committee on the Annual Welfare Seminar, held on 27 May and attended by nearly 90 people, including students and staff. He said that increasing attendance was a priority for next year and that he would work with Comms to ensure
better promotion. Alan Percy, Head of Counselling at the University of Oxford, had given the keynote talk and the findings of Mentality had been discussed.

5.5 MB told the committee that it was the College’s legal duty to provide learning materials in alternative formats should students need them. She recommended that having these available in advance was good practice. DW said that students who had used Penopto found it very helpful. MB made the committee aware that Kings College London had recently advertised for a specialist to develop a more inclusive environment for students; she suggested that this might be worth considering at Imperial.

6.0 Update from the Registry

6.1 Following on from discussions at the last DAC meeting about interruption of study rates, it was agreed that the data required from the Registry were: interruption of study rates by degree type, length of interruption and type of interruption. JB said that he would provide this for the next meeting.

   Action: JB

7.0 Update on Website Testing and Userite Report

7.1 SC confirmed that website user testing had been completed on multiple devices across a variety of audiences. In addition, Userite had carried out an assessment involving eight disabled testers. Feedback was generally positive and the new site was felt to be a big improvement on the old site. Userite’s main recommendations were to develop a site map and to reposition the link to accessibility support at the top of the webpage. Both had since been completed. Some issues were raised by Userite around the semantic structure of headings and labels. Moving forward, SC confirmed that the importance of semantic structure would be emphasised at training for web editors. Several further tweaks were planned in response to Userite’s report and a final certification test would then be carried out. He said the outcome of this would be shared at the next DAC meeting.

   Action: SC

7.2 MB asked whether ‘DragonDictate’ users could be involved in any further testing. SC confirmed that Userite testing was comprehensive and involved a variety of assistive software. MB highlighted that some of Imperial’s staff and students might be using legacy versions and were not necessarily experienced users. She asked whether a list of the software tested (and version) could be made available to the DAC.

   Action: SC

8.0 Update on Mental Health Steering Group

8.1 LO told the committee that a high-level Mental Health Steering Group chaired by the Provost had been established to embed cultural change around staff and student mental wellbeing. At the first meeting on 26 October, it had been agreed that the College would develop a network of Mental Health Champions in Faculties to raise awareness of mental wellbeing issues. Steering Group members had been tasked with considering what the role might look like in practice in advance of the next meeting.
Appendix 2

8.2 There was some discussion around the measures the College had introduced in recent years to bring about cultural change. LO said that awareness-raising events had made people more willing to talk about mental health issues. LL added that preventative measures (like MHFA) and encouraging line manager conversations were also vital. RS made the point that the dominant types of mental ill-health among students and staff seemed to be stress and anxiety; he wondered whether the College’s strategy needed to consider reducing barriers, making it easier for people to come forward and developing a culture where individuals felt safe to disclose an issue. BG added that it was important to focus on individuals and not statistics.

8.3 JN asked for LO to provide an update on the activities of the Steering Group at the next Committee Meeting.

Action: LO

9.0 External Member to join DAC

9.1 The Chair told the Committee that five suggestions had been received for the role of external member to the DAC: Kate Nash (of Kate Nash Associates), Steph Cutler (of Making Lemonade), Graeme Whippy (of Lloyds Banking Group), Geoff McDonald (independent consultant) and Ossie Stuart (independent consultant). It was agreed by all that Kate Nash would be the most appropriate person for the role given her experience of networks and expertise in workplace adjustments, issues that are pertinent at Imperial. It was agreed that LO would approach Kate Nash. This would be an unpaid role.

Action: LO

10.0 Update from Able@Imperial

10.1 SS told the Committee that Able had held its open general meeting on 23 October and that approximately 20 people attended. The theme of the meeting was reasonable adjustments and how they can work in practice. SS had also attended a steering committee meeting of the National Staff Disability Network at the University of Manchester. One of the issues under discussion had been the use of staff surveys. SS suggested that it might be useful to include questions about disability in Imperial’s next all-staff survey.

11.0 Any Other Business

11.1 KC gave an overview of the analytics summary prepared for the DAC by DisabledGo. The number of page views per session were higher at Imperial than at other organisations. However, users tended to access the information through search engines like Google. DisabledGo had suggested that Imperial might want to consider increasing the number of access points available on its own website. JJ said that he would be able to help with this. He also suggested that DisabledGo could be promoted in Staff Briefing to raise awareness of the resource.

Action: JJ

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 11 March 2016, 14:00 – 16:00
Appendix 2

Faculty Boardroom Level 4, Faculty Building