Equality and Diversity Committee

Thursday 24 November 2016
14:30 – 16:30
Faculty Boardroom, Faculty Building

Minutes

Present
Professor Jeff Magee Dean of the Faculty of Engineering – Chair (JM)
Mr David Ashton Academic Registrar (DA)
Ms Mary Bown Head of the Disability Advisory Service (MB)
Ms Suzanne Christopher Senior HR Manager (Staff Engagement) (SC)
Mr Dave Cosgrave Chair & Equalities Coordinator UNISON, Imperial Branch (DC)
Ms Kim Everitt Deputy Director HR (KE)
Ms Wendy Gould Deputy Faculty Operating Officer, Faculty of Medicine (WG)
Ms Ailish Harikae Secretary (AH)
Ms Louise Lindsay Director of HR (LL)
Professor Myra McClure Senior Consul (MM)
Ms Kalpna Mistry Staff Network Coordinator (KM)
Mr John Neilson College Secretary and Registrar and Chair of DAC (JN)
Mr Jarlath O'Hara Managing Director ICU (JO)
Ms Leyla Okhai Head of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Centre (LO)
Ms Sarah Shemilt Chair of Able@Imperial (SS)
Mr Roddy Slorach UCU Imperial Branch Diversity Officer (RS)
Ms Hailey Smith Secretary to Academic Gender Strategy Committee (HS)

1.0 Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed the committee to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to DA and JO, new members attending for the first time.

1.2 Apologies were received from Mr Nas Andriopoulos, Professor Lesley Cohen, Ms Emily-Jane Cramphorn, Ms Kani Kamara, Ms Susan Parker, Ms Melanie Peter, Dr Mark Richards, Professor Denis Wright and Mx Sky Yarlett.

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The Chair recorded the committee’s thanks to Professor Jo Haigh and Professor Washington Ochieng, who had stepped down from the EDC.

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

2.3 The Action Tracker was considered. The following updates were noted:

Staff Survey (May 2016, 2.2)
It was noted that an update on the staff survey would be given at today’s meeting by SC under agenda item 6.
Increasing Visibility of Staff Networks (May 2016, 3.6)
LO told the committee that work was underway on this and that she had met with Lesley Cohen to discuss ideas. ‘Celebrating Our Diversity Week’ (30 January 2017 – 3 February 2017) would also be an opportunity to promote staff networks.

Waiting Areas for Students (May 2016, 4.3)
AH told the committee that concerns about students waiting for counselling and Disability Advisory Service appointments in busy corridors had been communicated to Michael Lytrides, Director of Estates Projects, who was keen to understand whether the situation had improved. MB advised that the Disability Advisory Service had raised its concerns directly with Estates and had put in a bid for two counselling rooms to be split, creating a dedicated waiting area. The difficulty was finding an additional room for the advisers whose office space would be lost. MB confirmed that a space request had been made. JM said that he would raise the issue with the Space Executive.

Action: JM/AH

Annual Equality and Diversity Report (May 2016, 7.5)
JN confirmed that the Report had been presented to the Provost’s Board and Council.

Senior Sponsors for Calibre Projects (May 2016, 8.1)
SS said that she was liaising with Ossie Stuart (Calibre course leader) to develop a framework for sponsorship of Calibre projects, with a view to recruiting sponsors early next year.

Gender Equality for Support Staff (October 2016, 2.2)
KE confirmed that a specific committee was not thought to be necessary and that gender equality issues would be dealt with under the comprehensive Athena SWAN action plan.

Imperial College’s Diversity Pledge (March 2016, 5.6)
KE asked whether committee members were happy with the wording of the Diversity Pledge circulated with the papers, which was the version submitted with the Athena SWAN renewal pack. MM suggested that ‘all groups of our staff and students’ should be replaced with ‘all of our staff and students’.

Action: KE

LGBT students or staff completing research or placements overseas (October 2016, 7.5)
LO said that she was working with Ian Hackford, Safety Department, to incorporate relevant guidance into existing risk analysis procedures.

3.0 Advisory Groups – Updates

3.1 SS told the committee that Able@Imperial’s network action plan for the year ahead was under development. Able did not have any specific events planned for Disability History Month, but would be holding an event in January in partnership with Kevin Cope, Head of Building Operations, and DisabledGo. There would also be several
small events during the year. SS said she had done some work with the DAC to raise awareness of the need for a sickness absence policy for PhD students.

3.2 KM advised the committee that Imperial As One had celebrated Black History Month in October with a small event at the Senior Common Room. Several members attended and some had dressed in traditional clothing. A film showing of Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom had been organised for the same day, but turnout was poor, with just two people attending despite a much larger number expressing an interest. LO said that the event had been publicised in Staff Briefing, but that Black History Month had fallen at a particularly busy time of the year.

3.3 KM told the committee that I600 had applied in September 2016 for the Stonewall Workplace Index, a benchmarking tool used by employers to assess achievements and progress on lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) equality in the workplace. Although Imperial was unlikely to be among the top 100 employers, KM hoped to see an improvement in the College’s position compared to 2015. In addition, a Stonewall survey had been circulated to all staff networks to gather views on LGBT inclusivity in the workplace. JM asked if there was any update on renaming the network and DC reported that there had been discussions about introducing a more obvious and inclusive name, but that no decision had been made.

4.0 Disability Advisory Committee – Update

4.1 JN reported that the DAC would be finalising its action plan for 2016-17 at its upcoming meeting on 1 December 2016. The plan included objectives on the following: increasing disability declaration rates for staff and students; consulting with disabled staff and students; training, learning and development; learning and teaching experience; and improving support and awareness for those with disabilities. He advised that a survey on workplace adjustments had been carried out in partnership with the Business Disability Forum and that the results would be available in February 2017. He also said that there were plans for AON to make a presentation to the College on their work on supporting staff with mental health issues.

4.2 LL advised that following the recommendations of the Mental Health Steering Group, mental health activities would now fall under the remit of the Health and Safety Consultative Committee. Moving forward, this group would be used as a forum to rotate focus groups on topics of interest around physical and mental health and would involve participants for each topic with experience of the issues.

5.0 Imperial College Union – Update

5.1 JO reported that some of the work of Felix this term had been very good; the edition for Black History Month had been interesting and well-received, as had a feature on women’s rights. He said that ICU would be re-opening elections for a Disabilities Officer (currently vacant), as a student had expressed an interest in taking on the post. In addition, Emily-Jane Cramphorn, Deputy President (Welfare), was working with the Disability Advisory Service on its Inclusive Learning Strategy. More
generally, ICU was considering how best it could support its Liberation Officers and student body. The recent Funding Access Report had highlighted the risk of funding changes for disabled students. MB asked if the report contained any wider data for comparison and JN said that he would share it with MB.

Action: JN

6.0 Staff Survey – Update

6.1 SC told the committee that the third all-staff survey would be launched in February 2017. In July and August 2016, an extensive tender process had taken place and the College had appointed ORC International, a major provider of staff satisfaction surveys with experience in Higher Education and the public sector. A kick-off meeting had been held in October to develop the question set. The Provost’s Board had approved the approach to the survey and a steering group was in place to have governance and strategic oversight of the process. There was a working group involving a number of stakeholders (including the Trade Unions and EDIC) and this had contributed to the development of the question set. The next draft was due in December.

6.2 SC went on to confirm the timeline for the staff survey, which would be launched on Monday 27 February 2016 and would be open for three weeks. This could be extended if necessary. The survey would be available online, in paper format and respondents could also participate by telephone. ORC International would report on results promptly, with high level feedback available within two weeks and detailed reports several weeks later. This would allow more timely action planning than in the past.

6.3 WG asked SC whether department-level data would be available and SC confirmed that it would.

6.4 JM commented that Provost’s Board had emphasised the need for timely feedback; he was pleased to hear that there would be a quicker turnaround than in the past.

6.5 SS asked whether it would be possible to benchmark results against previous surveys. SC said that benchmarking would be possible for many questions and that questions in relation to College strategy and mental health and well-being were new. ORC also benchmarked externally against other Higher Education Institutions.

6.6 SC took the opportunity to tell the committee about the Staff Supporter Scheme, an initiative designed to help staff access support and guidance. The last staff survey had highlighted that staff did not always know where to get advice and this initiative would help address that. Twenty-two staff supporters had received bespoke training and were able to provide confidential assistance and signposting. SC urged the committee to raise awareness of the scheme and to encourage staff to call on Staff Supporters as necessary.

7.0 Institutional Culture Report - Update
7.1 LL told the committee that the research on institutional culture carried out by Dr Alison Phipps from the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Sussex would be made available to all staff and students early in December. Staff and students were encouraged to comment and Action Inquiry groups would be convened to discuss the issues raised by the research. LL said there were overlaps with Athena SWAN, the staff survey and other Action Inquiry groups.

8.0 Celebrating Our Diversity Week

8.1 LO told the committee that EPSRC had given the College ring-fenced funds for activities related to equality, diversity and inclusion (excluding Athena SWAN). As a result, a number of activities were being coordinated, including a week-long celebration of diversity to be held from 30 January to 3 February 2017. Events would include an exhibition in the main entrance showcasing the diversity of Imperial’s staff, Nina Nannar of ITN would be chairing a panel discussion on equality and diversity, which would feature successful role models and raise awareness of diverse talent, and a lecture on gender and research was to be given by the Vice-Provost (Education). Action Inquiry groups were planned, as was an event at the Graduate School entitled ‘Supporting and celebrating the career development of BAME postgraduate students’ and a research project involving the Post Doc Development Centre.

8.2 JM asked about the publicity campaign for the week and LO explained that Comms were working closely with EDIC to coordinate this. JM suggested that the Diversity Pledge could be promoted as part of the exhibition. JM congratulated all involved on an exciting programme of events.

9.0 Women @Imperial Week

9.1 HS told the committee that the next Women@Imperial Week (6-10 March 2017) was scheduled to coincide with International Women’s Day (8 March 2017). She said the event was now an established occasion in the College calendar and would be an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and contributions made by Imperial’s staff and students to the College, science and their professions.

9.2 HS outlined the key events, which included a panel discussion involving industry partners exploring how they support female staff; the launch of ‘Women at Imperial College: Past, Present, Future’ by the College Archivist, Anne Barrett; and a school’s event coordinated by Outreach. There would be social media promotion throughout and HS encouraged committee members to let her know about any local activities so that these could be promoted on the website.

9.3 JM congratulated HS on a comprehensive programme of events and thanked her for attending.

10.0 Equality Objectives – Discussion
10.1 KE invited committee members to share their thoughts on whether the Equality Objectives needed to be updated in any way. She reminded the committee that these would be reported on in the next annual report and were a legal obligation under the Public Sector Equality Duty. She also invited comments on the format of the action plan, which was based on previous years.

10.2 It was suggested that the opening blurb on the College Strategy might be replaced by the Diversity Pledge but it was thought that they were complementary.

10.3 LL made the point that the issue of sexual harassment in universities had received a lot of attention. At Imperial, there were often freedom of information requests around how this matter was dealt with for staff and for students. She wondered whether the committee would consider this issue or whether it would sit elsewhere. JN said that the guidance for students had recently been revised to reflect best practice and that the student disciplinary policy was also under revision. LL suggested that a wider piece of work around cultural change and the institutional environment also needed consideration. KE suggested that this could be considered under Objective 5, enhancing the current working environment, and JM agreed that it would fit well there.

10.4 MM wondered how the College would go about addressing Objective 1, increasing participation of under-represented staff on influential decision-making bodies. KE suggested that a comprehensive analysis of membership of the current decision-making bodies by protected characteristics would be a good starting point, as previous analyses had considered only the most senior-level committees. MM said there were concerns about representation more generally on the committees that made decisions, not just of protected groups. JM said there were staff and student representatives on Council and Senate. LL suggested that one issue might be how information was shared (upwards and downwards); she said that the staff survey would help give people a voice.

10.5 JM asked JN whether the work of the DAC aligned with the objectives and JN said that they aligned well.

10.6 JN suggested that the wording of Objective 7, on widening participation, could be improved. Encouraging applications ‘from a broader range of students’ suggested that there was no breadth at the moment. He proposed that ‘as wide a range as possible’ would be more appropriate.

10.7 SS suggested that an action could be incorporated on increasing under-represented groups in roles at level five and above, widening the focus in Objective 1 from decision-making bodies.

10.8 In relation to Objective 4, which focused on achieving a reduction in the percentage of staff and students about whom we have no data on protected characteristics, DA suggested that care should be taken with the timing of information requests. At the point of registration, which was already a lengthy process, students might not want
to share too much personal or sensitive information (e.g. on disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and international students might not be clear on the purpose. He added that the Registry was keen to work with ICU on improving communication with students around why information was collected and how it was handled. JO made the point that there was an important message for new arrivals from more closed communities around what was acceptable here, but DA stressed that care needed to be taken with the timing. JM proposed that Objective 4 be updated to include giving sensitivity to any data collection.

10.9 KE asked the committee if they were comfortable with the format of the plan and it was agreed by all that the format worked well.

10.10 JM asked committee members to contact KE by Christmas with any further feedback. It was agreed that KE would then update the plan based on discussions and any additional feedback.

Action: KE/All

11.0 Any Other Business

11.1 KE said that Susan Parker would like the committee to discuss whether the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be part of the College’s Diversity Pledge or included in our equality-related communications in some way. JM suggested that SP prepare a short paper on this in advance of a future meeting for consideration by the committee.

Action: SP

Next Meeting:
Friday 17 March 2017, 10:00-12:00