

## **Disability Action Committee**

Monday 1 March  
13:30 – 15:00  
MS Teams Meeting

### **Minutes**

Present:

Mr John Neilson	College Secretary – Chair (JN)
Mr Mark Allen	Careers Consultant, Careers Service (MA)
Mr David Ashton	Academic Registrar, Registry (DA)
Ms Hannah Bannister	Director of Student Services (HBA)
Prof Michael Bearpark	Professor of Computational Chemistry, Chemistry (MB)
Mr Harbhajan Brar	Director of Human Resources (HBR)
Dr Benita Cox	Principal Teaching Fellow, Business School (BC)
Dr Lorraine Craig	Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Engineering (LC)
Prof Stephen Curry	Assistant Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (SC)
Mr Richard Farish	Head of Building Operations (RF)
Mr William Hollyer	Head of Sport, Sport and Leisure Services (WH)
Ms Kani Kamara	Head of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Centre (EDIC) (KK)
Ms Angela Kehoe	Strategic HR Partner, Natural Sciences (AK)
Mr Okan Kibaroglu	Head of Business Operations, ICT (OK)
Ms Susan Littleleson	Deputy Director– Organisational Development & Inclusion (SL)
Ms Kalpna Mistry	Staff Network Coordinator (KM)
Ms Elizabeth Nixon	Internal Communications Manager (EN)
Ms Claire O'Brien	Director of Occupational Health (COB)
Ms Maureen O'Brien	Head of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) (MOB)
Mr Robin Peters	Head of User Services, Library (RP)
Ms Lisa Phillips	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (LP)
Ms Paula Phillips	Institutional Affairs Manager, Medicine (PP)
Ms Adya Rao	ICU Disabilities Officer (AR)
Mr Shervin Sabeghi	Deputy President Welfare, Imperial College Union (ICU) (SS)
Mr Roddy Slorach	Senior Disability Advisor (RS)
Cynthia So	Secretary to the DAC (CS)
Ms Maggie Taylor	Assistant Building Manager (MT)
Mr Jon Tucker	Faculty Operating Officer, Business School (JT)
Mr Tim Venables	Faculty Operating Officer, Engineering (TV)

Agenda Item

#### **1.0 Welcome and apologies**

- 1.1 JN welcomed the Committee to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from: Mrs Chris Banks, Prof Peter Openshaw, and Mr Adrian Mannall. Mr Robin Peters was attending on behalf of Mrs Chris Banks.

1.3 JN mentioned the Able@Imperial Disability Awareness and Support panel discussion that took place on Friday 26 February 2021, with JN, HBR, KK, SC and Prof Sara Rankin as panellists. JN gave a huge thank you to LP and Adrian Mannall for hosting the event, which over 100 colleagues attended.

## **2.0 Minutes of the last meeting 1 December 2020**

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

## **3.0 Matters arising not on the agenda / Action tracker**

3.1 The action tracker was considered. The following points were noted:

- 1 December 2020, minute 5.3 – Taking breaks at work: HBR noted that the Health and Wellbeing Group had yet to meet.
- 1 December 2020, minute 5.5 – Communications piece about workplace adjustments: KK noted that she had not had a chance to meet with EN yet but that EDIC had a newly formed Disability Working Group to go through actions and EN would be invited to join that group to progress this action.
- 25 June 2020, minute 4.4 – Disability Accessibility Project: OK and SL confirmed that the issue of resourcing was to be discussed at the next EDI Strategy Group meeting on 2 March 2021.
- 25 June 2020, minute 8.4 – Calibre Graduation: Dez Mendoza and Ryan Wilson from the 2020 Calibre cohort had been invited to share their presentations with the DAC in the next agenda item.
- 12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Adjustments to student assessment: DA noted that student assessment was still on the list of actions which would be addressed as part of SIMP.
- 7 June 2017, minute 3.2 – Financial implications of interruptions of studies for PhD students: DA noted that the interruption of study piece was in its final stages of being completed.

## **4.0 Presentations from Calibre delegates**

4.1 Dez Mendoza gave their presentation in a recorded video. They explained that they are a nonbinary atypical autistic with OCD, and that they also have partial deafness, persistent tinnitus and chronic asthma. They had chosen to attend the Calibre Leadership Programme because they had encountered various barriers during their probation process. In their personal project, they considered how using the social model of disability and investing in neurodivergent employees by developing their leadership skills can influence a positive outcome for all. They described the barriers that autistic people face, including attitudinal, environmental, and organisational ones. They concluded by saying that post-pandemic, it was essential that the organisation did not return to 'business as usual', and that disabled people have a unique power and knowledge deriving from their experiences. Using their expertise and vision could effect change for the benefit of everyone.

4.2 SC asked Dez whether there were patterns one could discern when it came to neurodivergence and autism that could feed into management training, or whether it was a matter of people being aware of the range and diversity of different people's needs. Dez replied that it was the latter in their experience, and that many

assumptions were made about what it meant to be autistic in the first place, which were projected onto the individual rather than having these conversations with the individual. One of the main things was sensory processing. Dez pointed out the example of noise levels in the Library. It became apparent that some things which were Dez's personal barriers were things which other people struggled with too, whether or not these people were autistic or neurodivergent.

- 4.3 KK stated that she agreed with Dez in terms of ensuring the environment was as inclusive as possible to minimise the need for workplace adjustments. She asked Dez what should be paid attention to in terms of remote working and returning to campus. Dez replied that there was a case for blended and remote working. For some roles, there was a need to be present on site, but Dez took an evening/weekend role because they struggled with the commute to work. They would like to be more actively engaged at work in the daytime, but they were put off by the commute. Any conversations around this would have to include the people who would be affected, and would need to centre the neurodivergent and disabled people any measures would impact. There needed to be more training and support for line managers, a point which was also raised at the Able panel on 26 February. Dez appreciated the Calibre training and thought that something similar tailored towards managers could be beneficial. Dez noted that quite often staff would struggle without speaking out if they felt they were going to receive a negative response to speaking out.
- 4.4 Ryan Wilson gave his presentation in a recorded video. When he was first diagnosed with ADHD, he did not understand much about what it entailed as he had lived with it all his life, but he realised that the issues he was having at work were directly or indirectly related to it. He talked about the medical versus social model of disability and how he figured out a new way of working that suited him. He stated that improving access or work patterns or using new programmes and procedures could help everyone and that it was important to change people's attitudes.
- 4.5 JN thanked both Dez and Ryan for sharing their thoughtful presentations.
- 4.6 RS commented that it was lovely to hear two new people coming forward to talk about the social model of disability in an accessible and understandable manner as it was a very important subject, and it was not the case that anybody should feel bad for inconveniencing others or making things difficult. As soon as an individual declares a disability, the responsibility falls onto the employer, and RS noted that this was something to work on spreading awareness of. SC also thanked Dez and Ryan for highlighting that it was the responsibility of the organisation.
- 4.7 Dez thanked RS and highlighted Neurodiversity Celebration Week on 15–21 March. KK responded that the Week was in the EDIC calendar and that there would probably be a tweet to mark it. SC was not aware of any activities planned for the week but said that it could be noted for future calendars. SC also highlighted that one of the projects funded by the EDI Seed Fund was led by Prof Sara Rankin and was a network to support neurodiverse staff and students across the institutions around Exhibition Road, called Neurodiversity at Albertopolis.

## **5.0 Action plan**

- 5.1 The action plan was considered.
- 5.2 Respond to the challenges of COVID-19:
- There were no comments.

### 5.3 Raise awareness:

- JN asked if there was a plan to run the You Make Imperial campaign again this year. KK replied that there was no specific date fixed but the plan was to run the campaign around the same time as last year, at the end of June or the beginning of July. KK was aiming to focus on the faculties, as there was a stark difference in declaration rates between staff in the faculties and those in central departments.
- LP noted that the Able discussion panel on 26 February had helped many people sign up to the network and they were planning to hold more sessions now that they had more members.

### 5.4 Remove barriers:

- MT noted that the AccessAble re-survey of 20% of the estate, which had been postponed due to the lockdown, should happen in the next couple of months. The Best Practice Guide recommendations from last year's re-surveys had been reviewed and MT had submitted paperwork to the Projects Approval Meeting to make some improvements, largely based around accessible toilets – to put in coat-hooks at the right level, shelves, etc. They were planning to renew the alarms and beacons in all accessible toilets in Ethos and to install signalling back to the South Kensington Security Office. They were also planning to repaint disabled bays outside the Central Library and highlight the change in level on both ends of the ramp at the rear of the Library. All in all, these works would cost around £23,000 (including VAT).

### 5.5 Improve support:

- COB noted that since this time last year, they had not been able to deliver the Mental Health First Aid two-day course, but the team had done sterling work delivering the half-day refresher course, and there had been good uptakes. The refresher course was now a requirement for anybody who had taken the two-day course so people would have the opportunity to refresh. COB had been having conversations with the Learning and Development Centre on how to roll out Mental Health for Managers.
- RS noted that he had attended the refresher training. He suggested that there was a need for a more general course in relation to mental health, as lots of people had had longstanding problems with stress and anxiety under the pandemic, and some people who were making the transition back to campus might be experiencing considerable challenges. There was a need to explore how to support people with these difficulties. COB stated that everybody returning to campus would have the opportunity to have conversations with their line managers, but there were no immediate plans to have a course as such. The needs of these individuals were being considered in the return to campus discussions. HBR stated that the Return to Work group was meeting for the first time on Wednesday 3 March and they would talk about key workstreams, one of which would be about wellbeing and mental health. They would analyse wellbeing survey results to look at key concerns. SL noted that the leadership and management offer was being reviewed to make sure that it was relevant to now, and to help line managers to be able to successfully support and run their teams in a way that maintained positive mental health, so that they could be proactive as well as reactive.

- KK noted that last year, a management briefing session was piloted which was put together by KM and Gabriella Kerr-Gordon. The feedback was good, so they were exploring how to ensure that the briefing reached as far and wide as it needed to. EDIC was also working closely with the Department of Earth Sciences to evaluate the interventions they had put in place to see what would be the best vehicle for ensuring that managers have the support they need. In addition, EDIC was reviewing with Adrian Mannall and Prof Sara Rankin the offering that they had put together in the summer of 2019 – a lunchtime briefing on the neurodivergent community and workplace adjustments – to see how they could knit this activity together. SC suggested that it might be worth doing a short presentation on this work at an upcoming Heads of Departments Lunch. If there was a briefing document ready then, the Heads of Departments could relay that to their staff meetings.

## **6.0 Update on What Happens Next report**

- 6.1 MA gave a presentation about the new What Happens Next report, an annual research piece on the destination of graduates, published by the Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services (AGCAS). In the past 17 years, there had been 14 reports. The 2021 report covered the 2018 cohort of graduates, as there had been some delays due to the pandemic. The Graduate Outcomes survey examined where the graduates were 15 months after they finished their degree.
- 6.2 There was a trend of disclosure going up at the first degree, from 6.1% in 2002 to 15.7% in 2018. The disclosure of mental health conditions in particular had increased greatly over the years, from below 2% in 2002 to 22% in 2018. The disclosure of autism had increased a little, from near 0% in 2004 to 3.7% in 2018.
- 6.3 Consistently, non-disabled graduates had higher levels of employment. The gap between the level of employment for non-disabled and disabled graduates had not lessened over the years. Autistic graduates had a much higher level of unemployment. Out of those employed, autistic graduates were also much more likely to be on a zero-hours contract or to be volunteering. More research was needed to find out why this was the case and how this situation could be improved.
- 6.4 A slightly lower number of disabled graduates were employed in London compared with other locations. Of these, autistic graduates were much less likely to be employed in London. With the exception of SpLDs, graduates with all other kinds of impairments had lower levels of employment in London.
- 6.5 RS noted that care should be taken when talking about disclosure rates in higher education, as SpLDs meet the legal definition of disability as far as education is concerned, but they do not in wider society, so the picture was distorted in terms of statistical returns. A large number of people that the DAS were supporting were people with SpLDs. One group missing from the data was people with general (as opposed to specific) learning difficulties. RS pointed out that in the past few decades, there had hardly been any change in the employment rates for disabled people.

## **7.0 How to engage disabled students / Update from the Imperial College Union**

- 7.1 AR asked for ideas about how to engage disabled students to join the new liberation network. She had contacted the ICU President, Abhijay Sood, about advertising in the ICU newsletter. She had also contacted the DAS to send an email to students who had signed up to the Service, and she had asked the Head of the Inside Imperial newsletter to promote it as well. The email from the DAS had engaged

students to fill out the survey that AR was conducting, but had resulted in few sign-ups to the liberation network.

- 7.2 JN suggested that running an event would help with engagement.
- 7.3 SS noted that the issue highlighted here was that the approach of talking widely to everybody did not work well. For example, the student-wide newsletter and activities that took place during Disability History Month did not translate into proper engagement. He agreed that a big event was probably needed.
- 7.4 SC noted that to get students engaged with any event, it was necessary to be clear about what students would get out of it. He also suggested disseminating information through the Heads of Departments, who would have direct email contact with their undergraduates.
- 7.5 KK offered for EDIC and Able to share their insights with AR about how the Able panel event was set up. KK and AR to have a meeting regarding this topic.

**Action: AR/KK**

## **8.0 Presentation from the Disability Advisory Service**

8.1 MOB gave a presentation about her new vision for the DAS. She stated that the DAS was committed to working with EDIC, Able and the DAC to raise awareness of disability and inclusion for both staff and students.

8.2 Her presentation centred around the following themes:

### 8.3 Drop in, don't drop out:

- Until recently, Imperial had had a high rate of disabled students who discontinue – just above 10% (twice the overall College rate). MOB's aim was for the DAS to make it easier for disabled students to drop in and seek support from their Departmental Disability Officer (DDO) or from DAS before they drop out. This was a serious problem which required serious attention, and staff had begun to consult on this. The DDO group had started considering the reasons for this drop-out rate last year. They thought the following factors could be significant:
  - Time pressures – courses at Imperial were thought to be like a full-time job
  - Fear of being stigmatised – not wanting to be seen by their peers as needing help
  - Resits – it was not easy for students to get them, which led to failure and withdrawals
  - Cultural problems
  - All of the above being aggravated this year and last by the pandemic
- MOB had begun discussions across the College about this topic and was asking students about the issues which impacted on their studies.

### 8.4 It's about data, not dates:

- Imperial had a low rate of disability disclosure compared to the sector average and other sector group institutions (just over 7% at Imperial compared to sector

average of almost 16%). The question was, was this related to Imperial's unique focus on STEM courses, or was there an interesting issue behind this?

- Students coming to Imperial had an aptitude for maths, science, and technology. Was it possible that some students chose those subjects to avoid essay-based A-levels which would have exposed an SpLD? Some students chose not to disclose when they applied – some of them might never disclose and they could be at the greatest risk of dropping out. There was a need to better understand the journey from application to graduation.

#### 8.5 Nothing about us – without us!

- MOB was seeking to talk to students through surveys and focus groups to gain better understanding of their experience and the barriers that they faced. MOB wanted to know if perhaps their procedures made access to DAS too difficult, and how students were juggling time and academic demands. The vision was for student voice to become central to planning.

#### 8.6 Outreach – to everyone

- The DAS had an excellent track record of outreach beyond disabled students, for example the inclusive technology project led by David Mooney. They had held study efficiency sessions for students with no diagnosis of disability – some of those would go on to receive a diagnosis. MOB asked if the DAS could do more and reach out to others who might benefit from targeted support, e.g. care leavers, estranged students, and others. A model of support which worked for disabled students could work for others too.

8.7 MOB concluded by stating that clearing a path for disabled people clears it for everyone. MOB was committed to leading a service at Imperial where inclusion is for everyone, where all students feel supported, with a level playing field from the start and no need for bolt-on adjustments when things go wrong.

#### **9.0 Update from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre**

9.1 KK thanked the Able Co-Chairs for agreeing to join the newly formed Disability Working Group, which would meet in between the DAC meetings to push forward some of the agenda items and actions. They were aiming to have something to report at the next DAC meeting.

#### **10.0 Update from Able@Imperial**

10.1 LP stated that she was very impressed with the Able panel. There was a lot of feedback from staff and the plan was to host another session. She thought that a session with line managers would be a good idea, to find out what Able could do to support them, and she would work with KK to see if there was any training that could be provided. She also had the idea of hosting a coffee session for line managers, so they could drop in and have a confidential chat.

#### **11.0 AOB**

11.1 RP announced that the Central Library building would be closed 12–19 March, to install touch-free self-issue machines which were designed to be accessible. The Assistive Technology Suite would be unavailable during this time. There had been communications going out about this and a FAQ page had been created on the

Library website. RP had also emailed RS about this. RP advised that if anyone had questions or needed further support, they should contact the Library.

11.2 JN thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.