

## Disability Action Committee

Thursday 25 June 2020

14:00 – 16:00

MS Teams Meeting

### Minutes

Present:

Mr John Neilson	College Secretary – Chair (JN)
Mrs Chris Banks	Assistant provost (Space), Director of Library Services (CB)
Mr Harbhajan Brar	Director of Human Resources (HB)
Ms Suzanne Christopher	Senior Employee Engagement Manager (SCH)
Dr Benita Cox	Principal Teaching Fellow, Business School (BC)
Prof Stephen Curry	Assistant Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (SC)
Ms Ailish Harikae	Secretary to the DAC (AH)
Ms Kani Kamara	Head of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (EDIC) (KK)
Ms Angela Kehoe	Strategic HR Partner, Natural Sciences (AK)
Mr Okan Kibaroglu	Head of Business Operations, ICT (OK)
Ms Susan Littleson	Deputy Director– Organisational Development & Inclusion (SL)
Mr David Mooney	Dyslexia and Specific Learning Difficulties Coordinator (DM)
Ms Elizabeth Nixon	Internal Communications Manager (EN)
Ms Paula Phillips	Institutional Affairs Manager, Medicine (PP)
Mr Richard Farish	Head of Building Operations (RF)
Mr Shervin Sabeghi	Deputy President Welfare, Imperial College Union (ICU) (SS)
Mr Roddy Slorach	Senior Disability Advisor (RS)
Ms Maggie Taylor	Assistant Building Manager (MT)
Mr Jon Tucker	Faculty Operating Officer, Business School (JT)
Mr Hilliam Tung	ICU Disabilities Officer (HT)
Ms Leisha Wegg	Active Lifestyles Manager, Move Imperial (LW)

Agenda Item

### 1.0 Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 JN welcomed the Committee to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from: Mr Mark Allen, Mr David Ashton, Ms Hannah Bannister, Prof Michael Bearpark, Dr Lorraine Craig, Mr William Hollyer, Mr Mike Horner, Mr Richard Martin, Ms Kalpna Mistry, Ms Claire O'Brien, Prof Peter Openshaw, Ms Lisa Phillips.

### 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 from the last meeting.

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

- 5 March 2020, minute 2.3 - staff disability declaration: KK explained that, in previous years, EDIC had provided the wording for the invitation to staff to declare a disability, which Faculties would disseminate through Heads of Department according to their own timetables. This year, KK proposed a centrally coordinated campaign, which would focus on all the protected characteristics, to run during July 2020. There was support from the DAC for this to happen.
- 5 March 2020, minute 3.4 - Mental Health at Work Commitment: On behalf of Claire O'Brien, AH reported that Occupational Health and Human Resources had not yet resolved how mental health training for line managers would be resourced. This had been identified as a gap in the College's mental health provision, in relation to the Mental Health Commitment. SL added that, once the recruitment freeze was over, the 0.5 fte L and D role in EDIC might be able to contribute to some extent to this and other EDI related capacity building.
- 5 March 2020, minute 7.3 - staff disability declaration rate - Medicine: On behalf of PP, AH reported that the Faculty Operating Officer for Medicine had been made aware that the declaration rate for Medicine was below the sector benchmark for Higher Education. The Communications team within the Faculty of Medicine would be promoting declaration to staff locally, to coincide with the annual campaign encouraging staff to declare a disability.
- 5 March 2020, minute 7.3 – new Disability Advisory Service Head: AH reported that the recruitment process to appoint a successor to Mary Bown was due to start soon.
- 12 November 2019, Minute 3.3 - accessibility: AH told the Committee that Guy Fairhurst, the Building Manager responsible for Main Reception, was arranging for press buttons to be installed for the door leading to Dalby Court.
- 13 March 2019, minute 4.3 - staff disability support project: KK told the Committee that work was ongoing to address the recommendations, but that EDIC's priority since the lockdown had been moving its training offer online. An interim written report on the Staff Disability Project would be shared at the next meeting, but the main areas where work was outstanding were: the publication of a guidance document for staff, which was under review in response to COVID-19; streamlining interactions with the Staff Hub; new support for line managers, to include an e-learning module and a series of 90-minute forums on workplace adjustments; recommendations around buildings and accessibility. Human Resources had now implemented all policy changes recommended in the report.

**Action: KK**

### **3.0 Disability Action Committee Plan 2019-20**

3.1 The 2019-20 Action Plan was considered.

#### **3.2 Raising awareness:**

- There was nothing to add to the updates recorded in the plan.

#### **3.3 Removing barriers:**

- MT told the Committee that, following the re-survey of the College estate in January 2020, best practice guides had recently been received from AccessAble and would be reviewed by Building Managers. The next re-survey was planned for Autumn 2020 but might need to be postponed due to COVID-19.

- OK reported that the Assistive Technology Enhancement Project remained frozen as a result of prioritising other COVID-19 related ICT projects, but that work was underway to support teaching and learning in the current circumstances, ensuring accessibility in an e-learning environment. DM said that he and Debra Ogden, Acting Director of Student Services, were hoping to re-launch the project and to discuss plans and funding for next academic year. OK encouraged DM to raise this with the Silver Group, the operational group leading the College's response to COVID-19.

#### 3.4 Improving support

- HB made a general point that careful consideration should be given to supporting staff wellbeing on an ongoing and long-term basis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, support for those now working from home needed to be given priority for the moment.
- SS asked whether there was an update on training for academics on inclusive learning and teaching practice, considering the pandemic. SC said that the Education Group was looking at EDI issues in preparation for the new academic year and that consideration was being given to accessibility issues for disabled students, as part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

3.5 The Chair asked members of the Committee to consider actions for inclusion in the 2020-21 DAC Plan. SC suggested that the new plan should include completion dates. The Chair said that the philosophy of the plan was that actions should be completed within the academic year; this year, some work had been delayed due to COVID-19. SL mentioned that information-gathering for the next HR Strategy was underway; she said that she would like to see some alignment across the two plans. The Chair said that a call for contributions would be made over the summer.

**Action: Secretary**

#### 4.0 **Update on Digital Accessibility Project**

4.1 OK reported that the Disability Accessibility Project Board was on track to achieve its objectives by the end of September. The College website and all new sites (e.g. the Business School website) were in good shape, and promotion and communication campaigns were well underway. An institutional statement of intent for digital accessibility was required. In addition, a decision needed to be made on where responsibility would sit for Imperial's Strategy and Roadmap for Digital Accessibility moving forward. OK said he would welcome a high-level message of support from the DAC and for digital accessibility to be included in the next DAC Action Plan.

4.2 OK went on to share the accessibility status of College websites. Approximately a third of 227 sites were 'green status' (i.e. either compliant, not applicable or had been decommissioned). 102 sites (45%) required action (red status) and site owners had been contacted. The remainder were inaccessible (amber) and were in the process of being decommissioned or deactivated. Where action had not been taken to remedy websites, the main reasons were that the site owner did not have the budget or technical know-how to make improvements, or that the technical support that had been available when the site had been established no longer existed.

- 4.3 CB asked whether any of the 'red category' websites were the outputs of research projects, which had been supported by funders; she said that the sustainability of these was a concern across the sector. OK said that most of these were. Support had been provided to some sites (e.g. to develop an accessibility statement). He added that these sites tended not to be heavily accessed but needed to be compliant. SC mentioned that there had been some pushback from some site owners, but that the minimum requirement, to have an accessibility statement, was not a big ask. SC added that oversight of the work of the Project Board by the DAC would be a good idea.
- 4.4 OK flagged that there was not currently a dedicated resource for the work on digital accessibility. In terms of next steps for the project, a clear statement of intent for digital accessibility was needed by the end of September and an ongoing Digital Accessibility Strategy and Roadmap. The Chair said that the DAC could issue a high-level commitment in support of the Digital Accessibility Project. SL suggested that the institutional EDI Strategy Group, whose Terms of Reference had just been refreshed, now had an escalation role. At its next meeting on 8 July, the issue of resourcing for the Digital Accessibility Project Board could be raised, to help build engagement with Deans and the Provost Board.

**Action: SL/OK**

## **5.0 Update on Wellbeing Pulse Survey**

- 5.1 SCH updated the Committee on the Wellbeing Pulse Survey, which had taken place in May 2020 with a view to understanding the impact of COVID-19 on staff wellbeing. There had been 2161 respondents (approximately 25% of staff), the majority of whom (59%) were from the professional, technical or operational job families. The main findings were as follows:
- Most respondents (90%) were working from home.
  - The majority (66%) of respondents had caring responsibilities at home.
  - 17% of respondents (364 staff) had workplace adjustments for a pre-existing condition but more than a quarter of this group (98 staff) said that these were not meeting their current needs.
  - 48% of respondents said that their mental health had been negatively impacted by the impact of COVID-19. However, 66% of respondents were able to manage their mental wellbeing effectively.
  - Heavy workload was an issue for 21% of respondents.
  - Most respondents (78%) felt able to access the information they needed in relation to health, safety and wellbeing.
  - Most respondents (75%) said that their manager was keeping in contact and was supportive of their wellbeing.
  - Most respondents (69%) were managing to take regular breaks from work.
  - Most respondents (65%) had what they needed to work remotely.
- 5.2 SCH shared a breakdown of the results by area. Staff mental wellbeing was lower, and workload was more of an issue, for respondents from the Business School and Faculties than for respondents from FOGIT (Finance, Operations and ICT) Group, Support Services and HQ. There was a similar pattern in relation to access to information and line manager contact and support. Respondents from FOGIT Group were least likely to have what they needed to work remotely.

- 5.3 Survey respondents were asked whether there was anything else that the College / Department / Manager could do to support their health and wellbeing. The main themes identified in responses related to communication, equipment, work environment, workload, juggling work and caring responsibilities, mental health, working hours, annual leave and lack of clarity around the recruitment freeze.
- 5.4 SCH shared a selection of comments received in relation to workplace adjustments. These expressed concerns around the unsuitability of equipment (e.g. screens, chairs, desks and keyboards), which were causing a range of issues including RSI, poor posture and eye strain. The adjustments that people had in the workplace were not available at home. SCH said that a scheme had since been put in place for staff to have equipment couriered to their homes from the office, which she hoped would help the situation. A follow-up survey was planned for later in the summer. SCH said that she would circulate all the comments on workplace adjustments after the meeting.
- Action: SCH, Secretary**
- 5.5 HB added that a College Wellbeing Day, planned for 3 July, was an opportunity for staff to think about their wellbeing. Other measures being developed in response to the survey included new online meeting protocols, no expectation that staff respond outside of normal working hours to email, home working guidance, and new guidance to support maximum flexibility for those with caring responsibilities.
- 5.6 RS said that 98 staff not having in place the adjustments they needed was a concern. He said that many staff did not realise that they could request adjustments or did not think of themselves as having a disability. He suggested that the language used in future surveys could ask more generally about needs, rather than workplace adjustments. He welcomed the opportunity for staff to have equipment from the office delivered to their homes.
- 5.7 The Committee was supportive of a follow-up survey. The Chair thanked SCH for her presentation.

## **6.0 Update on Mental Health Awareness Week**

- 6.1 EN updated the Committee on Comms activity for Mental Health Awareness Week, which ran from 18 – 24 May 2020. As well as publicising the programme of events and activities, the Comms team produced a video, [Your acts of kindness](#), which was shared across a range of media. Taking their cue from the Mental Health Foundation's theme of kindness, Comms had asked staff and students to share their acts of kindness via video clips. Some senior staff were also approached directly and invited to participate. In terms of anecdotal feedback, a lot of people had said that it lifted their spirits and made them smile, which had been the aim.
- 6.2 On behalf of Claire O'Brien and colleagues in the Learning and Development Centre, AH reported that a programme of virtual activities and events had been delivered by OH and LDC for Mental Health Awareness Week, including speed coaching, kindness meditation, meditation for sleep, a managers' wellbeing session, a financial awareness session, wellbeing webinars led by Confidential Care, a working carers session and yoga. A detailed analysis of attendance and feedback had not yet taken place but, in

general, events were rated highly in participant feedback, especially practical sessions such as financial awareness. Overall, there was a sense that staff would like mental wellbeing type offerings to be available more regularly.

## **7.0 Update from Imperial College Union (ICU)**

7.1 SS made the Committee aware of ICU's new accessibility policy, which had been developed as part of a broader review of policies and was due to be discussed at ICU's next committee meeting. The aim of the policy was to formalise ICU's responsibility to make adjustments for students.

7.2 SS also mentioned that ICU was planning a survey of students with disabilities. An area of particular interest was whether digital education offerings were meeting their needs. JN invited SS to share the findings with the DAC at the next meeting.

**Action: SS**

## **8.0 Update from Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (EDIC)**

8.1 KK reported that, as in previous years, EDIC would not be running any training over the summer, which provided an opportunity to review, reflect and plan. The team hoped to offer a full complement of training from the Autumn term, including disability awareness sessions. EDIC were also working with the National Autistic Society to develop a new work needs assessment service and training sessions for managers on autism.

8.2 KK spoke about the Black Lives Matter movement and the attention this was drawing to systemic racism and discrimination, in the UK and globally. She mentioned that Lisa Phillips, Chair of Able@Imperial, had recently participated in a panel discussion, which had given her an opportunity to raise awareness of discrimination in the round and the importance of allyship. She encouraged DAC members to consider how, collectively, the Committee could respond in the spirit of allyship.

8.3 Since the lockdown, EDIC had seen a reduction in the number of staff approaching them for support with workplace adjustments, which was to be expected with most staff now working remotely. KK said that EDIC had contacted individuals they had supported in the past to see whether they needed assistance. In most cases, these members of staff had been supported by their departments in terms of equipment needs.

8.4 KK reported that the Calibre Leadership Programme was running again this year and that there were nine delegates on the course, all from Imperial. Since the lockdown, there had been some remote sessions. The graduation would take place in the Autumn term and DAC members were encouraged to attend. KK said she would share the date with AH to circulate, once it had been confirmed.

**Action: Secretary**

## **9.0 AOB**

9.1 DM mentioned that he had become aware of several issues around changes of location, which had in turn impacted on accessibility (e.g. the re-location of the Chaplaincy). While acknowledging the current emergency, he said that addressing these issues in retrospect was challenging. JN said that, above all, staff organising gatherings had a responsibility to check that the location was suitable and accessible. CB mentioned that

the PLANON room booking system was going to be updated to ensure that all meeting spaces had accessibility information captured.

- 9.2 JN made the Committee aware that a paper was due to go to Council about removing the College's historic Latin motto from the logo, in line with the President's recent statement.
- 9.3 JN recorded the Committee's thanks to Louise Lindsay, who had recently left her role as Director of Human Resources and Organisational Change, for her contribution to the DAC over many years.

**Next meeting: 1 December 2020, 14:00 – 15:30**