

## **Disability Action Committee**

Tuesday 1 December 2020

14:00 – 15:30

MS Teams Meeting

### **Minutes**

Present:

Mr John Neilson	College Secretary – Chair (JN)
Mrs Chris Banks	Assistant Provost (Space), Director of Library Services (CB)
Ms Hannah Bannister	Director of Student Services (HBA)
Mr Harbhajan Brar	Director of Human Resources (HBR)
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)
Mr Richard Farish	Head of Building Operations (RF)
Ms Ailish Harikae	Secretary to the DAC (AH)
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 Littleson	Deputy Director– Organisational Development & Inclusion (SL)
Mr Adrian Mannall	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (AM)
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 (MOB)
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, successor to AH (CS)
Ms Maggie Taylor	Assistant Building Manager (MT)

Agenda Item

### **1.0 Welcome and apologies**

- 1.1 JN welcomed the Committee to the meeting.
- 1.2 MOB had just started at the College as the new Head of the Disability Advisory Service. SS was continuing with the role of ICU sabbatical officer for a second year.
- 1.3 Apologies were received from: Mr Mark Allen, Mr David Ashton, Professor Michael Bearpark, Dr Lorraine Craig, Mr William Hollyer, Prof Peter Openshaw, Mr Tim Venables, and Mr Jon Tucker.

## 2.0 Minutes of the last meeting 25 June 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

3.1 There were no matters arising from the last meeting.

## 4.0 Action tracker

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

- 25 June 2020, minute 4.4 – Digital Accessibility Project: This was to be addressed later in the meeting (see 6.0 below).
- 25 June 2020, minute 5.4 – Staff Wellbeing Pulse Survey: This was to be addressed later in the meeting (see 5.0 below).
- 25 June 2020, minute 7.2 – ICU survey of students with disabilities: This was to be addressed later in the meeting (see 8.0 below).
- 25 June 2020, minute 8.4 – Calibre graduation: JN noted that the Calibre graduation had taken place on 26 November 2020 and the Committee had been invited to attend. It was planned to invite a couple of Calibre delegates to the next meeting of the Committee.

**Action: Secretary**

- 5 March 2020, minute 2.3 – Staff disability declaration: This was to be addressed later in the meeting (see 9.0 below).
- 5 March 2020, minute 3.4 – Mental Health at Work Commitment: On behalf of COB, HBR reported that a group had been set up looking at health and wellbeing, of which mental health would be a key component. The main priority for COB had been the College's test and trace system.
- 5 March 2020, minute 8.1 – Disability Advisory Service: MOB was present at the meeting as the new Head of the DAS.
- 12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Adjustments to student assessment: On behalf of David Ashton, JN reported that there was a plan for a "vision group" under the SIMP programme or the successor to the SIMP programme, and special examination arrangements would be one of the topics that this group would cover.
- 12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Accessibility: AH reported that this had been successful and that there were now push plates on both sides of the door from Main Reception to Dalby Court, with access control that could be switched off at night for security. AH thanked colleagues in Estates for taking this forward, as well as CB for first suggesting this action.
- 13 March 2019, minute 4.3 – Staff Disability Support Project: A verbal update was to be provided by KK later this meeting (see 9.10 below).
- 7 June 2017, minute 3.2 – Financial implications of interruptions of studies for PhD students: On behalf of David Ashton, JN reported that headway had been

made with implications of interruptions for doctoral students. Registry was looking at financial support for all interrupting students and producing new guidance for students considering interruption.

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

5.1 SCH updated the Committee on the second Staff Wellbeing Pulse Survey which had taken place in September 2020 and provided a comparison between the May and September surveys to highlight the hotspots. The response rates had increased from 25% of staff responding in May to 30% (2,646 staff) in September. Every Faculty and department had increased on response rates apart from the Business School, although the Business School had separately surveyed their staff just before the College survey, which might have had an impact. The main findings were as follows:

- More staff were part home working and part campus working. More people needed to work on campus, and the number of staff on the furlough scheme had reduced.
- 82% of staff knew where to go for information on returning to campus or a College location safely. 20% of staff, however, did not know how to raise a concern about physically returning to work.
- There was an increase (from 249 to 326) in respondents who strongly agreed that their mental wellbeing had worsened as a result of the impact of COVID-19.
- There was a large number of staff who needed support with mental wellbeing and workload, with an increase from 122 to 173 respondents who felt their workload was not manageable.
- Fewer people were managing to take breaks during the working day, which was a big concern.
- More staff had what they needed to work remotely.
- It seemed that line managers were generally supportive of staff wellbeing.
- Over 2,000 comments had been received. The common themes were: commuting and transport, safety on campus, health vulnerabilities, work environment, caring responsibilities, workload, and mental health. A workload concerns working group had been set up to address some of these concerns.

5.2 HBR suggested that it might be easier to read the figures if they were expressed as percentages of respondents rather than the number of respondents.

5.3 RS pointed out the issue of people taking breaks at work, and suggested that many people drove themselves harder when they were working at home because they believe they have it easier, and that they do not ask for workplace adjustments that they should do as a consequence. He would ask people to think about what happened from the moment they left work to the moment they got home from work if they were working on campus. He proposed short interviews with staff so they could share their routines of working on campus, including walks and breaks to get water or go to the bathroom, for example. SS asked if there was any published research on this. RS responded that this was an under-researched area. SCH said that the Health and Wellbeing Group would take a look at this.

**Action: SCH**

5.4 SC noted that he was aware that Jonathan Weber was convening a working group that was looking at this issue for academics. HBR responded that Jonathan's work was ongoing and that they were trying to agree a methodology to measure workload. He stated that a paper had been expected to go to Provost Board in September originally, but this had probably been pushed to January. COB stated that workload was a recognised stressor and that Occupational Health had tried to provide management support for people who were experiencing stress and excess demand at work, but perhaps they needed to bring this higher up on the agenda again.

5.5 JN asked if more action could be taken on workplace adjustments as staff were expected to continue working from home. KK asked for more support from Comms to get the message out about the support available. There was discussion about whether messages were being heard by staff and about avenues outside of Staff Briefing. SCH suggested approaching through Heads of Departments and HoDs lunches to feed the message through. SL suggested a commitment of sending a periodic reminder about workplace adjustments every 2-3 months. SL had also suggested to EN about sending this message out as an email to the HoDs.

**Action: KK/EN**

## **6.0 Update on Digital Accessibility Project**

6.1 OK provided an update concerning progress on the three objectives of the Digital Accessibility Project.

6.2 Identify all websites associated with the College and contact owners to make them accessible:

- OK reported that they had contacted the owners of all 350 websites that they had identified as requiring action. 43 of these had been decommissioned. Of the remaining, more than half (168) were now compliant, having at least implemented an accessibility statement. 128 were still awaiting action by the owners. The contractor was still following them up and moving forward. OK noted that there were also 300 ICT services and 25 mobile apps, including Imperial Mobile, which would be included in the legislation scope as of April 2021, and they had started to look into those.
- OK explained that the issue was that this project would require ongoing support, as the website would evolve with time. ICT had put in place regular monitoring solutions to see how those websites were changing, and it was now possible to monitor accessibility on a daily basis. However, ongoing support was necessary because somebody needed to look into any messages, complaints and issues raised with the accessibility inbox, and if anything changed with those websites, somebody would need to follow up with the owners and give advice. Vickie Sherriff and OK had prepared a job description with support from other project board members, which was being put forward for approval, although it was uncertain where this job would sit.

6.3 Promote Digital Accessibility across the College:

- OK reported that this objective had been successfully completed by the Communications team and that an ongoing awareness action was in place.

6.4 Agree ownership and accountability for Digital Accessibility in the College:

- OK thanked SC for chairing the project board. OK stated that this project was expected to close in the first quarter of 2021, and that this vital responsibility should be handed over to a permanent College body. SC had discussed this with SL and in the first instance would be getting the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group to oversee this. SC commended OK for his industry and effort. SC noted that it was important that Digital Accessibility did not only affect the College's webpages but its entire digital education offering, which was increasingly a key part of how the College interacted with their audience.

6.5 HBR expressed his worry about those websites which were still not compliant. OK responded that these would be addressed definitively before the end of the project, and that they were currently going through the third phase of communications with those web owners. The plan was to disable these websites if the owners did not respond. SL noted that OK had been asked to prepare a paper for the next Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group meeting. Within that meeting, the Provost, Deans and others would be able to think how to deal with escalation on this and hopefully accept some of OK's recommendations. The Deans would be responsible for championing Digital Accessibility within their own areas and promoting compliance.

**7.0 Disability Action Committee Plan 2020-21**

7.1 The new action plan for 2020-21 was considered.

7.2 Respond to the challenges of COVID-19:

- There were no comments.

7.3 Raise awareness:

- EN asked, following the earlier discussion on adjustments, whether this was something the Committee would want to prioritise in terms of awareness and communications work, and whether this should be added to the plan. EN noted that there was a limit to what they could do, but they would be happy to have adjustments highlighted as a specific priority. JN stated that there should be strong support for that and agreed to add the communications piece about adjustments into the plan.

7.4 Remove barriers:

- There were no comments.

7.5 Improve support:

- HBR suggested including something specifically around mental health, aside from being a signatory to the Mental Health Commitment. JN agreed and noted that this was indeed a current priority both in relation to staff and students.

7.6 It was agreed to adopt the plan with the above changes made, and to review at each meeting what progress had been made.

**8.0 Update from Imperial College Union**

- 8.1 SS provided an update on disability-related work since the beginning of the academic year. The Students with Disabilities Network launched at the beginning of the year, chaired by AR, the new Disabilities Officer. There had never been a student-led disability group like the other liberation groups. They were finding it difficult to engage students and let them know about the network. SS was keen to work with the Disability Advisory Service and with MOB to get more students involved.
- 8.2 SS noted that AR was running a survey about the experiences of disabled students at Imperial, and that they would want to get help from the DAS in terms of reaching specific students. RS stated that he would be happy to help.
- 8.3 SS reported that the ICU had run a survey over the first half of November about student wellbeing, including all students, not just disabled students. They had asked a demographic question about disability. There were noticeable differences in the results between those who said they had a disability and those who said they did not, including the following:
- 50% of the undergraduate students who said they did not have a disability rated the quality of teaching as extremely good or good, compared with 40% of the students with SpLDs.
  - In terms of loneliness, students with SpLDs and those who preferred not to declare were twice as likely to say they'd been feeling lonely most or all of the time since the beginning of term. They were also more likely to say that they had been feeling lonelier since the beginning of term.
  - In terms of how hopeful the students were feeling, those who indicated that they had autism or a mental or physical disability were more than twice as likely to say they were feeling hopeless most or all of the time since the beginning of term.
- 8.4 SS noted that there would be a deeper look at the comments to draw out the reasons behind these responses. JN thanked SS and expressed interest in seeing the data from the survey. LM and AM asked whether there was scope for liaison between staff and student networks in this area. SS responded that all the networks (LGBTQ+, race, etc.) could be linking together more.

**Action: SS/Secretary**

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

- 9.1 KK provided an update from EDIC. The EDIC team had been refreshing and amending their resources so that they were more easily accessible. KK would like to get feedback from the Committee on the revamped webpages as to whether they had achieved what they set out to do, which was to ensure that people had access to information and resources without having to search through a great number of webpages.
- 9.2 KK noted that EDIC had also started to release online training, and that they were trialling an autism training session in February 2021. There had been a lot of interest, especially within HR, to ensure that they as practitioners had the knowledge to advise members of staff who might seek support from them in this area. EDIC had also spent a large part of the year working on content for [the new equality, diversity and inclusion online course](#), to serve as a foundation of knowledge for all staff.

- 9.3 KK reported that there had been discussion about enhancing the work needs assessment offering. A working arrangement had been confirmed with the National Autistic Society. EDIC had started to communicate via their networks that this particular assessment process was available, so that if individuals needed a workplace assessment in this area, EDIC could offer a similar service as they did with dyslexia and SpLDs. KK asked the support of the Committee to help highlight this new service to others.
- 9.4 KK stated that the EDIC team would have a debriefing session soon for the Calibre graduation, so that they could go from strength to strength in terms of supporting Calibre graduates.
- 9.5 KK mentioned that early in 2019 they had introduced a College-wide process for workplace adjustments for staff. KK wanted to make sure staff and their managers knew what support was available and how to access it. KK would be happy to put more resources and thinking into how to spread the word. KK acknowledged that SL's idea of repeating the message more regularly was a good one. EN would be happy to support.
- 9.6 KK announced that Imperial joined the [Hidden Disabilities](#) campaign earlier in the year. The Hidden Disabilities campaign had created resources around COVID-19, including face mask exemption and having effective conversations around challenging / being challenged on not wearing a face covering. KK asked the Committee to distribute this info throughout their networks. Campus Services were managing the mask exemption badges, which were kept at welcome points in campuses.
- 9.7 KK stated the dyslexia pages had been updated with additional guidance on autism.
- 9.8 KK reported that declaration rates had stalled and there had been no significant increase since the summer.
- 9.9 KK highlighted [Disability History Month](#) (18 November – 20 December 2020). LP had been interviewed by Imperial As One for their Belonging series and a recording would be going up on Imperial As One's [Belonging playlist on YouTube](#).
- 9.10 KK provided an update on the Disability Support Project. In 2018, EDIC had commissioned CS while they were a management trainee to look at what disability support was available for staff. A paper had been submitted to the DAC with a set of recommendations, which had been accepted by the DAC in late 2018. The priority had been to make the workplace adjustments process more consistent, as it was quite disjointed and managers were not certain of the process. KK highlighted that the following actions had taken place since 2018:
- In 2019, EDIC implemented a workplace adjustments process, with prominent webpages so that individuals could find the information they needed straightaway. They had made it explicit that they had two disability advisors on hand to provide support. They had worked with the Comms team to create a guidance booklet (available online in PDF form and in physical copies) for managers. They had also reviewed the HR policies and worked on the declaration campaign.
  - In 2020, EDIC had reviewed the accessibility of their webpages and revamped the EDI e-learning course. They had also developed the work needs assessment resources and webpages. They had successfully lobbied for additional resources so that they could provide more in the way of support for recommendations that

they had not yet been able to focus on and increase their support for the staff networks.

- In 2021, their aim would be to provide a detailed written review and revisit the Business Disability Forum proof points to see where progress had been made. They also planned to create management briefings and resources in collaboration with Occupational Health, the Learning and Development Centre, and Employee Relations.

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

- 10.1 LP provided an update from Able@Imperial. They had been promoting disability awareness and trying to increase their membership. They had started a coffee session every Friday morning on their Teams site, and attendance was picking up.
- 10.2 LP and AM had had an engaging meeting with JN. JN, HB and SC had agreed to be panel members for an event in February. The theme was undecided but the aim would be to raise awareness. EN had agreed to promote the event.
- 10.3 SL wondered if they might want to include the voices of women on the panel and suggested that Sara Rankin might be interested as a great supporter of disability equality.

## **11.0 AOB**

- 11.1 AR joined the meeting and introduced herself to the Committee as the new ICU Disabilities Officer. She had done an Instagram takeover for Disability History Month and noted that there was good student engagement.
- 11.2 JN thanked AH for her work as secretary over the past years and welcomed CS as her successor.