

IMPERIAL

Disability Action Committee

Thursday 14 March 2024

10:00 – 11:30

Hybrid meeting

Minutes

Present:

Kani Kamara	Head of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre – Co-Chair (KK)
Susan Littleson	Deputy Director - Organisational Development and Inclusion (SL)
Mark Allen	Careers Service (MA)
Chris Banks	Director of Library Services (CB)
Daniela Bultoc	Senior Organisational Development Consultant (DB)
William Cox	Principal Teaching Fellow, Business School (WC)
Lorraine Craig	Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Engineering (LCR)
Lesley Cohen	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (LCO)
William Hollyer	Head of Sport, Sport and Leisure Services (WH)
Bouquette Kabatepe	Digital Accessibility Officer, ICT (BK)
Angela Kehoe	Strategic HR Partner (FoNS) (AKE)
Tony Lawrence	Executive Sponsor of Able@Imperial (TL)
Adrian Mannall	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (AM)
Dez Mendoza	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (DM)
Jonathan Mestel	Senior Consul (JM)
Wayne Mitchell	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (WM)
Kalpna Mistry	Staff Network Coordinator (KM)
Claire O'Brien	Director of Occupational Health (COB)
Maureen O'Brien	Head of the Disability Advisory Service (MOB)
Rebecca Smith	EDI and Department Coordination Manager, Business School (RSM)
Cynthia So	Secretary to DAC (CS)
Maggie Taylor	Assistant Buildings Manager (MT)
Andrew Youngson	Head of Internal Communications (maternity cover) (AY)

**Co-Chairs of the Committee*

Also present:

Suzanne Christopher	Head of Employee Engagement, Human Resources (SC)
Paige Noyce	Project Manager, Chemistry (PN)
Gerald Prescott	Associate Dean Education (Science), University of St Andrews (GP)
Charlotte Sutherland	Principal Teaching Fellow, Chemistry (CSU)

Agenda Item

1.0 Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 SL welcomed the Committee to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from: David Ashton, Hannah Bannister, Harbhajan Brar, Andreea Cojocea, Lizzy Hand, Richard Johnson, Ahlam Khamliche, Emmanuel

Lawal, Richard Martin, Graeme Rae, Roddy Slorach, Tim Venables, and Chris Watkins.

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting 30 November 2023 and action tracker

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

2.2 The action tracker was considered. All the actions had been closed except 12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Adjustments to student assessment. David Ashton was on leave but would be able to update the Committee on this action once he was back from leave.

3.0 Update on workplace adjustment passport paper

3.1 LC said that the paper was raised at the People and Culture Committee (PCC) and intended to raise awareness of the new workplace adjustment process created by EDIC. She supported the work by EDIC and therefore asked the PCC to approve a monitoring period and review a report of progress in 12 months' time. There was discussion at the PCC meeting around the number of people who declared their disability anonymously on the 2022 Staff Survey – about 50% more people than those who have declared their disability on ICIS last year – so it seemed that an increasing number of people were willing to declare anonymously and that the Staff Survey would therefore be a useful tool to help us aim for declaration numbers on ICIS. LC said that the PCC agreed that there should be monitoring of how things were progressing and that a report should be brought back to the PCC in a year's time.

3.2 KK thanked LC and WM for their support on the workplace adjustment process and for highlighting it at the PCC. The EDI Centre would endeavour to have that report and evaluation ready with the support of this Committee in 12 months' time.

3.3 A question was asked about the flowchart representing the workplace adjustment process in LC's paper. It had come up at an Able coffee morning that one route to request workplace adjustments was via flexible working, and there had been discussion that workplace adjustments and flexible working were different things and the distinction between them should be made clearer. Also, the fact that there were four potential routes to get workplace adjustments did not necessarily spell simplicity. In response, LC said while those were wise words, people came to an understanding through different routes, and there were many ways that they could realise that an adjustment was necessary. The webpage that the EDI Centre had put together on the process set it out much more clearly, while LC had tried to keep her paper simple and short for PCC. WM said that there could not just be one route, to capture the diversity of people's experiences and approaches.

3.4 KK said that there was ongoing work to ensure that people knew and understood the process. The EDI Centre had created a draft skeleton of a disability allyship webpage and the outstanding action was to start to co-create the content of that with Able. She was hoping that this webpage would be the vehicle to ensure that there was clarity around language and that there was consistency to what the College was saying to people, especially managers.

3.5 Summing up, SL said that it was very helpful to keep receiving feedback about the process and that it was important to put in place mechanisms now to measure implementation of the workplace adjustments process, so that EDIC could report back to PCC in a year.

Action: Kani Kamara**4.0 Designated quiet space in Chemistry**

- 4.1 PN and CSU presented on the quiet space they had created in the Department of Chemistry for students experiencing overwhelm. The project started when research teams were relocated to White City. They identified a room on the South Kensington Campus as a place to be repurposed. They had received a lot of feedback from sources that said there was no space for students go for time out, a quiet break. They were refurbishing the Chemistry common room, but that was not a quiet space. So, they put together a proposal with input from the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) to apply for the President's Community Fund, which was approved. They formed a working group, which had representatives from DAS and Chemistry who had expertise in this subject. They went through a design iteration process and the construction took six weeks. The room was still a work in progress, and they were still making iterations.
- 4.2 Continuing, PN and CSU said that they had taken a one-size-fits-all approach when thinking about designing the space in terms of lighting, size of space, privacy, furniture for different needs, etc. The project had cost £64,000, with two furniture iterations. Considering the needs of neurodivergent students, they had gone for plain décor in neutral colours. There were mid-height power sockets. The lighting was warm, not harsh, and controllable. The seating had higher sides for privacy, and there were movable dividers to subdivide space, and if people were feeling faint, they could lie down. There were also rotatable chairs for those who might want to stim in that way. All in all, the room was made to be suitable for as many people as possible. They still needed some furniture that was more supportive for the head and neck, but they had purchased some foot stools for those needing to rest their legs.
- 4.3 Continuing, PN and CSU said that access to the room was controlled, and it was open to around 60 students now, however any Chemistry staff would have access and could bring students there if they needed to. The students on the list were mainly those who had adjustments from DAS. They had to find the balance between promoting the room and making sure that usage of the room was keeping to the purpose. There were students with access who were not from the Department of Chemistry, as DAS had identified they would benefit from it. The usage was currently such that they could support people from other departments, and they had requests from every faculty now.
- 4.4 Concluding, PN and CSU said that ideally, they did not want students to have to declare that they wanted access. Another issue was that due to pressures of space, the room had some unintended alternate use, such as for prayer rooms, as there was a known challenge around the time it took to get to the prayer space in the Chaplaincy. Sometimes people also tried to use it as a social space. Students were also expecting similar spaces at other campuses now. There was a QR code for students to give their feedback in the room. People liked the privacy and reliability of the space, the blankets and side lights, and the location of it on the ground floor in a more secluded place. The room did not appear to be getting overuse.
- 4.5 A question was asked about whether there was any mechanism to check in on people who did not feel well. PN and CSU said that when students were directed to the room because they were not feeling well, they would often be accompanied by a member of staff who could then check in on them.

4.6 CB said that in terms of avenues to expand on this work, there was a group looking at spaces in White City at the moment, so that could be a route to go through to ensure that a similar space would exist in White City, and also, there was a big Estates project that would be swapping out light fittings for sustainability. MT said that it was an ongoing endeavour to replace fluorescent lights with LED lights, but if anybody had specific lighting issues in their building, they could speak to their building manager about this.

5.0 Staff Survey 2024

5.1 SC presented on the upcoming Staff Survey which would take place from Tuesday 16 April to Tuesday 7 May. She asked the Committee to encourage staff to participate. The survey ran every two years, and was a huge vehicle for getting staff feedback. The survey provider, People Insight, work with over 50 universities in the HE sector. They had also provided the Pulse Survey tool which had been used over the past year to delve into hotspots. Some departments had used this tool for their Athena Swan surveys, and SC anticipated that the use of this tool would grow.

5.2 Continuing, SC said that the question set had not reduced as they needed the same questions from last time to be able to benchmark and see what had changed. They had consulted with the Joint Trade Unions on the questions. There were new questions on sustainability, and some of the wording had been refreshed, for example PRDP had been changed to ARC due to the launch of the new process. Otherwise, there was no significant change in the themes of the survey. There were three free text comments at the end to provide the opportunity for staff to tell the College what they thought. The survey was confidential and voluntary, and all the data was externally hosted. Nobody at the College had access to individual answers, and a redaction process took place at the People Insight end to withdraw any identifiable information in people's comments.

5.3 Concluding, SC said that managers could encourage their staff to fill out the survey, for example by giving everyone time to complete it together at the end of a team meeting. There were no more paper copies, as they printed these out last time and nobody filled them in. There was a new QR code that you could scan to complete the survey on mobile devices. The communications around the survey would ramp up after the Easter break, and league tables would go out to Heads of Department to generate healthy competition. SC had worked with the Comms team to create a "you said we did" campaign to show how departments and teams had implemented changes based on people's feedback from the last Staff Survey. They were also recruiting Staff Survey Engagement Champions, and there would be information sessions for staff and managers coming up with People Insight.

5.4 A comment was made that some staff felt that it was strange that they were being encouraged and chased to complete a survey that was meant to be voluntary, and also that some staff had expressed suspicion about the confidentiality of the data monitoring, due to the existence of the league tables. Responding, SC said that it was an interesting point about the survey being called "voluntary" that she would take away to think about further. She said that when it came to the league tables and email reminders, there was no way for managers to know who the people were who had filled out the survey already, only the number of people.

5.5 A question was asked about whether there was the possibility of comparing Imperial's results against the global sector, as Imperial experienced competition from universities not in the UK. Responding, SC said that she would check if People Insight could do this.

6.0 Updates and issues from Able, EDIC, DAS and Student Services

- 6.1 MOB said that the main highlight from the DAS report was the increase of students registering with DAS, getting adjustments and getting screened and diagnosed with SpLDs and autism. The number was continuing to grow – not only the registrations with DAS, but also disability declarations to the College had gone up over the last couple of years. Demand would always outstrip resource in the first term, but DAS had tried to address some of those demand issues by accepting Form 8 evidence (the document to get adjustments at GCSE and A-Level) as a temporary measure and putting in exam adjustments in the first term based on that, before inviting students to come back and have a full diagnostic assessment. 18 students came forward with that evidence in the first term, so that fast-tracked their exam adjustments. The other thing DAS was doing was providing the suggested reasonable adjustments document (SRAD) from the diagnostic report for in-house SpLD diagnostic assessments, which fast-tracked them and allowed a quick turnaround within two weeks of the diagnosis.
- 6.2 MOB also gave an update on behalf of Hannah Bannister. The Student Lifecycle Administration Board (SLAB) had had two consultations with Marjolo, an external company, to look at the entire student journey from pre-enrolment all the way through, and all the transitions and pain points through that for a disabled student at Imperial. The next step was where that work would sit, whether in SLAB or another route. David Ashton and Emma Hewitt would be responsible for this. SL said that it would be lovely to get an update on this project next time as it progressed.
- 6.3 KM said that the key highlight from the EDIC report was that the neurodiversity assessment figures were quite high. They had seen a significant increase in the number of requests for neurodiversity screenings. One of the factors driving this was the big push last year during Disability History Month, thanks to the help of the Comms team. KM said that she wanted to remind people that the College was a member of the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and that all members of staff in the College could access the resources on the BDF website using their Imperial email, as well as the BDF advice line. The BDF also provided a review service. KM asked the Committee to get in touch with her if there were any policies and processes that they would like the BDF to review. The BDF had a self-assessment framework called Disability Smart which contained ten different criteria against which the College could measure how well we were doing. If there was interest in undertaking this self-assessment, various departments and individuals would have to be involved. SL said that it would be worth having a lunchtime workshop with BDF to hear more about the resources and advice line.

Action: Secretary

- 6.4 DM said that they wanted to draw attention to the work that Able had been doing with HR towards the new sickness absence policy to make it more robust and supportive for disabled employees. On the Teamseer platform, it was now possible to select sickness related to disability as a category, so if staff had ongoing issues relating to disability, you could identify that without having to use the 'other' category or something more generic. DM said that it would be interesting to review in 12 months and see what reporting came back from that. SL said that it felt very positive that HR's efforts had been well received, and that there had been a good dialogue between the Employee Relations team and Able. SL thanked Able for engaging in those conversations.

7.0 S-coding process at St Andrews

- 7.1 GP said that at St Andrews, they made all their academic adjustments at a modular level, so they did not do anything at a programme level. To be responsive to students and to support students, they needed to deal with circumstances quickly and in relation to events that were happening at the time. They managed most activities through reasonable adjustments, extensions and deferrals. Occasionally however, a student would be able to engage with their studies and it would be appropriate for them to do so, but it would be clear that their circumstances were having a significant impact on their ability to engage at their full academic potential. S-coding stood for special circumstances. Students could apply for this, and it was their decision if they wanted to do so, as guided by the policy. As St Andrews was a Scottish university, S-coding was possible for Year 3 and 4 of their standard honours programmes and 4 and 5 of their integrated Master's, and for the postgraduate/one-year programmes. It was not used for first two years which did not count towards the degree.
- 7.2 Continuing, GP said that if a student believed they had special circumstances and applied for S-coding, that would be considered by a formal committee within the school. The committee would make the decision of whether S-coding was appropriate. This would be reported at the time that module results were reported. If students got a module grade, for a student with special circumstances, their grade would be 16-S (not 16-pass). When final degree classifications were calculated, all adjustments were done at a modular level. Any module that was S-coded, the classification would be calculated in the presence of those grades and the absence of those grades. The student would receive whichever classification was the highest.
- 7.3 A question was asked as to whether S-coding ever lowered a student's classification. Responding, GP said that if modules that had been S-coded would bring down a student's classification, they would be taken out. S-coding never lowered a classification.
- 7.4 A question was asked about whether GP could give an idea of what percentage of a student's programme would be S-coded, because Imperial's assessments were quite traditional and they were very similar assessments across the four years of the degree, and if it was implemented at Imperial, there was a chance that a high percentage of modules could be S-coded. Responding, GP said that in St Andrews' approach, S-coding was an absolute last resort. They had an expectation on their staff to make reasonable adjustments for assessments associated with disabilities as routine. The S-coding allowed them simply to recognise circumstance whereby with all the appropriate reasonable adjustments in place, the students were unable to fully engage for a very defined period of time. They did not allow students to S-code any more than 25% of the taught credit at the honours level (one semester was 60 credits). They would use measures like leave of absence and alternative assessments routinely to support the students.
- 7.5 A question was asked about whether it was pre or post the marks that students could apply for the S-coding. Responding, GP said that it was pre the marks and students had to apply before the marks were published. In some really exceptional instances, students were not always able to do that, so there was a retrospective S-coding process, the approval of which sat with GP as the Associate Dean Education, rather than with the academic school, and there was a much higher requirement of evidence around that.
- 7.6 A question was asked about what percentage of students get S-coded. Responding, GP said that it was probably less than 1%. Of the 2,500 students that would

graduate, maybe 4 or 5 of those had S-coded. It was a really last-resort situation and circumstances were meant to be substantial.

- 7.7 A question was asked about how S-coding would work for the one-year Master's degrees, as assessments would tend to be a similar times and circumstances might affect students across a large proportion of their programme. Responding, GP said that with the postgraduate taught programmes at St Andrews, there were two semesters of taught material, and one semester which was the dissertation. Students could S-code 50% of the taught material, but they could not S-code the dissertation, as it was seen as a critical apprentice piece. They would always support students with circumstances with other methods during that period, for example with extended study. S-coding was only for situations where there was no other option to support the students. GP said that they expected that S-coding would usually not be about a known disability, but about exacerbation and bereavements, etc. If it was going on for more than one semester, they would try leave of absence, change in assessment approach, and other methods. They would never say, "You have a whole year of circumstances, these can be S-coded." They would expect staff to work with students to look at the right way to allow them to engage and complete the modules to their ability.
- 7.8 A comment was made that 50% of the taught material being S-coded would put higher weighing on other parts of the degree, if a student was weaker in other areas. Responding, GP said that he thought the programmes at St Andrews were consistent enough that he had not seen this type of situation happening, and that at least a third, if not more, of the students did perfectly well in the assessments, so those S-coded grades actually remained in there and pulled up the classification. Where they had seen students dropped grades, they were devastating drops, not just a fractional impact, so the students at that point had clearly had a substantial impact on their studies when S-coding was used.

8.0 AOB

- 8.1 LC said that she had written a paper talking about ableism and disableism. It had been raised with her at an Able coffee morning that to create uniformity with the webpages on religious tolerance and other pages on the EDIC website, now that a disability allyship webpage was being created, the College should adopt a definition of ableism or disableism. The paper set out examples of discrimination and harassment and some suggested examples of the definition of ableism or disableism. The paper had been seen by the Deputy Legal Director (University and Regulatory), who made some detailed comments about the language used.
- 8.2 SL asked LC how she would like people to feedback to her on this. LC said she would welcome feedback in any way and that perhaps the paper could be taken to an Able coffee morning and posted on the Able Teams site and open for comments there, and then perhaps the Able co-chairs would like to summarise comments, or forward all the comments to LC and WM. SL said she would leave it to LC and Able co-chairs to discuss how to progress this.

Action: Lesley Cohen/Able co-chairs

- 8.3 JM said that he had been talking to someone who had recently been bereaved, who was surprised there was no network available at the College to talk to about this. SL said that the support available could be publicised, for example Staff Supporters, micro-coaching, and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Confidential

Care, as people might not realise that they could use these resources in this specific way.¹

- 8.4 MT said that following on from some feedback received from a disabled student using toilets in academic buildings, in discussion with Lizzy Hand, Estates would carry out a survey of accessible toilets of all the academic buildings across the estates. MT had done something similar in Hammersmith a couple years ago. The project was now underway and she would collate all the information and see what budget could be given to make improvements.

Action: Maggie Taylor

¹ **Post meeting note from Secretary:** SL noted that since the meeting, JM had met with SL and others to set up a network.