Imperial College London

Disability Action Committee

Wednesday 21 June 2023
14:00 – 15:30
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)
David Ashton	Academic Registrar (DA)
Hannah Bannister	Director of Student Services (HB)
Chris Banks	Director of Library Services (CB)
Daniela Bultoc	Senior Organisational Development Consultant (DB)
Lorraine Craig	Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Engineering (LC)
Stephen Curry	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (SC)
Lizzy Hand	Head of Building Operations (LH)
Richard Johnson	Faculty Operating Officer, Business School (RJO)
Angela Kehoe	Strategic HR Partner (FoNS) (AKE)
Ahlam Khamliche	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (AKH)
Tony Lawrence	Executive Sponsor of Able@Imperial (TL)
Richard Martin	Executive Sponsor of Able@Imperial (RM)
Dez Mendoza	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (DM)
Jonathan Mestel	Senior Consul (JM)
Elizabeth Nixon	Internal Communications Manager (EN)
Claire O'Brien	Director of Occupational Health (COB)
Maureen O'Brien	Head of the Disability Advisory Service (MOB)
Nathalie Podder	ICU Deputy President (Welfare) (NP)
Cynthia So	Secretary to DAC (CS)
Maggie Taylor	Assistant Buildings Manager (MT)

Co-Chairs of the Committee

Also present:

Gabriella Kerr-Gordon	EDIC Advisor (GKG)
Jason Riley	Vice-Dean (Education) for the Faculty of Engineering (JR)

Agenda Item

1.0   Welcome and apologies

1.1   SL and KK welcomed the Committee to the meeting.

1.2   Apologies were received from: Harbhajan Brar, Jasmine Chan, William Cox, William Hollyer, Bouquette Kabatepe, Adrian Mannall, Kalpna Mistry, Graeme Rae, Nick Roalfe, Roddy Slorach, Chris Watkins, Tim Venables.

1.3   SL welcomed TL and RM, the new executive sponsors of Able@Imperial.

2.0   Minutes of the last meeting 29 March 2023

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

3.0   Action tracker

3.1   The action tracker was considered and the following points were noted:

- *29 March 2023, minute 7.5 – You Make Imperial campaign:* KK said that this had been tabled for a subsequent meeting, as there were a few outstanding actions from ICT that had to be completed first.

- *12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Adjustments to student assessment:* DA said that the work still needed to be done. It came under the student management area and the project development would go on for the next two to three years. As it was still an ongoing project, DA asked to keep this action open.

4.0   Mental Health Awareness Week 2023

4.1   DB presented on Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW) which took place in May 2023. The theme was anxiety. The Week was co-organised by People and Organisational Development (POD) and colleagues across the College. They put on fewer events this year (39 in 2023 vs 50 in 2022), to be more focused. They also had a new registration process using Eventbrite to provide ease of booking for participants, and an accessible and user-friendly website. They focused on engagement and communications for higher registrations and attendance. There were 971 registrations in total across all the events, and 729 attendances. The number of registrations was three times that of last year.

4.2   Continuing, DB said that 131 people responded to the evaluation form. 68% of people who attended MHAW events were female, and they had the most engagement from Professional Services staff. The feedback suggested that MHAW could be improved by: having more examples of lived experiences, providing more time to dig deeper into the subject matter, following up with reading lists/links to other courses available. There were also suggestions not to run any events at lunchtime. DB said that next year they would look at running a symposium to engage with more researchers and academics, and starting with a panel discussion with professional experts. DB highlighted that POD also had wellbeing offerings throughout the year.

4.3   SL asked if there was anything the Committee could do to keep mental health on the agenda. DB replied that the Committee was key to ensure that a wide range of people would be included in the College Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy action plan.

4.4   A question was asked about the plans around supporting people with long-term mental health conditions, and whether there could be some kind of mentoring or buddy scheme to help them. SL said that this could be picked up through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy action plan. COB added that SWELL Plans were available, which were devised to create an ongoing supportive structure for anybody with long-term health problems, including mental health problems. KK said that it

was right to ensure that more people knew about SWELL and that there were mechanisms for staff to talk to their managers, but separately there should also be a discussion about peer-to-peer support.

4.5 A question was asked about whether SWELL could be part of the ARC process. DB said that she would ask the POD team about this.

4.6 A comment was made about how it would be good to see better understanding of how neurodivergences affect mental health.

4.7 A comment was made about how the College needed better support for staff who were not working core 9-5 hours as support services were unavailable in the evening and at the weekend.

4.8 SL said that these comments would all be good to feed into the College Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy action plan.

5.0 Institutional Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

5.1 RM said that following DB's presentation about the Strategy in the previous DAC meeting, the Strategy had been through various iterations at the University Management Board (UMB), and it was ready to launch. The Strategy set a strong ambition for Imperial in this space. Over the next few months, the action plan would be formulated. There had been a strong collective effort between those providing services for students and HR, as well as a good budget investment from the College.

6.0 Review of action plan 2022-23 & ideas for action plan 2023-24

6.1 CS had sent out a form to gather input for next year's action plan as well as to highlight the achievements from this year's action plan. SL presented on the responses received. Achievements included Estates' accessible toilet project and AccessAble resurveys, the piece that was published by Comms during Disability History Month 2022 profiling disabled members of the Imperial community, ICT's work on digital accessibility, EDIC rolling out new disability briefings, and Careers Service revamping the disability webpage on their website.

6.2 Continuing, SL said that the themes from the previous action plans, 1) Raise awareness, 2) Remove barriers, and 3) Improve support, stood the test of time, and she shared some ideas that had been submitted around each theme.

6.3 Concluding, SL said that two examples of best practice had been shared as inspiration. Some other Russell Group universities including St. Andrews have implemented S-Coding as a process through which allowance could be made for special circumstances affecting the final grade for a module. The Department of Chemistry had created a designated space for students to go when they were experiencing overwhelm. SL said that the Committee could look into these examples of best practice at future meetings, perhaps by having an update from St. Andrews, and having colleagues from Chemistry tell us what they had done with the quiet space.

Action: Secretary

6.4 SL said that after this meeting, CS would collate the ideas into a standard plan format. If there was anything people wanted to progress or thought would be helpful, they should get in touch with CS.

Action: All/Secretary

6.5   A comment was made that there would be merit in taking the plan for approval at the People and Culture Committee (PCC) once it had been developed, so that it had sight at the highest level in case there were any further resources arguments. SL agreed that it would be good to take it to the PCC in October.

6.6   A comment was made that it would be useful to keep in mind the space in Chemistry in terms of where things might go in the longer term with the campus plan around community and other types of spaces.

6.7   A comment was made about training and how to ensure that people were aware of the offerings available. AKE said that Melanie Lee had been doing some work with leadership and suggested that the engagement of managers could be woven into that.

6.8   A comment was made about how there was training for managers and training for staff, and managers and staff might have different ideas and perspectives which they were not communicating or sharing as they were not in the same training sessions, so there should be more training that involved both managers and staff so they could communicate their demands and needs. SL said this was a very helpful comment.

6.9   A comment was made that there was a need to look beyond training, at other ways to have those levels of engagement and conversations with line managers and staff, as not everybody could have those conversations in a safe way in a training space. SL said that some of the things raised earlier, like mentoring schemes, could be helpful.

6.10   A comment was made that members of staff might also need training to help look after students as well. There was Departmental Disability Officers (DDOs), who did great work and provided support in departments, but training should be filtered out beyond that. SL said that it was important to shine the spotlight on what was provided for students as committees like this could end up focusing more on what was available for staff.

6.11   SL thanked CS for their work on the action plan and asked the Committee to get in touch with CS if they had any additional ideas.

7.0   Workplace adjustments process in context of work location framework

7.1   GKG said that the new workplace adjustments process had now been published on the EDIC website. It displayed the four main routes to request workplace adjustments – via the line manager, via EDIC, via Occupational Health (OH), and via the Flexible Working Policy. Individuals were always recommended to approach their line manager first if they feel safe to do so, especially for low-level requests for example noise-cancelling headphones, as these could be quick and easy to purchase without going through long processes. With OH, it had to be through a management referral.

7.2   Continuing, GKG said that if a workplace adjustment was reasonably straightforward, it should be implemented and a written record should be kept of what had been agreed. If extra support was needed, EDIC could provide advice. Following discussions, the line manager should consider all available information and communicate the outcome in writing to the member of staff. If there was a disagreement with the outcome and all reasonable attempts to resolve the matter with the support of EDIC and Strategic HR have been unsuccessful, a Workplace Adjustments Review Meeting should be convened. The Workplace Adjustments Review Meeting would be chaired by the line manager's manager (or an alternative

senior manager). It should be attended by the line manager, an HR representative, the member of staff. A Union rep, a disability advisor from EDIC, and an OH rep could also attend. At the Meeting, they would consider the effectiveness of the proposed adjustment, the practicability, and cost of proposed adjustment, the resources of the College and other financial assistance available. Following the meeting, the Chair would consider all the information and confirm the outcome in writing within 10 working days. Where adjustments had been agreed, a timetable for implementation would be included. Where adjustments had not been agreed, this would be the end of the process.

7.3   Continuing, GKG said that the Staff Hub's role was to respond to queries that come in via Staff Hub. They could signpost to EDIC guidance and/or Strategic Support if necessary. Strategic Support could support managers with the workplace adjustments process, and they would ensure that departments and managers were aware of their duty to implement adjustments. EDIC's role was to provide expert knowledge and guidance on support for disabled staff and the legal duty, and OH's role was providing expert medical advice and undertaking medical assessments in conjunction with a manager referral. Employee Relations (ER) would provide support if a Workplace Adjustments Review Meeting was required.

7.4   Concluding, KK said that one action going forward was that EDIC would get the support of Strategic HR Partners to disseminate this information in a way that could be absorbed by people.

7.5   COB said that it would be useful to manage people's expectations of OH, as OH could not sign off on adjustments – this was the responsibility of managers. OH would continue to triage the self-referral route to avoid future conflict and confusion.

7.6   A comment was made about how the word "reasonable" in "reasonable adjustments" was subjective. What seemed reasonable to managers might not be reasonable to staff, so there needed to be a clear definition of "reasonable".

7.7   A question was asked about whether it would go to the Capability procedure if no adjustments were put in place following the Workplace Adjustments Review Meeting, as this seemed concerning. GKG said that Capability was one example of where it could end up, but not necessarily always the case. SL responded that this was an important point to be captured and addressed as part of communications on workplace adjustments. KK said that she would take this to Audrey Fraser and ensure that they respond appropriately.

Action: Kani Kamara

7.8   A comment was made that Access to Work seemed to be failing at the moment, especially regarding ICT advice. KK responded that it depended on the type of support needed from Access to Work, since it was going through quite smoothly for certain things, and offered to take the conversation offline. GKG said that not every assessment needed to go through Access to Work, for example EDIC offered screenings and work needs assessments for neurodiversity cases outside of Access to Work. Access to Work was also very good for travel to work.

8.0   Updates and issues from Able, ICU, EDIC, DAS and Student Services

8.1   A comment was made about how it seemed that demand for the services of the DAS had increased dramatically. MOB responded that the number of disabled students declaring at university had gone up across the sector, and that autism had taken over from mental health conditions at the moment as the number one disability declared by students. Imperial offered screenings and diagnoses for autism where other institutions did not.

9.0   AOB

9.1   MT said that she had an contact from AccessAble who would be happy to do 30-minute virtual presentations to explain what AccessAble is and how to use the app and webpages, and that it would be great to spread the word about AccessAble. MT will send the contact information to CS to distribute to the Committee.

Action: Maggie Taylor/Secretary