Imperial College
London

Disability Action Committee

Wednesday 29 March
14:00 – 15:30
Hybrid meeting

Minutes

Present:
Kani Kamara	Head of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre* (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 (LC)
Lizzy Hand	Head of Building Operations (LH)
William Hollyer	Head of Sport, Sport and Leisure Services (WH)
Bouquette Kabatepe	Digital Accessibility Officer, ICT (BK)
Angela Kehoe	Strategic HR Partner (FoNS) (AKE)
Ahlam Khamliche	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (AKH)
Dez Mendoza	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (DM)
Jonathan Mestel	Senior Consul (JM)
Kalpna Mistry	Staff Network Coordinator (KM)
Elizabeth Nixon	Internal Communications Manager (EN)
Claire O'Brien	Director of Occupational Health (COB)
Maureen O'Brien	Head of the Disability Advisory Service (MOB)
Nick Roalfe	Director of Estates Operations (NR)
Cynthia So	Secretary to DAC (CS)
Maggie Taylor	Assistant Buildings Manager (MT)

Co-Chairs of the Committee

Also present:

Michele Barritt	Product Owner, ICT (MB)
Gabriella Kerr-Gordon	EDIC Advisor (GKG)
An La	Product Engineer, ICT (AL)
Lisa Phillips	Strategic HR Partner (FOGIT and Business School) (LP)
Natasha Tubbritt	Staff HESA Advisor, HR (NT)

Agenda Item

1.0   Welcome and apologies

1.1   SL and KK welcomed the Committee to the meeting.

1.2   Apologies were received from: David Ashton, Hannah Bannister, Harbhajan Brar, Jasmine Chan, Stephen Curry, Ana Faro, Richard Johnson, Adrian Mannall, Nathalie Podder, Graeme Rae, Roddy Slorach, Tim Venables, and Chris Watkins.

1.3   KK thanked LP, who was stepping down as Co-Chair of Able@Imperial, and welcomed AKH, who had been newly elected as Co-Chair of Able.

2.0   Minutes of the last meeting 6 December 2022

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. Rob Bell had supplied responses to his actions. Notes from NR about the accessibility of 170 Queen's Gate had been circulated.

4.0   Action plan 2022-23

4.1   KK reminded the group that they were coming to the end of this action plan and it was due to be reviewed at the next DAC meeting. Individuals would be asked to send in their updates and add their thoughts in terms of what the DAC might want to concentrate on for next year.

5.0   Workplace adjustments process in context of work location framework

5.1   GKG presented on the update of the workplace adjustments process. There had been quite a lot of consultation around this process. The main concerns were: lack of clarity for managers supporting staff with a disability as to what could be deemed as a workplace adjustment, lack of recording mechanism to keep track of agreed adjustments, both managers and disabled staff feeling that they were not being heard, and increased number of requests to the EDI Centre. GKG undertook a process mapping journey with the Operational Improvement team. As a result of that, the EDI Centre would be making changes to how they interact with Occupational Health (OH) and how OH could signpost back to the EDI Centre. The EDI Centre would also now provide written recommendations by email after the initial consultation, so all parties were clear about next steps.

5.2   Continuing, GKG said that one of the main areas they had been working to unpick was what happens if a line manager does not agree to the recommendations of workplace adjustments. The EDI Centre was working on this with HR and the Employee Relations (ER) team. After initial negotiations, it would then go to ER who would have an employee workplace review meeting where they would decide if all options had been explored and all potential adjustment routes had been taken. This would be a formal meeting and the EDI Centre and OH might be involved if additional advice and guidance was required.

5.3   Continuing, GKG said that for line managers, the EDI Centre had introduced specific 90-minute briefings on workplace adjustment implementation this year. A two-page checklist for workplace adjustments was being created so line managers could have a point of reference when having these conversations. For staff, the EDI Centre had updated the general disability workshop to address concerns about understanding the support available, and they were introducing workplace adjustments passports after consultations with managers and disabled staff, to make adjustments easier to manage. For Central Services, there would be a dedicated practical guidance checklist for Staff Hub Advisors, including immediate resource links for easy referencing and signposting. There would also be a process map for workplace adjustments via the EDI Centre route, and a best practice guide for EDI Centre disability advisors so they were also clear about changes in the process.

5.4   Concluding, GKG said that people could support by encouraging having disability briefings in their areas, sharing the information with their teams, and engaging with the EDI Centre on changes to workplace adjustments as this was an ongoing piece of work and constantly evolving to make sure it worked for everybody, so GKG would welcome any positive feedback or any challenges or concerns faced when implementing adjustments.

5.5   A question was asked about the take-up for the disability briefings. GKG said that general take-up had been quite good, but it had been more challenging engaging with line managers. The EDI Centre were trying to push engagement by going into departments. GKG could send out blurbs of the sessions to the Strategic HR Partners for them to promote.

Action: Gabriella Kerr-Gordon

5.6   Summing up, KK said that they had listened to the feedback and tried to ensure there was as much clarity as possible for all the points of contact. CS would share GKG's slides with the Committee.

Action: Secretary

6.0   College Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

6.1   DB presented on the College Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. DB said that from the wellbeing pulse surveys that started in May 2020, staff were recognising that their mental health had worsened as an impact of COVID. Based on analysis of the staff survey results, they were able to determine some influencing factors in staff wellbeing, for example: getting on with job requirements without working excessive hours, effective collaboration with other areas, effective leadership, and career development (having quality conversations in PRDPs). Staff who declared disabilities (or chose "prefer not to say" on that question) formed one of the groups who recorded the lowest rates of satisfaction when it came to the health and wellbeing questions on the staff survey.

6.2   Continuing, DB said that they were using a whole-university approach to developing the strategy, with cross-College collaboration and community engagement, while ensuring that the strategy was evidence-based and informed by data. A steering committee had been formed, followed by an expert advisory group, and now they were consulting with staff and student groups on the strategy draft. The key themes emerging for staff were increased workload and challenges of operating in a hybrid environment, people and teams working in isolation and in silos, lack of visibility and clear communication from leadership, the need for better conversations between line managers and staff, the need to actively remove barriers and increase usage of mental health support, and ensuring the right culture and values are lived.

6.3   Continuing, DB said that the guiding values of the strategy were nurturing, creative, agile, and actively inclusive. The vision was to create an inclusive, caring, compassionate university which enabled everyone's voices and needs to be heard and respected. The strategy was being based around three pillars of health and wellbeing: mental, emotional and physical. The main strategic goals were leadership, belonging, collaboration, prevention, early intervention, support, curriculum, transitions, and evidence driven.

6.4   Concluding, DB asked for feedback to be provided using MS Forms. The concern was to get the language right, as the Strategy covered both staff and students and they wanted the language to resonate with the majority of the community.

6.5   A question was asked about the timeline. DB said that the first version would be submitted to University Management Board (UMB) on 19 April. After that, there

might be a few more versions depending on the thoughts coming out of UMB. They would then still need to consult on the action plan. The plan was launch at the start of the academic year or perhaps earlier.

6.6   A question was asked about how they were planning to approach gathering the actions for year one. DB said that for the staff side, they were highly influenced by the staff survey. There was already an action plan from that which had been embedded into other action plans. They would pick up those actions that Imperial had already committed to as an institution, and look at those action plans to see what was relevant to include in this strategy. From the strategy, they would look at the goals and see what else they needed to identify and collect. From the student side, a similar exercise would probably be done. The President was the overall champion of this strategy at the UMB. KK said that the Committee should make sure the new DAC action plan aligned with the action plan for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

7.0   Changes to personal details on ICIS

7.1   NT and MB were present to give an update on the upcoming changes to personal details on ICIS. NT said that the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) require an annual statutory return for staff and students. When they request changes to what is collected and returned, Imperial has to deliver. One of the areas this year was around disability. Currently the requirement was to return one disability that you might have, but now HESA have introduced being able to return multiple disabilities. However, this was not possible with where disabilities were currently stored on ICIS. They were having to move the data and migrate it to another area of ICIS. The return period runs up till July, so this had to be ready to implement before then.

7.2   MB showed a prototype that they were building in a test environment in ICIS. A special area dedicated to disability information had been added, where people would be able to select multiple values. They were building out the value set based on HESA requirements and working with HR to ensure this was fit for purpose. The separate form would provide capability around security and allow such highly sensitive data to be ringfenced.

7.3   A question was asked about whether the data was going to feed through to other systems – for example, in the Library, they had a data feed where people with certain needs would automatically be granted access to specific rooms such as the Assistive Technology Suite. MB said that they always made sure they looked at the dependencies and they would ensure the systems linked.

7.4   A question was asked about the terms that had been used in the prototype to describe different disabilities, as some of the descriptors would not be terms that disabled staff members might use to describe themselves and they might find some of the language alienating. MB said that she had spoken to Rob Bell and could attach a link on the form that would go to an EDIC webpage that gives more guidance and explanations of the descriptors, as these were based on what HESA asked for and also certain limitations on ICIS (word count, etc.) KK said that another conversation and a walkthrough of the form with Able before it goes live would be beneficial.

7.5   A question was asked about when this new form would go live, as it might be a tight time frame to spread the word and encourage staff to declare. NT said that they were hoping to go live with it around May. As some of the values had changed in the personal details form on ICIS, work had to be done to reclassify and migrate the data. KK said that EN was beginning to collate and update the You Make Imperial campaign materials in conjunction with EDIC. KK would speak to EN about bringing everyone together on the comms plan.

Action: Kani Kamara/Elizabeth Nixon

7.6   NT said that it was possible to request a late return through HESA/Office for Students, though this was not something they would normally recommend or do. The intention was to submit the return before the deadline in September. Even if the comms and migration did not happen till July, it would still be possible to return, as they would still have a lot of the data. It was just that the quality of the data might not be the best it could be.

8.0   Reasonable adjustments for students in labs

8.1   COB said that there was a project to look at reasonable adjustments for students undertaking lab/workshop-based projects. When students had disabilities for which they needed functional adjustments to help them undertake lab activities, the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) would make referrals to Occupational Health (OH), who would have conversations with the students to try and understand their needs. It had been difficult for OH to make recommendations because they did not always have sight of the risk assessments for the work that was being undertaken. COB thought it might be a good opportunity to engage in collaborative working with colleagues in DAS and in departments, to improve the experience from a student perspective and streamline the process. They tried to identify best practice in terms of implementing adjustments for students and referencing the risk assessments for the activities to be undertaken, in order to develop a standardised approach to selecting alternative equipment to assist students in safely meeting their learning objectives. As they were dealing with individuals, not every adjustment could be standardised. Where they were not able to completely standardise the approach, they wanted to try and have a set of agreed principles to assist decision-making for less common adjustments.

8.2   Continuing, COB said that the stakeholders of the project were DAS, Departmental Disability Officers (DDOs), Lab Managers, and Central Safety. The next steps were to review the DDO survey responses (as they had recently distributed a survey), to invite stakeholder reps to participate in one or more interdisciplinary working groups to create opportunities for cross-department knowledge sharing and solution finding, to develop a framework to streamline the process, and to develop long-term collaboration to support students to ensure accessibility is embedded from the outsight.

8.3   A question was asked about how many students would be seen by OH in a year. COB said that annually they had seen about 20. The numbers were not huge but it was enough to think they were not necessarily approaching it in the most effective way and that a little more collaboration would be helpful.

9.0   Dyslexia/Neurodiversity Champion programme

9.1   KK introduced AKH, who had just completed the formal qualification to become a Neurodiversity Champion. AKH said that the course used to focus on dyslexia, but now covered neurodiversity more generally. It was a great experience for AKH personally for her role as co-chair of Able, giving insight into other conditions that she could help support, and for her day-to-day work in the School of Public Health. She thought that the project during the course allowed you to think outside the box and see what practices were out there that you could adopt if you needed to support someone with neurodivergence.

9.2   GKG said that AKH was the first at Imperial to become a Neurodiversity Champion. Prior to that, Imperial had trained six Dyslexia Champions. For adults wondering about or newly realising their neurodivergent conditions, it could be overwhelming and have a significant impact on mental health. These Champions could help people

with the process around neurodivergence support. GKG would be happy to talk through this programme for anyone interested.

10.0   House of Commons Library Briefing – Suggested Reasonable Adjustments Document (SRAD)

10.1   MOB said that the DAS were mentioned in a House of Commons Library Briefing for their good practice for their Suggested Reasonable Adjustments Document (SRAD). It was likely that the House of Commons Library came across this initiative during web-based research and they might have also sought advice from organisations such as Disability Rights UK who run the All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability. The SRAD came about when Imperial left the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) scheme and had to come up with a replacement for the DSA needs assessment report for students to have their disability documented. Unlike other HEIs, Imperial referred to the Equality Act in the SRAD, highlighting the need in law to be able to put those adjustments in place for students, instead of presenting those reasonable adjustments in a learning support plan which would perhaps have less clout. MOB was pleased to see this mentioned in the Briefing.

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

11.1   MOB gave an update on behalf of Hannah Bannister about the areas that Robert Kerse, Chief Operating Officer, had been working on: the Enabling Strategy, and the White City and campus development, which acknowledged the need to ensure that our continued development of campus spaces is inclusive.

12.0   AOB

12.1   MT said that the annual AccessAble resurveys were carried out at the beginning of the year. The project on accessible toilets at Hammersmith last year was extended by funds from Estates. MT said she would send a full update to CS.

12.2   JM asked how the EDI Strategy Group (EDISG) liaised with the DAC. SL said that the DAC was a sub-group of the EDISG. As there was a review of governance at the moment, it would be good to clarify the relationship between the DAC and the EDISG. The name and membership of EDISG would be changed now that the People and Culture Committee had been established.