

Imperial College London

Disability Action Committee

Thursday 30 November 2023

10:30 – 12:00

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)
David Ashton	Academic Registrar (DA)
Hannah Bannister	Director of Student Services (HB)
Chris Banks	Director of Library Services (CB)
Andreea Cojocea	ICU Deputy President (Welfare) (AC)
William Cox	Principal Teaching Fellow, Business School (WC)
Lesley Cohen	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (LCO)
Richard Johnson	Faculty Operating Officer, Business School (RJO)
Bouquette Kabatepe	Digital Accessibility Officer, ICT (BK)
Ahlam Khamliche	Co-Chair of Able@Imperial (AKH)
Emmanuel Lawal	ICU Disabilities Officer (EL)
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)
Wayne Mitchell	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) (WM)
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)
Graeme Rae	Faculty Operating Officer, Natural Sciences (GR)
Nick Roalfe	Director of Estates Operations (NR)
Roddy Slorach	Joint Trade Unions and Disability Advisory Service (RS)
Cynthia So	Secretary to DAC (CS)
Maggie Taylor	Assistant Buildings Manager (MT)
Chris Watkins	Faculty Operating Officer, Medicine (CW)

**Co-Chairs of the Committee*

Also present:

Tatiana Codreanu	Assistant Coordinator – French, Centre for Languages, Culture & Communication (TC)
Robin Peters	Head of User Services, Library (RP)
Paul Seldon	Senior Teaching Fellow, Graduate School (PS)
Katie Stripe	Senior Learning Designer, Education Office (KS)
Andrew Youngson	Planning, Insights and Evaluation Manager, Communications (AY)

Agenda Item

1.0 Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 KK welcomed the Committee to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from: Mark Allen, Chris Banks, Harbhajan Brar, Daniela Bultoc, Lorraine Craig, Lizzy Hand, William Hollyer, Angela Kehoe, Adrian Mannall, and Tim Venables.
- 1.3 KK welcomed LCO and WM, the new Associate Provosts (EDI). She also welcomed AC, the new Deputy President (Welfare) in the ICU as well as EL, the new Disabilities Officer in the ICU.
- 1.4 EN said that she would be heading on maternity leave soon and AY would cover for her during this period.

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting 21 June 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 and the following points were noted:
 - 21 June 2023, minute 7.7 – Workplace adjustments process in context of work location framework: KK said that she had had communications with Audrey Fraser in terms of ensuring there was clarity around all the different options, and there was an action for the EDI Centre to update its webpages to reflect this.
 - 12 November 2019, minute 3.3 – Adjustments to student assessment: DA said that he was trying to get some work done within the new few months in order to look at the process so that they could be in the position to automate it as part of the student case management work. There was work going on elsewhere, in the Assessment and Feedback Group which had been set up by Peter Haynes, looking at all things to do with assessment. The review was supposed to look at it in terms of policy as well as how the College processed any application through that procedure. The action was much more live now than before, and DA would have a more definitive timeline after January.

3.0 Action plan 2023-2024

- 3.1 KK thanked CS for putting together the action plan for 2023-2024 and said that more clarity was still needed from action owners on the timescales.
- 3.2 The workplace adjustment passport was discussed. In discussion, the following points were made by members of the committee:
 - i. Certain staff members wanted to get away from the word “disabled”. (However, it was later clarified that the passport was already called the “workplace adjustment passport”, not the “disability passport”.)
 - ii. The word “disability” should not be lost in general. There was a purpose to the word, as there were barriers that staff and students faced that needed to be dealt with. The problem was with the ableism they faced, not with the word “disability” in itself. Some organisations had tried rebranding “disability” by calling it “wellbeing” or “inclusion”, but the difficulty was that it muddied the waters. People who were disabled did need adjustments. Without saying the word “disability”, it was difficult to get across the necessity of disability services and provide them to people who needed them. The tendency was for people to downplay their needs,

and not come forward for the entitlement that they had, and in the process they were making themselves ill or worse.

- iii. There had been feedback from College staff that even though the workplace adjustment policy was there, some people were still not receiving their adjustments. It was expressed that it was disappointing that some people were not being given adjustments for working arrangements, especially remote workers. People were more vulnerable to ergonomic issues while working from home. While the working at home arrangement covered part of their support needs, it would not cover all of those needs. The College needed to convey strongly to managers that people working from home were not part-time workers and needed the equipment to be successful at work.

- 3.3 Responding, KK said that there would be comms about this from the work location framework in the new year, and this might be something that could be a future agenda item, in terms of an update for this Committee.

4.0 Personae project

- 4.1 KS said that she had been working on an online skills short course called Attributes & Aspirations, which was not credit-bearing and had originally been developed for postgraduate students, to help with skills and career development, for example time management, project planning, etc. This year, they were piloting a version for undergraduate students. A set of digital personae had been created to help describe element of the course. Inclusive personae were common in web development or product user scenarios. The personae all had bios with education history and personal details, and they were all on a College course and they used College services and had motivations and frustrations.
- 4.2 Continuing, KS said they had been using stock images for these personae so far, but this was not scalable, so they put forward a proposal to make their own animations. The stock images were of very similar body types. There also issues with using stock images and AI to try and find representations that reflected gender identity and race accurately and sensitively. By designing their own animated personae they could have a more diverse range of depictions with different body types and skin tones.
- 4.3 Continuing, KS said that through the personae project, they were building archetypal students for different situations, not just teaching ones, and creating a library that could be used by anybody. They were aware that there was not a huge amount of disability representation in the personae. This was something they had discussed. They were conscious that they had to have a balance between representing the student body that Imperial had, and the student body that Imperial should have, and they did not want to be putting stereotypes onto these characters. Mental health and neurodiversity were easier to insert into the personae, and one of the new characters had a hearing impairment. The personae could be used to explore how students might use services or react in different scenarios, and KS had been working with service providers to see how they could use the personae to present the services better. One way the personae could be used would be for staff training, to explore and describe circumstances without attributing them to a real human being.
- 4.4 Concluding, KS said that she was open to suggestions about how the personae could be used and what could be done with them, and that any ideas would be welcome.

- 4.5 A question was asked about how the narratives were being developed for the personae. KS said that they were driven by the services, as they needed to work for the services where they were presenting information. For example the Library had its own working group for this project. The personae all needed to sit centrally, but the Library could say, "We have this story we want to tell", and one of the existing personae could be adapted and brought into the story. KS was helping different services and departments figure out how they could tell stories. KS realised that as a group of staff who interact with lots of students, they had a great deal of knowledge about past students and what they might struggle with, so they were a big data source. Students were also used to sense-check the stories at the end.
- 4.6 A question was asked about whether KS had thought about using generative AI in terms of developing different narratives. KS said that they were not there yet, as they were wary of using AI, based on the way it generated images for the project. However, she was aware that AI would need to be looked at, the same way it had to be with everything.
- 4.7 A question was asked about how students were able to sign up for the course. KS said that because they had been developing it by Faculty, this was the first year they had the full range of College comms at their disposal. The course was on Blackboard and they had a website, and it went out in as many student department newsletters as they could get it into. They had spoken to EN's team and it was something they were figuring out.
- 4.8 A question was asked about whether KS had explored using certain tools that were available online that allowed you to create your own personae by adjusting elements like skin colour, hair colour, etc, though it might be very easy to represent different hair colours but not as easy to represent different gender identities. KS said that they had noticed the first thing you had to do when creating an avatar for social media was pick male or female, so that was why they were choosing to keep control within the project. They wanted to get to a technical solution which would allow users to pick different hair, eyes, etc. using sliders in a more realistic way than in currently available tools.
- 4.9 A question was asked about whether KS could invite contributions from the community, since they were wanting to develop such a diverse range of personae, by using a survey to capture people's stories in an anonymous way and perhaps asking them how they would respond to different scenarios. KS said that this was an interesting idea to gather more data and sounded a bit like what Tiffany Chiu had done for her SIDUS project.
- 4.10 Summing up, KK thanked KS for coming and sharing the beginnings of her project and where it was at, and said that it looked like there were some offline conversations to be had. The committee were asked to get in touch with KS if they wished to use or participate in the project.
- 5.0 Update on comms on adjustment process, workplace adjustment passports, and data declaration**
- 5.1 EN said that since categories on ICIS had been changed in relation for staff declaring disabilities and they could now declare multiple specified disabilities, Comms did an initial update in the summer when those categories were implemented. After a series of conversations with KK and colleagues from the EDI Centre and from HR about the declarations and the workplace adjustments process and passports, it had been agreed that it would make sense to bring all of those communications together, and that they would focus on workplace adjustments because that was what had the most direct impact on staff and their working lives.

On 17 November 2023, there was an item in the Staff Briefing that brought together those elements for the start of Disability History Month. They would carry on including comms about this subject in Staff Briefing throughout the year.

- 5.2 Continuing, EN said that for Disability History Month, Sara West in the Internal Comms team had written a piece on staff support with profiles of three staff members, to help staff understand what they were entitled to and what they might be able to get access to from going through the process. There would also be a mirror piece on student support with profiles on three students and links to information on the support available. The third piece was about how to make accessible digital content. This brought together existing guidance but took a more light-hearted approach, showing the worst ways you could do text and images together for example and what would be the impact of not making content accessible for those using screen readers.
- 5.3 Concluding, EN said that she would share the links with CS who could distribute them to the Committee.

Action: EN/Secretary

6.0 Presentations from Calibre 2023 graduates

- 6.1 TC presented her Calibre project about the IDEA Theatre. IDEA stood for Inclusion, Diversity, Equality, and Accessibility. Design thinking was a part of her PhD, and she came up with the challenge statement: "How might we foster a transformative shift in the mindset and practices of the university community?" IDEA Theatre was an answer. Bringing the power of theatre, it offered a platform to challenge stereotypes, ignite empathy and provoke critical conversations, and shift the narrative to one of addressing systemic barriers. The project would showcase new writing and real situations, and staff and students would be encouraged to participate. After each play, disability awareness workshops would be held, to create understanding and empathy, and post-performance discussions to engage with the audience.
- 6.2 KK said that this was one example of some of the outputs from the Calibre programme, to showcase to the Committee some of the thoughts and ideas that were being generated, and perhaps members could percolate on how they could help the idea progress.
- 6.3 KM said that part of the Calibre programme consisted of actors coming and doing a piece. It was a very powerful training tool because people could actually see what was happening, and maybe this project could be used to incorporate more theatre into already existing training courses that were delivered at Imperial, to get that same impact and learning. KK said that she would be happy for KM to explore this and do more research on the topic and come back to the Committee.
- 6.4 PS presented his Calibre project. He found out he was dyslexic at the age of 45. As Calibre got participants to discuss what their barriers were and how by reducing those barriers they could help themselves and other people, he identified that one of his barriers was the writing barrier. All academics were required to write. Conducting research consisted of a lot of highlighting and linking and thinking about what was emerging in terms of themes and subthemes. It was a long process, and he was thinking about how to make it easier. He investigated pen scanners which could be used to translate and cut/highlight text, and he came up with the idea of the Thought Miner, an interactive personal storage system, which could store your notes and keep track of whether they were someone else's Intellectual Property or yours, and would be able to follow where you got the references from. It would have to be some sort of personal AI, and he was not aware of anything that could do this.

6.5 KK thanked PS and said that if anybody had any further questions or suggestions that could move things forward, to contact KK or CS.

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

7.1 KK said that she loved the update from the Union and she looked forward to hearing more about the neurodiversity society. She was pleased to see what had happened with the FLOWN pilot to address focus and concentration concerns, and looked forward to hearing more from David Mooney on that. She also said that it was lovely to see how the Able committee was growing.

7.2 A point was made about how there seemed to be overwhelming increases in the number of students declaring they had a disability. MOB responded that the DAS saw it as a good thing that more and more students were declaring, but the team would never be able to meet all the demand, especially in the first term. However, the team had grown, as they had taken on a new advisor and was about to appoint a new SpLD tutor, and they had filled an admin position.

8.0 AOB

8.1 DM said that any members of the Committee who were not already members of Able@Imperial should join the network. The network was not just for disabled staff members, but for all supporters of disability equality. KK said that she and KM and a couple other colleagues from the EDI Centre would be at the Able coffee morning at 9am on Friday 8 December to give an update on the disability workplace adjustment passports, and she asked the Committee members to go back to their areas and encourage people to join this coffee morning.

8.2 RP said that the Abdus Salam Library had recently refurbished their Assistive Technology room. They had carried out a User Experience (UX) project with the President's Community Fund. The refurbished room was proving really popular with students, and a lot more students were using it than before. They were also collaborating with the DAS to put on inductions for students. KK said this was heartening to hear.