

Student Welfare Committee

Tuesday 17 June 2014

10:00-12:00

SALC 10

Sherfield Building, South Kensington Campus

Minutes

Present: Dr Michael Bluck, Dr Sharon Bolton, Dr Michael Emerson, Dr Sarah Freedman, Mr Charles Gallagher, Mr Brett Harmony, Professor Debra Humphris, Dr Mick Jones, Mr Andrew Keenan, Mr Colin Kerr, Miss Marissa Lewis, Ms Claire O'Brien, Mr Roddy Slorach, Ms Rosie Summerhayes, Mrs Kelly Swaby, Dr Lynda White, Rev Andrew Willson.

In attendance Ms Lynda Chandler (Secretary)

Apologies: Professor Denis Wright, Dr Simon Archer, Mrs Mary Bown, Mr Nigel Cooke, Dr Vasa Curcin, Professor Maggie Dallman, Mr Gerry Greyling, Dr Julie King, Miss Sarah Parkes, Mrs Leigh Turvey.

Agenda Item

1. Dr Lynda White advised she had been asked to Chair the meeting on behalf of Professor Denis Wright.

On behalf of the committee, LW thanked ML for all her hard work as IC Union Deputy President (Welfare) during the last year and wished her well for the remainder of her MBBS; in his absence, she also thanked Vasa Curcin who has been appointed to a lectureship at Kings College London.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 11 February, 2014.

3. **Matters arising:**

(i) **Minute 4 (i): Postgraduate Welfare Room:** LW confirmed that, as the bungalow in the Secret Garden was unlikely to be available next academic year, accommodating PG students with a disability in the managed PG halls at Clapham Junction is the best option (good bus links) until suitable accommodation nearer South Kensington is available.

(ii) **Minute 4(viii) (carried forward from Minute 7(vi) October 2013): Credit Control communications to students:** LW gave a brief explanation to the background of this minute, detailing the three levels of graduating severity of communications to students. DH advised that a paper had been submitted to the Provost's Board in response to the OFT report '*Universities Terms and Conditions*' into the fairness of universities using academic sanctions where students owe the university non-tuition fee debts.

To comply with the OFT report, the College will no longer apply/threaten academic sanctions in the event of non-payment of any non-tuition fee debt, and the relevant policies and

regulations have been amended for 2014-15. The College Accommodation Licence for 2014-15 has also been updated.

LW advised that Wardens will be copied in where students receive a Final Reminder email, which will now state *'I am now advising you that if payment is not made by the deadline date indicated in the reminder letter, we may exercise our right to initiate court proceedings to recover the arrears.'* At every stage students are encouraged to get in touch if they dispute the amounts that are payable. On a personal basis, Credit Control will discuss any hardship circumstance or grievance with the possibility of arranging a personalised payment plan, extension or dispute resolution with the Student Hub, in conjunction with the Finance Office.

Further steps may include contacting the student's academic department. In addition, a letter would be sent, which would be delivered by the warden to the student in person. This letter would contain the wording: *'I am now left with little alternative but to advise you that if your payment is not received by [date] or if you fail to contact us to agree a suitable payment schedule by [date], the College will initiate court proceedings to recover the arrears. Please note that if the College is successful in any court proceedings against you, this is likely to have a detrimental effect on your credit rating and the court may make an order that you pay the College's costs of those proceedings in addition to any rent arrears.'*

If any debts are still outstanding after this stage the approach is to wait until the student has left accommodation for the summer vacation and then seek to recover arrears.

ME commented that departments should be brought in at an earlier stage so they could advise students to attend the Advice Centre and there was general agreement. DH explained that more needed to be done to soften the tone of these letters as they could appear very alarming to vulnerable students. She was prepared to take this matter up again with Credit Control.

Action: DH

- (iii) Minute 4(iii): Health Centre Registration:** SF advised it was too late now to follow up on this action for this year but confirmed numbers of registered students would be sent to Wardens at the end of the first term in 2014-15.

At this point Item 9 on the agenda was brought forward:

Health Centre Update

1. Staff shortages had put pressure on clinical services. A skeleton service will continue and the Health Centre will do their best to minimise the impact.
2. Mitigating Circumstances – SF advised that they had seen a high number of requests to provide certification for students who fall outside the requirements of the College Policy. Paper G outlines circumstances where certificates will be issued. SF asked whether College would consider introducing self-certification, in a similar way to employees, utilising Tutor judgement. Following a general discussion regarding effective monitoring LW suggested further investigation on how to implement such a change was needed before it could move forward.

Action: LW

3. SF outlined that, due to demand, it had been necessary to re-organise the CBT service. They would continue to see those would benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach, but would refer others to their local Independent Access to Psychological Therapies Service.
4. SF advised they are in the process of recruiting two new doctors, each working 3 days per week, to replace Hannah Prosser who is leaving.

In addition to Paper G, SF also commented that the exam workshops had been badly attended. She proposed moving the workshops to Wednesday afternoons but that that they would need a venue. DH advised that the Student Health and Wellbeing Task Group would be looking at the provision for such workshops over the summer.

SF raised an incident where explicit details of a psychologically unwell student in an extreme state of distress was sent to all Wardens, Sub-Wardens, College Tutors and Halls support staff. She stated that it would have been better to say that he had been unwell and had subsequently been sent to hospital. Committee members agreed that this was unacceptable and DH and MB agreed to meet to discuss the issue.

Action: DH/MB

- (iv) Minute 4(iii): Special exam requirements:** RS advised that the exam requirements for disabled students are currently being reviewed, including the removal of the word 'Special' from the terminology. The out of date 2002 policy requires updating to reflect best practice and to ensure it operates within legal requirements of the Equality Act for implementation in 2014-15.

- (v) Minute 4 (iv): Halls alumni network/College Hardship Fund - Fundraising charity events - Development of the College Hardship Fund paper:**

LW advised that following the news that the College will lose all 'Access to Learning Fund' (ALF) money from 2014/15, a revised paper was drafted by the Academic Registrar and submitted to Provost's Board in April. A single 'Student Support Fund' will replace the Hardship Fund and ALF. The new fund, which it is proposed will receive part central funding from College, and be more visible for 'Giving to Imperial', will be available for all Imperial students.

GG will be discussing fundraising charity events with Chris Kaye, the new IC Union Vice President (Welfare), once he is in post, and a Warden's representative.

- (vi) Minute 4(ix): Visiting Lecturer accommodation/teaching space:** BH tabled a paper updating Committee members regarding the ongoing visiting lecturer accommodation and teaching space issues for summer pre-session courses. He also highlighted concerns about the increase in lecturer accommodation costs and the anticipated disruption to courses due to the Library refurbishments. Meetings had been arranged with key personnel to discuss these issues. DH explained that disruption due to Library refurbishments would be kept to a minimum but that it was vital to go ahead with the work.

- (vii) Minute 6: Guidance for students on the use of social media:** CK confirmed that the draft policy had now been passed to the Academic Registrar to review the impact on discipline within the College regulations.

Action: Academic Registrar

(viii) Minute 8: Draft 'Student Mental Health Policy and Procedure': LW advised that this action has been put on hold in anticipation of a report by the Student Health and Wellbeing Task Group (item 7).

(ix) Minute 9: SpLD assessment charges: RS advised that due to budget constraints a charge of £60 per assessment will be introduced from 2014-15. It is currently unknown what effect cuts in the Disabled Student Allowance(DSA) was going to have or how students will access alternative funding if they are no longer in receipt of DSA. It was hoped that those in financial hardship would not be asked to pay but with the removal of ALF it was not known whether other financial assistance would be available. DH commented that it was not unusual to charge students for assessments but that we would need to ensure students were not being disadvantaged.

4. Hall Warden Policy and Procedure (Paper B):

Following the Residential Experience Review (Item 8), the Hall Warden Policy and Procedure was modified to take into account the Review recommendations approved by Provost's Board in April. A revised Policy and Procedure was taken to Provost's Board in May and the approved version (Paper B) will be subject to annual review each Spring Term.

5. Report on Annual Student Welfare Seminar (Paper C):

Feedback following the Sixth Annual Welfare Seminar has been very positive. SB suggested that the next Seminar would benefit from being a full day rather than half. LW agreed it would be worth considering.

Action: LW

6. Student experience survey (2013/14):

ML advised that individual reports were currently being sent out to departments. An action plan had been sent to DW and she was currently creating a handover to her successor, Chris Kaye.

7. Student Health and Wellbeing Task Group (Paper D):

LW referenced the Terms of Reference and membership of the group. CO gave an overview of what's in place so far. DH said she would welcome any examples of best practice found elsewhere and that they needed to take their time to create a total package. The aim is for the recommendations to go to the VP Advisory Group for Education and the Provost's Board in September.

RS asked whether any consideration had been given to employing a Mental Health Advisor. DH confirmed they were looking into what other institutions do.

KS commented that Sports provision did not appear to be mentioned. CO confirmed it is being included.

SF commented that September is a short time frame for planning services to respond to agreed recommendations. DH confirmed it will be an evolving service and that the Health Centre would be given ample warning of any recommendations necessitating action from them.

8. Residential Experiences Review (Papers E & F):

Following a brief overview of the recommendations from the review BH advised that management of the Student Amenity Fund may move to the Student Union and talks were ongoing. DH confirmed the proposed new lower level contribution of £1.50 per week (rather

than the original suggestion of £1.00) for all students/halls would be going to the Provost's Board. Following a discussion regarding clearer information being available regarding PG accommodation, DH commented that College needed to provide more student centric information and look at what other institutions were doing.

9. Health Centre Update (Paper G):

This minute was addressed under item 3 (ii).

10. Warden's Committee:

BH advised most items for discussion had already been addressed under items 4 and 8. He apologised for the late referral of a particular disciplinary case earlier in the year.

11. Departmental Disability Officer Monthly Forum:

RS advised that the main issues of discussion over the last 5 to 6 months had been:

- Discussing and outlining exam procedures with Registry and departments, collating best practice;
- Assisted technology;
- Disclosure – pros and cons and the roles of DDOs within this;
- Diagnostic assessments.

CO commented that the assisted technology session was very good and well attended. DH advised that as part of the first phase library refurbishment the assisted technology provision will all come together on the first floor.

12. SWC meeting dates for 2014-15:

LC confirmed the meeting dates for the next academic session are as follows:

Tuesday 7 October 2014, 14:00-16:00 – SALC 10 (Annual report meeting)

Tuesday 10 February 2015, 14:00-16:00 – SALC 10

Tuesday 9 June 2015, 14:00-16:00 – SALC 10

13. AOB:

(i) SB advised that the International Student Support Office had set up an induction programme for new administrators to get out and meet staff in similar roles other services and asked for members to get in touch if they were able to accommodate staff in their area.

(ii) RS advised he is now responsible for organising DDO Forums.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 7 October 2014, 14:00-16:00 in SALC 10