Evolving Goldsmiths - Overview

28 January 2020

This overview sets out the background, rationale and delivery of the Evolving Goldsmiths programme which is being launched at Goldsmiths, University of London in January 2020.

What you need to know

• Evolving Goldsmiths is our action plan to secure a bright future for the university and secure a lasting legacy for our college
• We need to stabilise our current financial position through some short-term steps and move to financial sustainability through longer-term steps
• Current teaching, learning and student experience will be protected and the future offer in all these areas will be improved

This programme is about evolution rather than revolution: we will build on Goldsmiths’ heritage, cultures and achievements as part of a transformational process to ensure we are fit for the future.

Goldsmiths must overcome a range of challenges facing both our institution and higher education as a whole. Evolving Goldsmiths will address these challenges by bringing about positive institutional change over the next decade.

By 2030 we will have a solid financial foundation to ensure the university is viable and sustainable – allowing us to further grow our reputation as a beacon with an active local, national and global reach.

Why Goldsmiths matters

The UK has seen some profound changes economically, socially and politically in recent years. We now have a majority Conservative government and Brexit is enshrined in law. Climate change and environmental politics are coming to the fore internationally, taking their place alongside other significant issues of the 21st century, not least globalisation and digitalisation and their impacts, social inclusion and uncertain economies.

Radical thinking and critical analysis are going to be essential to understand our world and inform responses – and Goldsmiths has a vital role to play.
As the UK enters an uncertain future outside the EU, the English higher education sector begins a new era with the Office for Students (OfS) having gained full powers at the beginning of the current academic year.

The OfS’s focus on student outcomes and the government’s value for money approach to understanding the purpose of a university education will have real implications for how HE is perceived.

The Conservative manifesto promised ‘close consideration’ of reducing undergraduate tuition fees with no indication of whether the funding for institutions would be replaced by other means. Continued pressure on university finances and scrutiny of our worth and contribution to society should be expected.

Goldsmiths itself is also entering a new phase of its history with a new Warden joining the institution just as it faces this set of external challenges.

The sector is starting to see and hear the priorities of a new generation of students who are confident in challenging behaviours and ways of thinking. This generation is also informed by the changed funding environment of higher education, with average student debt now £36,000.

A competitive higher education sector has meant that at application stage students have a greater choice between institutions, while students now have much greater expectations of the role and responsibilities a university takes during their time at university.

These students are then faced by a more uncertain job market than graduates of previous generations, and have an expectation of different and varied future careers.

These challenges carve out a powerful role for Goldsmiths which mean the College must be strong and sustainable – financially resilient, academically innovative so we can provide a place for developing critical thinking and alternative ideas.

It is our collective and accepted belief at Goldsmiths that we are a socially responsible and impactful institution. How we respond to the range of challenges now facing society and the sector will determine whether we can continue to lay claim to this reputation. Goldsmiths as a champion of liberal values, ideas and hope has never been more vital.

To be successful the Goldsmiths community will need to collectively grasp this challenge. We must recognise what it is important to protect – which are a number of unique and outstanding qualities – and where we need to shift our thinking. We must move beyond internal silos and at times internal confrontation to recognise the threats and the opportunities that face us as an institution.
We need to raise our game if we are to fully compete in higher education over the next 10 years and preserve Goldsmiths as a beacon for progressive thought and a place that benefits the lives of individuals and positively impacts broader society. We have to be ‘match fit’ if we are to be at the vanguard for social justice.

**A Vision of Goldsmiths in 2030**

A Goldsmiths that has successfully navigated the difficult years ahead to emerge strong and impactful, could look like this:

**A beacon with an active global reach**

We enable our students to address and navigate contemporary, real world issues – climate change, polarized communities, economic challenge to capitalism, health, sustainability, ethical business and design, science, and wellbeing – and thereby create the thinkers and difference-makers of tomorrow. We do this through continuously shifting the academic centre of gravity and how our courses and disciplines are focused in order to speak to shifting issues and priorities. Through continuously refreshing our content and practice, we demonstrate the undeniable value of the arts, social sciences and humanities. As a result, we have an excellent reputation which attracts students and staff, and our research and knowledge exchange is recognised, across the UK and the world.

**Aware that every student matters**

We understand how to support the academic journey of all of our students and have innovative teaching and learning practices in place to meet the needs of an academically, socially and culturally diverse student body. We integrate technology into our practice to enable our complex student body to collaborate, to have a personalised learning experience, and to achieve under difficult circumstances. We understand the ambitions of our students and enable them to gain and articulate the skills and experience they need to succeed. As a result, the retention, degree attainment, and career success of all our students is good, meaning that we have a Silver (if not Gold!) TEF and a far stronger position in international and UK league tables.

**Secure in our future**

We are less reliant on tuition fee income, generating income through international partnerships, enterprise activities and consultancy. We achieve an annual surplus of at least 2.5%, which enables us to continually invest in our human and physical resources and ensure services and systems meet the needs of all users. We have a new student record system and a rolling programme of renewal and upgrade in our technologies and estate and...
facilities. We invest in staff training and support individual staff aspirations through regular career development programmes.

Making a difference

Goldsmiths is an exemplar of how a truly civic university operates. We are at the heart of a creative cluster that drives economic and social benefit in South London, whilst being well-networked throughout the UK and internationally. We have expanded, developed and influenced the creative, cultural and technological industries and our graduates establish and move into new fields. We influence innovation, enterprise and technology developments by encouraging new business models that support the environment and demonstrate how we can affect society through our social justice commitments. We inform the Government’s Industrial Strategy and secure major Research Council, Government and local council government funds for this work.

Radically transparent

We have a strong and active Goldsmiths community, with an approach to governance that enables dialogue between staff, students and the wider external Goldsmiths’ communities and stakeholders. Our structures are transparent, effective and support ease of communication and decision-making for staff, students and externals. We understand and hear the many voices of the Goldsmiths’ community and work constructively to achieve a collaborative and democratic university.

Where we are now – Goldsmiths in 2020

The vision above points to an ambitious and exciting future for Goldsmiths. But in order to plan for the future, we need to have an honest understanding of where we are at present.

Goldsmiths is academically-led and focused. We have a strong sense of who we are and what we stand for and these beliefs are informed by our history. We have been highly influential – our alumni, approach to practice and research are testament to this.

But, we could and should be making a more significant contribution to today’s world. Despite its innovative reputation, Goldsmiths has failed to significantly improve the student experience, respond to its changed student body, or to recognise that financial pressures are not going away.

While Goldsmiths is, and should be ‘different’, it must change and evolve its approaches as the world changes around it. An honest assessment of our present performance would suggest that we are not yet keeping pace with the world around us.
For example, our financial model sees an over-reliance on tuitions fees, with some 75% of our income drawn from this source with a particular focus on domestic students. The money we spend is greater than the money we bring in.

Our research performance, whilst demonstrating some significant strengths, also requires some honest reflection. We have an international reputation for our research originality, our innovation and a deep integrity that others covet.

For that reputation to become more meaningful, there ought to be far broader examples of such research across the university. It is important that we collectively understand our research strengths, but also our weaknesses – we can give greater support where such support can help us flourish, but we ought also to offer a helpful mirror.

Our efforts to change to date

Goldsmiths’ Strategy, launched in 2018, condenses the university’s strategic ambitions into four overarching objectives:

- Shape our portfolio of academic programmes and range of research to build on Goldsmiths’ reputation as relevant, challenging and distinctive
- Respond to the full range of students’ needs and expectation through innovative delivery of excellent teaching and learning and everything that supports it
- Equip graduates with the flexibility, skills and confidence needed to achieve their ambitions and aspire to make a different to the world around them
- Support research excellence that addresses local, national and global challenges

In many ways, these objectives articulate the ‘basics’ of being a good university. However, Our Key Performance Indicators, which track key metrics aligned to the strategic objectives, demonstrates the distance we have to travel to demonstrate that we are getting these areas right.

There have been significant efforts across the university to secure these improvements, for example the new academic offers refreshing the College.

It is important to acknowledge that a range of activity has been undertaken by many colleagues across the university in recent years. Alongside this we must be honest and accept that change at Goldsmiths has been incremental and relatively small scale compared to the growing challenges we face.

Pursuing our Strategy and achieving our stated objectives continue to be vital, both to being a successful university and being the university we wish to be. Achieving these objectives will mean that we have a solid base from which to meet current challenges. The plan set-out
here is therefore not a divergence from the existing Strategy but rather a means of accelerating and focussing our work to ensure we are getting the ‘basics’ right.

**Our financial position**

Goldsmiths’ current student outcomes and recruitment issues are now leading to significant financial challenges. These only serve to bring into sharper focus the need for change, whilst also presenting constraints to the ways in which we must seek to achieve the necessary changes.

The financial position has been deteriorating on an annual basis for several years. Ambitious student number targets have driven growth, requiring resource additions to be put in place. But additional resources were allocated on the basis of stretch targets, which were not always met.

This has meant that in areas across College, both in professional services and academic departments, costs have not remained in line with income. Added to this, with relatively flatline increases in tuition fee levels we have had to absorb inflationary pressures as well as significant increases in pension costs.

This academic year, the institutional budget was for a £2million deficit. However a drop in our student conversion rates has seen our undergraduate intake fall while anticipated growth at postgraduate did not take place. In addition to this we have not met savings already set out for this year – leading to a significantly higher deficit forecast for academic year 19/20.

In short, we need to reduce our costs by over the next two years, saving at least £10million by the end of 20/21 academic year, in order to return to a breakeven position. We will then need to move to a surplus position to enable us to begin to build and invest into the future.

**Evolving Goldsmiths – a programme for change**

The plan set out here is the result of deep consideration over a period of time. The programme looks to the long-term with a commitment to achieving sustainability by looking at the evolution of our college renewing teaching and learning, diversifying income and strengthening research. It also looks to the present allowing us to collectively take some immediate steps to stabilise the institution and start improving our student experience.

In headline form, the programme will deliver the following:
• Enhanced capacity for driving change, revising senior academic leadership roles to create dedicated Head of School (Executive Dean) positions and refocusing Heads of Department roles to allow for greater academic innovation.
• A redesign of our academic administration to further drive change and meet the needs of refocussed activity, moving administration to the School level in order to provide professional and standardised support to both students and academic staff, ensure compliance with external and internal policies, and achieve efficiencies of scale in structure.
• The undertaking of a series of significant cost reduction exercises over the next 12-18 months in order to stabilise our financial position in the short-term, as well as identifying significant savings across all budget areas this will include a Voluntary Severance Scheme for all staff. A cost reduction target for professional and academic service areas of 15% over the next two academic years (10% 2020-21 and 5% 2021-22) has already been set.
• A revitalisation of our teaching and learning offer, streamlining provision and exploring opportunities for new provision, whilst ensuring that content and delivery is focussed on supporting and enabling success across a diverse student body as well as engaging them with distinctive content that is relevant to real world issues and facilitative of their future ambitions.
• A reimagining of the ways in which we engage and work with partners and funders so that we maximise both the external reach and impact of our knowledge and expertise and the financial contribution these activities make to our sustainability.
• A revised approach to academic workload allocation and academic career pathways to ensure fairness and transparency, provide clarity of expectations, appropriately reward success, minimise casualisation, and focus time and effort on those activities that are of most strategic importance and value to Goldsmiths.
• Through all of the above, design an operating model for the institution that achieves financial stability and sustainability for the long-term so that our costs are appropriate for our size, resource allocation us aligned with our strategic priorities, and we can continue to invest in the future.

This is a significant programme of work. The Warden and Senior Management Team are mindful of the impact on individuals of these plans, and of the challenges that implementation is likely to pose. Change is always difficult, and these changes are wide-reaching and substantial.

The changes proposed here seek to tackle a fundamentally existential challenge to the future of Goldsmiths and are therefore deliberately and necessarily radical and comprehensive.
It will of course be important to listen to the community’s input across the range of work outlined here, and there will be varied opportunity for staff and students to engage with meaningful conversations and share their thoughts around this change programme.

**What it means for current students**

Evolving Goldsmiths will make administrative and management structures at the university more efficient – which in turn will allow our staff to focus on providing students with support where it is most needed.

**What it means for future students**

All of the proposals will help develop and grow Goldsmiths. Those seeking to join us in the future will benefit from the improved structures, facilities and an academic offer which is both relevant and challenging and a fully sustainable organisation.

**What it means for staff**

This is a programme to undertake positive change at Goldsmiths – through this there are likely to be some challenging times. These changes will affect our staff and we are committed to making sure that colleagues are informed and engaged in the programme through clear communications and support delivered through existing line-management arrangements.

The first significant step for staff is the launch of a voluntary severance scheme on 31 January 2020. There will also be opportunities for colleagues to assess their working terms and conditions ie reducing the number of days worked.

**Staff support and change management approach**

As stated above, the input of colleagues across the university will help to strengthen the detail of the changes. It is also recognised that any significant changes to work practices, particularly in an environment that is not used to change, will need support and training for individuals.

A full change management plan will form an important part of programme management. This will provide a range of opportunities for staff and students to engage with and understand the changes and inform them where appropriate. It will also include staff development and training opportunities.
Programme Management

A dedicated programme team and appropriate governance arrangements are being put in place to manage this programme of change. The programme will have SMT leadership from the Registrar and Secretary whilst day-to-day management and the team will be led by the Director of Strategic Planning and Projects.

Governance

Appropriate governance arrangements will be put in place for the programme. Each workstream will have governance to take oversight of the specified deliverables including the meeting of targets. Workstream governance will include representation from key stakeholder groups to ensure breadth of input and engagement. There will be a Programme Board, to be made up of the Senior Management Team and representation from Council (for example membership from FRC would be beneficial). External representation will also be sought from people with relevant experience of change at other HEIs.

Communication the programme

Ensuring that colleagues, students and other stakeholders are aware, understand and are able to navigate the programme is critical for all involved and for the success of Evolving Goldsmiths.

We will:

- Provide high quality programme support to aid the successful delivery of Evolving Goldsmiths
- Secure clear understanding of programme purpose, rationale and benefits thus building trust and confidence amongst audiences
- Deliver relevant, appropriate comms content so colleagues can understand what the programme means for them