

Responding to strike action - email to students

26 November 2021

Dear students,

As the first four days of strike action come to an end, I'm writing to share our College's response to events this week.

These days have shown just how much people care about Goldsmiths, as a special place which must be treasured.

Believe me when I say we all care deeply about our institution, what it stands for and the importance of the role it must be able to play in this increasingly challenging world. Like now, we want our successors to be challenging inequality, questioning orthodoxies and throwing a searchlight on some of society's biggest problems.

The Goldsmiths of the future will not be able to do this if we do not address the significant financial challenges we currently face – because it is unlikely to be here in its current form.

For some time we have spent more than we bring in, which has created the deficit we are working to fix. We have already taken a number of steps to close this financial gap, like selling buildings which are not major teaching spaces or reducing the amount of money on what is called non-pay areas, which includes some building work and projects on our campus.

But we cannot continue to sell parts of estate and there are limits to how much we can reduce non-pay because this includes resources like books, computers and software, and because we have to be able to maintain our campus and its facilities. Instead our approach to recovery must be to take measured action through evidenced but potentially difficult decisions.

Parallel to this we are facing a government whose policy decisions have already cut deeply into our financial wellbeing – with it widely reported that No10, Treasury and DfE are likely to take further negative financial measures in the year ahead.

I understand this is not an easy time for our community, especially after the last 20 months, and that the pandemic has come with its own emotional and financial costs. With this in mind, we're in an unenviable and unsought-for position that means we have

difficult decisions to take – but which are for the collective good of Goldsmiths and its future.

Our offer to talk

That we all care so deeply about Goldsmiths should be a starting point of any discussions. As I shared with colleagues earlier this week, we truly value conversations with our unions who have always played an important part in the life of our College.

We continue to meet with union leaders, with five meetings alone last week, and have twice appealed to Goldsmiths UCU to join the College in facilitated discussions at ACAS, the reconciliation service which gives independent and impartial advice in industrial disputes. To date, Goldsmiths UCU are refusing to join talks. Colleagues from UNISON have agreed to join.

None of us want students to pay the price for this dispute and the impact of three weeks of strike action can be avoided if Goldsmiths UCU are willing to come to the table.

Supporting students

I know questions have been raised about our Student Hardship Fund and I want to reassure you that we continue to assist students through this resource. During the last academic year, and with central help from the government's Covid-19 funding programme, we provided more than £750,000 of support to nearly 800 students – at an average of £950 a student.

Despite the government withdrawing central hardship funding for this academic year we have still been able to support students who have applied for hardship support from the College – and I would encourage any student who needs this help to [make an application](#).

Have your say

Students have a vital role to play in contributing to the collective consultation over the recovery programme. We've previously invited students to share feedback on the consultation proposals and our thanks go to students who have already submitted their ideas. [Submissions are still open](#) and can be made until 3pm on Friday 3 December.

Thank you

The 21 consecutive days of strike action called by Goldsmiths UCU represent one of the most significant periods of strike action at a university in recent times.

We are doing everything we can to minimise disruption to your learning, and over the past week a number of teaching sessions have gone ahead. We have a wide range of

resources to support self-guided study and studios, rehearsal spaces and the Library and VLE continue to be available. But given the extent of the strike action, it is realistic to expect that some scheduled academic sessions may be affected.

I would like to apologise for the impact this strike action is having on your time at Goldsmiths and would like to thank you for showing understanding at what is a challenging time for all in our community. With picket lines due to be in place for a further two weeks, I would like to appeal to everyone on campus to continue to show empathy and respect at all times.

[Information about the industrial action is on Goldsmiths website.](#)

If you have any questions about the industrial action, please email strikeaction@gold.ac.uk.

With best wishes,

Professor Frances Corner

Warden
Goldsmiths, University of London