Letter from Warden

2 November 2021

Dear student

I hope you are keeping well and enjoying Autumn Term. After 19 months since the start of the pandemic, it is brilliant to see so many people on campus, to enjoy the positivity of having students and staff learning and working in-person and for many of us to be able to catch up with friends and colleagues.

The last two years have seen real change for us all, and the fact that we are now at a point where we can deliver our core mission of learning in this way is to be celebrated.

The impact of Covid-19 on Goldsmiths has not gone away, however, with the financial shock of the pandemic contributing to ongoing challenges for the College.

I am writing today to set out what this means for our student and staff communities – and to address a time of necessary change for Goldsmiths which will ensure a future where our university is the pre-eminent beacon of liberal, progressive values.

Putting students first

As you may be aware, Goldsmiths is building a Recovery Programme to address a significant financial deficit and put the College in a stable and sustainable financial position by making savings across the university.

During this time we are putting students’ learning and experience first and doing all we can to make sure that outcomes and ambitions are achieved. This includes agreeing a range of commitments with staff unions related to the Recovery Programme, including over Associate Lecturer teaching budgets.

The reasons for the deficit are complex, including the £10 million impact of Covid-19, and are set out on the Recovery Programme webpage.

Steps we are taking

We are taking action in a number of areas to improve our financial position:

- We have recently sold a number of non-essential buildings on our estate
- We have reduced non-pay expenditure and made efficiencies and found suppliers which offer better value for money
• We have lobbied against central government funding cuts for Goldsmiths

Despite these efforts we need to take further action to help us save money. The size of the deficit means that no change is not an option. Our college has benefitted from growth in the past, but now as other Universities are growing, Goldsmiths is not and we are having to make some difficult decisions about our how we spend our money.

This includes looking at staff costs. At Goldsmiths our staff costs are very high, having grown to more than £80m a year which is over 65% of our total income and is above the sector average. Redundancies are always a last resort but this is something we are having to consider as a way of saving money.

One thing the College is not undertaking is so-called “fire and rehire” practices – our policies (which we agreed with our trade unions) make it clear that we cannot and most importantly, would not do this.

Have your say

It’s vital that students have their say about the proposals in the Recovery Programme and last month we asked all students to be part of a formal consultation. This formal consultation is being undertaken within policies agreed with staff trade unions.

There is still time for you to contribute to the consultation – visit the VLE to find out more.

Looking to the future

The world is changing faster than ever, with new questions posed every day but where answers more often than not come from the same vested interests and powerful social hierarchies. Goldsmiths already plays an important role in challenging those orthodoxies and throwing a searchlight on some of society’s biggest problems.

Yet we can do and be so much more, and in the years to come Goldsmiths will be the pre-eminent beacon of progressive, liberal values with a deeper reach and wider impact than we have so far experienced. Through strong, sustainable foundations we will be able to invest in the academic endeavour so that students have a peerless and equitable experience.

Within this, subject to ongoing consultation with our unions, we remain committed to teaching the humanities as part of a varied teaching and learning offer including the disciplines of history, English and creative writing. This includes an expectation of the continuation of areas including Creative Writing, Black British History, Black British and Caribbean Literature and Queer Studies as vital areas of academic endeavour which, alongside the Goldsmiths Prize, are a unique part of our College.
This commitment to our educational offer remains unchanged and the Recovery Programme’s proposals seek to find a middle way, where we can achieve sustainability and secure areas that are distinct and intrinsically "Goldsmiths" and which find new ways of delivering in our traditional areas of strength like the environment, civic responsibility and social justice.

**Ballots over industrial action**

You may have seen that UCU, which is the biggest union in higher education, is currently balloting its members over whether they are prepared to take industrial action relating to pensions and working conditions.

These issues are not unique to Goldsmiths – this is a dispute on a national level with ballots at 152 institutions in total. Separately, UCU members at Goldsmiths are also being balloted for industrial action over the College's Recovery Programme.

All of the issues relating to the potential industrial action are underpinned by the financial challenges which the College is facing.

The ballots all close this week. We can expect their outcomes next week as well as information about any potential industrial action, which could begin before Christmas.

I recently took the unprecedented step of urging UCU members to not vote in favour of taking industrial action, given the significant effect any such action could have on our students’ learning and experience. This request is further underlined by the considerable impact of the pandemic over the previous two academic years and into this academic year.

I completely respect the right of colleagues to take industrial action but this would not be industrial action in a normal year – we have seen this illustrated by the Students' Union of UCL, [who have come out against industrial action](#).

**Our promise to students**

This year the College is committed to providing our students with as full a learning experience as is reasonably possible in line with Covid-19 guidelines, with in-person activities expected to take place on every programme.

In the autumn term we are planning for all interactive sessions to be taught face-to-face with a wide range of in-person activities for all students, including those on practice-based courses, while lectures will be online.

Industrial action may impact on our ability to deliver this promise to you. The College will provide students with comprehensive support to minimise the impact of industrial action on your studies. We will also take all reasonable steps to help you achieve your learning...
outcomes and to enable the College to deliver educational services in accordance with your student contract.

As the situation around potential industrial action becomes clearer we will be able to share more information about any potential impact and the measures the College will put in place to mitigate any impact.

Information about industrial action at Goldsmiths will be shared on this webpage.

Our commitments

We recognise fully our responsibilities towards students and colleagues during what may be a challenging time and we are making two clear commitments to our community:

- We are putting students’ learning and experience first, doing all we can to make sure that outcomes and ambitions are achieved
- We are doing everything we can to support staff, including providing the fairest employment terms and conditions possible

This has been a longer message than usual and I would like to thank you for taking the time to read and reflect on it. I hope it has helped set out Goldsmiths’ position and that it provides you with reassurance that we will continue to do everything we can to put students first.

With best wishes,

Professor Frances Corner

Warden

Goldsmiths, University of London