

Extraordinary Council

18th August 2020

2pm-5pm

Present: Dinah Caine (Chair), Frances Corner, Mark d'Inverno, David Oswell, Elisabeth Hill, Lauren Corelli (left at 5pm), Rodger Kibble, John Price, Atau Tanaka, Ben Fowler, Philip Stoltzfus, Ian Borman, Theodora Zemek, Pam Raynor, Aaron Porter, Andrew Laurence, Carol Rue, Susan Dilly, Ravi Mahendra (left at 5.00pm), Lynn Percy, Monika Barnes, Ronke Akerele

In attendance: Helen Watson, Matthew Brooks, John Dickinson-Lilley, Melanie Rimmer, Nirmal Borkhataria and Sally Priddle (minutes)

Apologies: David Reddaway and Kierin Offlands

OPEN BUSINESS

1 Minutes

Received:

1.1 Open Minutes from meeting of 25 June 2020.

Noted:

1.2 The date required correction.

Resolved:

1.3 The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2 Communications Update

Received:

2.1 Communication framework; the next steps for communications to the community including the key messages that would be covered and how the communications connect with the recovery and renewal plan (19-568)

Noted:

2.2 It was reported that a revised approach to communication had been implemented to support the community during the Covid pandemic, this included Covid-19 briefings, a Covid-19 information hub on gold.ac.uk and establishing channel shift for departments. The Covid communications had received positive feedback and engagement, the content had moved away from narrative and focused on factual information.

- 2.3 A set of materials and films had been created to demonstrate to students how they could engage on campus and how to effectively socially distance on campus. The materials were being established as pre-enrolment pieces of learning.
- 2.4 It was reported that there had already been a return on the investment made in clearing and communications, conversion was better than this time last year.
- 2.5 The consultation hub had been established and was now operational. Concerns had been raised by the community about utilising an external tool when the College had the expertise to create something in house. It was reported that the hub had been identified as an effective tool because of its comprehensive functions and immediate implementation. It would also support colleagues who were already dealing with a large workload.
- 2.6 Council asked how the consultation hub would be used to inform committees and feed into the governance structures. It was reported that Council members would be asked to engage with all consultations. Committees could also see the consultation hub as a tool to effect its business. It was reported that the hub would be utilised to engage the internal and external community on the next steps for the Deptford Town Hall statues. It was agreed it would be beneficial to hold a virtual tour of the hub so that Council could better understand the system and its potential uses.
- 2.7 The consultation hub enabled structured questionnaires which provided effective reports which could provide an insight into the community's thoughts as well as feed into decision making. The hub would sit alongside the governance structure, not supersede it. All formal decisions would still need to be made through the existing structure.
- 2.8 It was reported that the team were working to establish systems and guidance to support managers to cascade information and updates. Although there were a high number of communications about the College's position, challenges and decision made, these were not yet being heard at all levels of the community. It was important that everyone understood the position and the context to any difficult decisions.
- 2.9 The College was now establishing the recovery and resilience impact phase. Resilience looked at the critical incident group reports, operations and returning to campus, whilst the recovery focused on the College's recovery and actions. Underneath these strategic approaches were the ongoing crisis communications, which responded to issues as they arose and to feedback from the community. This system enabled a two-way communication flow and focused on the community receiving important information.

- 2.10 People were at the heart of the communication approach. Colleagues needed to understand what was happening next and why. When there was greater clarity on the shape of the recovery plan and key actions, Communications would support all stakeholders to understand and work to ensure consistency of messaging.
- 2.11 Throughout the implementation of the approach, the Communications team would continue to check back and ensure they were hitting the objectives. It focused on disseminating information that was appropriate for everyone in inclusive, accessible ways.
- 2.12 The team were taking an audience focused approach. Support had been provided to the Director of Estates to establish new communication routes for her team, ensuring that colleagues with less contact or access to technology in their role could still receive all College updates. Support was being provided to all managers and leaders to ensure they had the confidence and tools to talk about impact and support their teams.
- 2.13 The College provided a potentially overwhelming amount of information to students, and the Communication team wanted to reduce and simplify this to improve access and understanding.
- 2.14 It was agreed that the approach needed to ensure the community's understanding of key information. There needed to be an understanding that the future conduct and approach the College took to its work could not continue in the same vein as in the past.
- 2.15 Council asked how they would be assured about the impact and effectiveness of communications.
- 2.16 Council agreed that it was beneficial that the Strategy provided a framework for communications, focusing on the different phases of the College's future. It was important that focus on the longer term was maintained and supported the Strategy and future decision making.
- 2.17 The Students Union asked how the ongoing and organic feedback that different parties and bodies across the College would feed into the framework, i.e. feedback received by the Student or staff unions. It was agreed that organic feedback was important and needed to be integrated into communications work.
- 2.18 Council agreed that it was important that the communications approach enabled collective responsibility, a blame culture was not effective to address areas for improvement and would not establish a sustainable future for the College.
- 2.19 Council asked for a comprehensive single document that articulated which plans and approaches were dealing with which challenges. They requested a single document articulating all aspects for the September meeting.

Action:

- 2.20 Arrange a virtual tour of the Consultation Hub.
 - 2.21 Circulate the Communications presentation to Council.
 - 2.22 Arrange a meeting with the Students Union to talk about the Consultation Hub.
 - 2.23 Provide a single integrated report to Council outlining all aspects of the Resilience and Recovery Plan.
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3 Student Experience and NSS Results

Received:

- 3.1 College and the Students Union reports on the student experience and NSS results; reflecting on what the results mean, what changes need to be made and how Council can be assured effective action is being taken (19-569)

Noted:

- 3.2 Council agreed that there was a collective responsibility for student experience and the subsequent NSS results. The results were disappointing but confirmed the issues that Council had discussed and challenged previously.
- 3.3 Pro-Warden Learning and Teaching provided an overview of the NSS survey, its contents, how it was implemented and published. The survey was available to all final year undergraduates in UK Higher Education Institutions.
- 3.4 It was reported that Goldsmiths' rating had dropped against all 27 questions. The College had already begun to assess the context behind the outcomes and assess the free text feedback. The three biggest decreases between 2018 and 2020 were: Learning Community (-9.2pp); Academic Support (-9.0pp) and Organisation and Management (-8.1pp).
- 3.5 It was agreed that everyone was responsible in different ways for the results; there was no doubt staff had worked extremely hard this year, especially in ensuring the effective transition to online learning. Colleagues had worked to turn around the student experience, however it had not resulted in the hoped-for increase.
- 3.6 Although it would be assumed that industrial action and Covid negatively impacted the results, analysis showed that 50% of responses were made before the spring term period of industrial action and nearly all the responses were made before lockdown. However, this cohort of students had experienced two additional periods of industrial action, in their first year and during the Autumn term.

- 3.7 The results were not the only piece of the puzzle however they needed to be reflected upon seriously and the College needed to assess what was right for the student experience. The College's perceptions and students' experience did not currently align.
- 3.8 That the student experience had to be central to all action planning. All work streams had representation from both Sabbatical Officers and staff members of the Students Union. The workstreams covered both Covid-response and business as usual activities.
- 3.9 The Chair reported that she had requested the Students Union provide a report reflecting on their results and offering thoughts on why the results may have dropped and what key pieces of work they wanted to work on with the College. A report had not been provided due to annual leave, however a verbal update was provided. It was agreed that a brief written report would be provided after the meeting to inform Council.
- 3.10 The Students Union reported that they did not support the NSS survey and had historically boycotted it, believing it to be a flawed mechanism. The Union did not believe that the results of the survey were representative of them and their work, as they regarded the questions as reductive and suggested that the survey was often not engaged with by students who were heavily involved in the Union. The 1.7% drop was not out of step with others across the sector.
- 3.11 The Students Union confirmed that although the results were surprising, they were reflective of the issues that they had raised with the College throughout the academic year. It was good to hear that the results were being taken seriously and there was an appetite for genuine reflection and real change. Despite the survey's flaws it was important to undertake analysis and establish a robust action plan. In addition, the students were likely to have been reacting to the high profile issues within the College, namely racism, the strikes, Evolving Goldsmiths and staff working conditions, all of which led to dissatisfaction.
- 3.12 It was reported that the Students Union ran an annual survey of their own and the results of that aligned with those of the NSS. Consistently the student body were unhappy and over a third of the students reported that their mental health had deteriorated whilst at Goldsmiths.
- 3.13 The Students Union raised concerns about the reduction in academic administration capacity, stating that loss of staff would further impact the support students received and therefore further effect future NSS results. Feedback from students was presented, and it was suggested that there was neither any mechanism to facilitate change in place, nor any rationale explaining why this could not change.

- 3.14 Council asked the Students Union for further information on their analysis, how they supported the community and whether they felt they effectively represented the students.
- 3.15 It was agreed that NSS feedback should not be responded to in isolation and that other forms of student feedback were integrated and fed into improvements plans. It was reported that the new department development plans were based on a variety of feedback sources.
- 3.16 Council expressed disappointment and concern at the results and particularly the poor results regarding the organisation of courses. It was clear that the College could not effectively support its students or provide positive outcomes without ensuring that its courses were well organised. The question was raised as to whether departments worked with critical friends outside of the university to benchmark quality and identify improvements. It was reported this practise was part of the quality and programme review process.
- 3.17 Council asked whether a comparable set of questions were asked to Year 1 and 2 students to identify concerns earlier and mitigate the negative trajectory. It was reported that there was not a comparable survey for these year groups.
- 3.18 Council asked whether it was possible to receive an additional breakdown by protected characteristics to inform analysis and actions. It was reported that this analysis was possible and would be provided.
- 3.19 Council asked whether some of the particularly appalling scores would result in conversations at the department level. The point was raised whether some of these responses might eventually result in a serious consideration of the sustainability of certain programmes and departments. The results only showed poor results in the final year but this did not reflect that there could well have been many students that might have left the College in the first 2 years of their course as a result of poor provision. The College needed to consider whether the current portfolio of subjects offered to students was optimum.
- 3.20 Council discussed the need to reflect on its position in the market, especially in light of the pending outcomes of Augar, the spending review and the interpretation of courses on the basis of value and worth.
- 3.21 Council were already aware and looking at these issues before Covid, the pandemic had exacerbated a number of these issues.
- 3.22 Council asked that the response plan and recovery report submitted to the meeting in September include a reflection on the resourcing and organisation of the College. With 19 departments and split administration, how would resource be deployed to enable improvements, including at a senior level.

- 3.23 It was reported that the Pro-Warden Learning and Teaching was leading a major curriculum review and this would be integrated into the business review.
- 3.24 It was agreed the College needed to reflect on the results, focus conservatively on what things were being done well but remain open to challenging those areas of provision that were lacking.

Action:

- 3.25 Provide Council with an analysis of the results including protected characteristics.
- 3.26 Students Union to provide a written update and reflection on the NSS results and their next steps.
- 3.27 Include in the response and recovery plan information about the organisation and resourcing of the College, including at a senior level.

4 Use of College Seal- Batavia Mews Lease

Received:

- 4.1 the College's Seal was affixed to a Deed of Surrender (regarding the property known as Batavia Mews) on 10 August 2020.

Noted:

- 4.2 It was reported that the Executive was required to inform Council when the Seal had been utilised. The Seal had been used to approve a Deed of Surrender on a currently unoccupied property which was unable to be occupied prior to the conclusion of the lease.

5 Updates from the Office for Students (Open)

Received:

- 5.1 Correspondence from the Office for Students regarding changes to data returns directed to the governing body.

Noted:

- 5.2 Council noted the updates from the Office for Students and the changes to the data returns and timelines for submissions.
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6 Any other business

Noted:

- 6.1 The Chair reported that a number of Council Members were ending their term and wanted to express thanks on behalf of Council.
- 6.2 Theo Zemek joined Council in 2015 and had supported a number of committees since joining including Finance and Resources Committee and Audit and Risk Committee, always providing robust challenge. Theo had since moved to Scotland and sincere thanks were given for all her support to Goldsmiths, with warm wishes for her next step.
- 6.3 Carol Rue joined Council in 2017 and has also supported a variety of committees including Human Resources and Equalities Committee, Finance and Resources Committee and the Chair of the External Relations Committee over the past year. Carol had helped review the role of the External Relations Committee to ensure it effectively scrutinised and drove the Strategy in this area.
- 6.4 Kierin Offlands joined Council as Chair of Student Assembly in 2018. In his post Kierin was the only active student post on Council and he had actively participated whilst undertaking his degree. His role was unique and Council thanked him for his input, challenge and ongoing advocacy of student experience at Goldsmiths. Council wished him the best of luck in the next stages of his work beyond Goldsmiths and hoped to stay in touch with him.
- 6.5 John Price had been Head of History for 3 years and had served on Council in the capacity of Academic Board Representative. Having an active Head of Department on Council had been invaluable in providing insight into academic matters. Members thanked John for his resilience whilst walking an often challenging line as both a Member of Council and Head of a Department during difficult decisions. Council looked forward to hearing about John's continued work at Goldsmiths.
- 6.6 Conrad Heyns had been the Director of English Language Centre for nearly 4 years and had also been on Council in capacity as an Academic Board Representative. Council had heard about the noticeable developments in pre-sessional courses which have led to increase in student numbers and greater integration with academic departments. Members thanked Conrad for continuing to bridge the gap between Council and Academic Board. Council looked forward to hearing more about Conrad's work in the newly named Centre for Academic Language & Literacies.

- 6.7 Mark d’Inverno had been the Pro-Warden International since 2016 and had played a key role in the development and expansion of the College’s global work, including University of London Worldwide. Mark had supported Council to improve the link between management and strategy, especially in providing vital assurances on the International Strategy. Mark would be remaining at Goldsmiths supporting in an advisory capacity 1 day a week.