

GUCU submission on 'School Restructuring'

19 March 2020

Caveats

1. Meaningful Consultation

The College's 'Managing Organisational Change' policy states that 'full and meaningful consideration will be given to any proposals put forward by staff and the Trade unions. These could include alternative proposals for addressing the business need [of the College] and for implementing change...' (para 72).

GUCU believes, however, that the College has failed to implement fully this policy and to participate in 'early and meaningful consultation with the recognised Trade Unions' (para 3). GUCU puts forward the following proposal with a major caveat: that staff were *not* consulted in advance about the fundamental terms of 'Evolving Goldsmiths' (EG), the programme that is driving the more specific proposal to restructure Schools and to change reporting lines. The current consultation is severely limited because it is focused simply on *how* to implement EG as opposed to considering alternatives to EG before it was imposed. We present below a more holistic account of how the entire College community could work together to address financial and other challenges; this requires a different starting point to the current, overly restrictive process on school restructuring.

We also note that GUCU has not had representation at Council or on other key decision-making committees relevant to EG, nor have we had direct access to information/documentation circulated at those meetings. An important example is the Finance and Resources Committee on 5 March 2020: we were refused the opportunity to observe. We have been furnished with a number of financial documents, but documents from the FRC committee that are likely to be important for the purposes of collective bargaining have not been forthcoming on the basis of a narrow interpretation of the guidelines of the ACAS Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) as cited in our Recognition Agreement. A version of Finance Strategy documentation has been promised from the Interim Head of Finance but has not yet been received. GUCU requests participation in and access to documentation from such committees for the purpose of collective bargaining, but also because access and information withheld on the basis of 'commercial sensitivity' is at odds with public interest: the university is a registered charity whose decisions must be scrutinised and made accountable, especially when management makes explicit claims to 'radical transparency', social justice and equality.

2. Covid-19

Over and above our concerns about the lack of meaningful consultation, we believe that the refusal thus far by SMT to suspend EG in the light of the Covid-19 crisis, demonstrates a strategic and ethical failure on the part of the Warden/SMT. At a time of international crisis in which all staff and students are facing unprecedented challenges in their personal, professional and social lives, it is irresponsible in the extreme to continue pushing through a contentious reform that has already had a severe impact on the wellbeing, mental health and professional capacity of huge numbers of staff. To allow this major source of anxiety to continue on top of all the anxiety and fear caused by the Covid-19 situation is reckless and counter-productive. It is hugely regrettable that we and other affected staff continue to be forced to divert time and energy to this process when our attention should be focused solely on protecting and supporting our colleagues and students.

Introduction

We are well aware of the challenges Goldsmiths faces: the prospect of a cut in student fees or capped numbers for certain subjects (e.g. the creative arts), increased pensions costs, potential losses from Brexit and EU research funding, and demographic uncertainties. Coronavirus now brings heightened concerns over international student applications in particular.

Innovative and urgent responses are in short supply across the sector. Goldsmiths, with its [stated commitment](#) to pursuing social justice and 'radical and innovative thinking', is ideally placed to meet these challenges with a genuinely collaborative approach that will inspire staff and students, within a vision that is socially transformative.

Goldsmiths' response should not just reproduce existing approaches but should carefully consider how to do things differently. It should not uncritically defend the *status quo* but embrace a progressive vision of change whilst also ensuring it addresses the challenges it faces.

Such a response should be based on some simple principles:

- The willingness of the *whole* of Goldsmiths to adopt practices dedicated to pursuing social, economic and environmental justice as well as financial and environmental sustainability;
- A commitment to equality and inclusivity in order to secure a flourishing higher education for the public good;
- The adoption of strategies to develop Goldsmiths as a proudly anti-elitist, deeply democratic, inclusive, academically rigorous and politically transformative institution.

Our immediate concerns

The explanation for the College's current financial position, as outlined in the restructure proposal, fails to provide a persuasive background to and explanation of the overall financial picture. Instead, it merely asserts a projected deficit of £10m for 2019/20 without any discussion of [how this deficit has been calculated](#). Furthermore, no evidence is provided as to why the proposed restructure will improve the College's financial standing (or any of the other challenges it faces at the moment), and indeed, UCU believes, for reasons explained below, that it might in fact make them worse.

Despite promises of 'radical transparency', none of the affected groups of staff were provided with the detailed financial information necessary to evaluate the basis on which the EG programme was developed, nor with the specific proposals relevant to this consultation. Unions had to wait some three weeks before such information was provided under the terms of our Facilities Agreement.

Consultation has, this far, been experienced by affected staff largely as a 'tick box' exercise. Concerns, for example, over the alleged benefits of 'economies of scale' and centralised budgets, have been noted but not been answered and staff do not believe their feedback and constructive criticism has been taken into account. Significantly, they do not believe the claim made by management that the proposed restructure involves only minor changes to institutional practices, job descriptions and line management procedures but, instead, believe that it will contribute to wider cultural change inside the College.

In this context, Academic Board, as the 'principal academic authority within the College committee system' should have been consulted in considering the terms of the proposed restructure – including whether it would have an impact on the academic profile of the College. That it was not consulted at all is a matter of great concern.

DBMs in particular are unclear as to how their roles may be affected in the next stages of the wider 'Evolving Goldsmiths' programme given that the consultation paper clearly states that the proposed changes 'in themselves are insufficient to meet the demands set out in Section 1 of this document [the College's 'current position']'. They are rightly puzzled about the timeframe of the proposed restructure and why their line management changes are to be imposed ahead of the changes to HoD responsibilities. This has made it very difficult to make informed choices about whether to express an interest in the VS scheme and will damage planning processes for the remainder of this academic year. We also note, with regard to the caveats framing this document as stated above, that the current measures needed to address

the effects of Covid-19 place HoDs and DBMs in particular under extreme pressure (together with the staff they support and line manage), and it is unreasonable to expect them to be able to pay due consideration to EG and the VS scheme under these circumstances.

Finally, there has been insufficient attention to equalities issues in the consultation paper: in particular, the concerns raised by the Goldsmiths Race Equality Group, who in their communication to the Warden/SMT stated that the ‘substance of the plans currently outlined, pose severe challenges to advancing racial equality at this institution, a process that the College has already acknowledged is in its infancy.’ GREG goes on to register their dismay at the lack of consultation with racial equality stakeholders before announcing Evolving Goldsmiths, which undermines the supposed commitment of the College to embed racial equality concerns more thoroughly in its governance and communication structures.

The suggestion that the College hopes that the proposed restructure will have a ‘positive impact’ on equalities is disingenuous. No evidence is provided as to why DBMs will gain from the restructure or why the new reporting structures will suddenly provide them with a ‘professional management structure and support network.’ Moreover, the shift of budgets to School level followed by a review of programmes and modules that is expected to be part of the wider EG programme is likely to focus on ‘value for money’ issues that may place pressure on smaller programmes, those of particular interest to disadvantaged groups.

Our immediate recommendations

1. That control of individual Department budgets remain with HoDs.
2. That the proposal to move direct line management of DBMs to School Administrators is scrapped.
3. That, if there is a failure to agree 1 and 2 above, the proposed change of line management of DBMs should be synchronised with changes to HoD responsibilities and that the deadline of 1 April (or 14 April according to a recently revised timeline) for the former should be changed and brought in line with HoDs.
4. That the Voluntary Severance scheme be extended until 1 December 2020 and that all options should be explored to mitigate against the need for compulsory redundancies.

GUCU’s alternative proposals

1. ‘Evolving Goldsmiths’ has been imposed without meaningful consultation in advance of its roll-out across the institution. We need a different starting point. We believe that we should avoid a top-down solution that will increase costs in the short to medium term

(through additional appointments at senior management level and through voluntary severance payouts and associated restructuring costs, totalling at least £4 million). We should also avoid an approach premised on centralising management control over Departments that will disincentivise staff, aggravate an increasing and provoking sense of 'us' and 'them', result in ever-decreasing staff morale and poor decision-making at a distance. Instead, we need to start change at Departmental level in order to take advantage of the contribution that all staff have to offer.

Action: Heads of Departments and Departmental Business Managers have already been asked to make financial savings within departments. There should be a series of rapid consultations within Departments involving all staff to analyse in detail the teaching provision (present and future) to determine strengths and weaknesses; what is going wrong, what can be improved and where further savings can be made. A plan should be drawn up within individual Departments for agreement at their summer Departmental Board with a view to quick changes for September 2020.

2. We need to better understand why recruitment is dropping and retention is poor at a granular level within Departments. Targets should not be so high as to be unrealistic – and generate artificial deficits – or so low that there might be a justification for staff cuts. Departmental autonomy is crucial if we are to encourage maximum participation in devising new programmes and ways of working that will either bring in new cohorts of students or improve the learning experience of those who are already here. We need to focus immediately on converting UG applications to firm acceptances and in enhancing MA recruitment through persistent and direct communication with students that stresses the richness of our research and creative environment.

Action: SMT to provide Departments with detailed analysis and supporting evidence of why applications and admissions have dropped in relation to particular programmes. We need to move away from the model of central services cascading down targets and replace this with practical implementation plans based on clear information and best practices across the College. Working groups should be established across Schools and professional services and including the Students Union, to look at student experience, admissions and retention. Targets should be drawn up in conjunction with Departments that are neither artificially high nor unfeasibly low and that are based on an expectation of consolidation, not crisis.

3. We need to suspend 'Evolving Goldsmiths' while we make these assessments to address the financial challenges we face, to learn from other institutions and implement changes

to our offer that are responsive both to our intellectual strengths and to student demand. The Coronavirus pandemic will seriously restrict our ability to recruit overseas students in the coming year. In this context, 'Evolving Goldsmiths', and the more limited restructure that is at the heart of this 'consultation', is a divisive distraction that will very likely make it more difficult for us to secure essential revenue in the immediate future. This is not the moment to weaken the role of Department Business Managers (DBMs) nor to hollow out the Head of Department role (despite the promises made in EG proposals that HoDs will be better able to focus on intellectual leadership because they will no longer have budgetary control). Staff within Departments know very well that undermining the role of DBMs through proposed new line management reporting structures constitutes a potentially huge loss of knowledge, experience and information that is vital to their successful operation. Staff also realise that removing budgetary control from HoDs does not free them up to focus on academic issues but restricts their ability to make effective decisions about both academic and non-academic matters. Despite SMT's view that the centralisation of administrative support will increase consistency and efficiency across the university, we need DBMs and HoDs with all their specific and local knowledge of their respective Departments precisely in order to help devise and implement necessary changes.

Action: 'Evolving Goldsmiths' and the School restructure should be suspended in order to allow DBMs and HoDs to lead delivery of (1) and (2) above. Some Departments will find it harder than others to make savings (either through cost saving initiatives or increased income from fees etc). Where possibilities exist for greater sharing of components across degrees and Departments and where there is intellectual compatibility, this should be considered; where there is scope for sharing of other student support areas from mental health to work placements to study skills these should also be considered, with a view to implementation in September 2021.

4. Ensure capital expenditure remains under £5m for the next 4 years.

Action: We propose that the development of the Enterprise Hub be paused during the current period and that the College should lower other capital expenditure over the next four years or, at least, until College finances are more stable.

Conclusion

We are not opposed to change. We are opposed to being excluded from 'change management' procedures. We are happy, and indeed keen, to collaborate with others in order to create more agile Departments and processes that are responsive to changing student demands and

external priorities. We want, above all, to secure a more democratic and inclusive institutional structure that privileges academic excellence, widening participation, high quality learning and working conditions and that is committed to rooting out the forms of discrimination that interrupt this ambition.

We suggest that there should be a meaningful consultative exercise, not one with predetermined outcomes, that revisits the current School structure that was originally based on short-term bureaucratic considerations at the time rather than any systematic discipline-based work. We need an alternative model which should involve a full consultation on which Departments might best cooperate on academic initiatives as a way of enhancing interdisciplinarity while also maintaining discipline-led Departments. This might result in more Schools or a different framework for existing ones but, either way, this needs to be a process in which all staff are able to contribute and in which Heads of Departments and Departmental Business Managers can share issues, identify inconsistencies, build collaborations, synergies and inter-disciplinary working and if/where appropriate standardise approaches. In this way, we can work together productively and collaboratively to safeguard the future of the College and to roll back the anxieties that this restructure, together with 'Evolving Goldsmiths' as a whole, have generated.