

26 March 2020

Dear Goldsmiths Council members,

In advance of your meeting on April 2nd, we wanted to put forward the following arguments on behalf of the organisation of senior academic staff that we have founded, the Goldsmiths Professors' Forum.

Given the severity of the two crises we now face, Covid-19 and the financial deficit that has recently become apparent, we wanted to put forward the following:

- The plan for dealing with a double crisis – global health pandemic and institutional financial deficit – needs to be fully thought out by key stakeholders in the College. 'Evolving Goldsmiths' is not the only option for dealing with the crises. 'Alternative Goldsmiths', currently being shaped and honed through detailed proposals, considers pedagogy, research and international reach, is a significant contribution to the debate. No doubt other valuable options will emerge if a proper process for working with stakeholders is established. EG has been so widely opposed across the College not simply because many staff on the ground reject its cuts and centralisation but also because, fundamentally, it lacks the vision and imagination that will meaningfully address the problems we face.
- Currently staff are working far in excess of their contractual obligations to respond to COVID19, often on dysfunctional remote platforms. Academic staff are the key resource keeping the College going, looking after students. Despite widespread dissent about these conditions, there is a determination to provide the best teaching and learning environment that we can achieve in extremely difficult circumstances. There is rising concern among staff about the doubling of their workloads when added to the complexity of on-line teaching of large groups, are the myriad questions about fees, visas, deadlines etc' (please see appendix A) If Council seeks to balance the budget by relying on cuts and redundancies, then it is likely that the support and labour of the staff that makes it possible to continue in these circumstances, will be withdrawn and the College will suffer irrevocable damage.
- We urge Council to not follow a drastic plan given that we do not yet know the extent of the crisis and given that we face a national crisis that will need to be dealt with by national government strategies. We do not want to find ourselves diminished by our own governing body when, within Higher Education as a sector, we should be arguing for comprehensive support packages as, no doubt, other institutions will be (please see appendix B).

We hope to be engaging in discussions that will consider the different pathways to Goldsmiths' future.

With best wishes,

The Goldsmiths Professors' Forum

Appendix A

A range of quotes from the staff WhatsApp lists in the past days:

- “As in every crisis we are the front line workers mobilised to keep things going, with an administration that shifts the burden on us” ...
- “I know you are working incredibly hard and struggling between teaching and having to spend much additional time with students and to field constant questions and demands. It’s the most difficult period we have ever faced”.
- “it’s a shame we just didn’t refuse to take on the responsibility, by doing this the blame has been shifted from a useless SMT, to a discussion of broadband technology”.
- “Every morning I wake up at 6 to get a few hours work before my son needs to be home schooled and I have to do admissions interviews, tutorials with students stranded in bedsits.. the hospital calls about a sick relative, the cleaners have to bring their children to work... there is no leadership and every bit of decency is extracted from us at great expense”.

Appendix B

We would like to draw your attention to some of the comments coming out of the Office for Students, notably its update on 17 March (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/letter-from-the-office-for-students-on-coronavirus/>) that encourages governing bodies "to minimise long-term disruption to the English higher education system" and "to make good judgements about the actions necessary to protect the interests of students and, in particular, to ensure that students have effective pastoral support." It is also worth noting that the OfS has paused all existing and new consultations "until further notice".

You may also find relevant comments by Nick Hillman of the Higher Education Policy Institute (quoted in <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/ofs-new-emphasis-financial-sustainability-welcomed>) who argues that it is "absolutely right that universities are not left to fall over in the current crisis...At the end of the crisis, universities will be even more important if towns and cities see staff laid off, companies go bust and civic institutions are hampered in what they can do."

In conclusion: Our understanding is that you will not be discussing the 'Evolving Goldsmiths' restructure and senior appointments, as they have been postponed until after a special Academic Board at the end of April. But there may well be other, especially financial, issues that you will be asked to consider in the light of the extreme circumstances of Covid-19. In that context, we are concerned that Council could be urged to take drastic steps that we believe would be premature. We believe that any suggestion that the College's future can be protected through cuts and redundancies may be especially counter-productive in this period. We urge you to be cautious in taking such measures, at least until the extent of any sector support to be offered by the Government becomes clear.