

Goldsmiths Council: The Professors' Forum

Goldsmiths Professors Forum <PROFORUM@JISMAIL.AC.UK>

on behalf of

Goldsmiths Professors' Forum <alternativegoldsmiths@GMAIL.COM>

Wed 4/1/2020 12:50 PM

To: PROFORUM@JISMAIL.AC.UK <PROFORUM@JISMAIL.AC.UK>

Dear Member of Council,

We write to you as members of Council at Goldsmiths. You will have, we hope, heard of the formation of the Professors' Forum, a group of senior academics at the College deeply engaged with and concerned about the future of Goldsmiths. Whilst we understand you have our papers, we write today to put a human face on the group and to introduce ourselves. We recognise that serving on such a council is a form of public service and an investment in the work of education. Your experience, worldview, and decisions help to shape our institution in a time of radical change in HE and in the world. These decisions have a direct and palpable impact on the intellectual and day to day livelihoods of staff on the ground and academics on the front lines of teaching and research. We seek to be not a clique of elite elders, but a group of concerned colleagues who lend our experience and history at Goldsmiths to interface between our excellent lecturers and management. Together we seek to envision a viable future for Goldsmiths.

The Evolving Goldsmiths plan announced in January took staff by surprise not just in its delivery but in its substance. However, this has now been completely surpassed by the worldwide COVID19 pandemic. This does not by any means alleviate the College deficit but puts it in a new, wider context. While it may create greater urgency, it also creates the need to address the whole situation with long term vision and a real sense of community.

Council was asked to approve new Executive Dean posts before they were introduced to Academic Board, effectively inverting normal procedure defined in the College Statutes 4.20 of Powers of Council,

"To establish or abolish any posts in the College, provided that the Academic Board shall be consulted on any changes to the establishment which involve major change to the academic profile of the College."

This has caused an enormous breach of trust in Senior Management on the part of academics, and has triggered an initiative to bring a Vote of No Confidence in The Warden and SMT. The Professors' Forum has carried out an intense round of direct diplomacy with telephone calls and emails with members of Senior Management to receive some of the assurances needed to delay the VoNC.

We fully recognise the seriousness of the deficit, and the need for a survival plan. However, this cannot be done by increasing management while reducing academic staff numbers. In any case in the wake of COVID19, no standard rationalisation plan can remain relevant. Indeed, no top-down plan from management is likely to be sufficient or appropriate to the range of circumstances in the College: instead it is paramount that situated expertise from across the College is brought to bear. The lack of trust caused by EG prevents this, but a clear message from the SMT and Council could restore trust and facilitate a wider, cross-college response.

Goldsmiths prides itself on being a cutting edge, visionary place, and has always set an example nationally and internationally. Recently however, institutional responses to student occupation, industrial action, and lack of meaningful consultation on EG has made the press report that Goldsmiths has become an example of a way not to do things. We must reverse this trend.

Goldsmiths academics may resist EG, but they are not resistant to change. In fact, as radical, leading intellectuals, we are a creative resource and engaged workforce that has an enormous

appetite and capability for meaningful change. We need to find forms of governance, participatory process and financial transparency to unlock this potential. We urge you to consider greater staff representation, including all committees that deal with financial concerns. This becomes a means to make sure that all significant decisions remain close to the actual reality of the college.

Council counts amongst its members four elected academics, three of whom sit on Academic Board. We encourage you to make best use of their experience, and draw upon them to represent the views of all academic staff at the College. There needs to be a way for this channel to be truly meaningful.

We recognise that the agenda of the meeting of 2nd April will be dominated by the COVID19 emergency. Nonetheless if there will be a moment to discuss governance, we hope that this letter helps you understand the mission of the Professors' Forum to be a constructive, productive body, committed to the future of Goldsmiths.

Sincerely yours,
The Steering Group of the Professors' Forum
Irit Rogoff
Natalie Fenton
Des Freedman
Bill Gaver
Alan Pickering
Evelyn Ruppert
Sanjay Seth
Atau Tanaka

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