

Working Together Task Group Discussion Paper – February 2021

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We note:

Following the bullying scandal which came to light at the end of last term, the Provost and the Senior Consul¹ have created the “Working Together Task Group” under the aegis of President’s Board and Provost’s Board (senior College committees). The aim of the group is to “propose practical improvements” which help improve the internal environment in the College, enable staff and students to thrive/give their best, and (thus) to help the community pursue the academic mission of this institution. Michaela has been invited to join this group.

Some students, as well as staff representatives, have raised concerns with this process. In particular, the UCU are likely to boycott this exercise, feeling that it is a fig leaf intended to misdirect the community from the tepid response to the bullying investigation.

We believe:

We’re sympathetic to the view that this is being done to detract from other more decisive action (i.e. removing certain senior staff members); we would feel much more confident if this was being done alongside that action, rather than in lieu of it. However, our role in this process is slightly different to that of the staff union. For one thing, Michaela’s involvement means that we’re “on the other side of the table” in some sense; there is a possibility we can shape this consultation. For another, we are concerned that in disengaging from this exercise, we might burn bridges with the College and create a selection bias for people who are happy with this being the only ones whose voices are heard. We would also lose the opportunity to observe the College’s behaviour in this process, which may be useful in itself.

Our view is, currently, our best approach is to “wait and see”. If the exercise seems artificially limited in scope, or that it is indeed a fig leaf and nothing more, we can consider withdrawing in future. We could debate this decision at the next Council meeting.

In the meantime, we would like to get your input on this exercise.

Key Questions:

1. What do we think the output of this exercise should be? What should the scope of any recommendations be (what should be ‘on the table’)?
2. Who should the group consult with? How can they best do so?
3. What should our role be? If we were to disengage from this exercise, what would we put forward instead? What are the alternatives?

¹ The [consuls](#) are professors, elected by other senior academic staff, to represent the views of the academic community to the university. They have a range of responsibilities, including chairing disciplinary panels, appeals, and Fitness-to-Practice hearings for medical students. The current senior consul is [Peter Openshaw](#).