

Committee: Board of Governors of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama	Date: 18/05/2020
Subject: Principal's Public Report	Public
Report of: Lynne Williams	For Information
Report author: Lynne Williams, Principal	

Summary

This is the Principal's General Report for the Board of Governors. The report concentrates on the current COVID-19 crisis.

Recommendation: that the Board receives the report and notes its contents.

Main Report

Introduction

As I read my last report of February 2020, I am reminded that at that time we were mostly concerned with the impact of Brexit, especially in terms of a reduction in student numbers from the EU, international mobility for staff and students and collaborative international research opportunities. We were also concerned with the implementation of certain aspects of the Augur Review.

Our focus changed on the day of the Board Away Day on March 2, when we took the decision to close the School buildings for a week on learning one of our hourly paid staff had contracted Corona Virus, was in hospital and had already announced this on social media. We were the first university to experience infection and we acted swiftly to stem the tide of panic, especially among the parents of 600 of our under-18 students who had been in the same teaching building, our residential students within Sundial Court and our Chinese students whose government knew the full impact of the disease. We set about tracking and tracing all those with whom the staff member had come in contact, isolating them and suggesting tests where appropriate. We were pleased that only one student tested positive linked to this incident. The School was thoroughly cleaned and additional cleaning regimes were put in place especially in terms of pianos and other shared instruments. We opened one week later, only to be locked down with the rest of the country soon after. We

are convinced that the nature of our intense and intimate specialist training makes us especially vulnerable to the spread of the disease and we learnt a lot of lessons for the future from this early experience.

The School has now been operating in emergency mode since the country's lockdown in March in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. At the time of government directives for schools to close, the government advised the university sector that Vice Chancellors should each be responsible for achieving the continuity of programmes as they saw fit. We have therefore been 'open' as a higher education provider, albeit delivering exclusively online, concentrating on supporting all students to achieve progression or completion in this academic year. This means that all staff whether teaching, administrative or support staff are totally engaged in the life of the School with the additional stress of working remotely and learning how to deliver in new and creative ways. A small Facilities, Security and Engineering team have maintained a physical presence on site during this period.

We immediately turned to our Business Continuity Plans which had fortuitously recently included a training scenario for an epidemic. Phase One saw Gold, Silver and Bronze groups meet three times per week via Teams, to deal with day-to-day operational decisions and implementation. The Principal and the Chair of the Board discussed and agreed all major decisions and weekly conversations were held with the President of the Students' Union and bi-weekly meetings with a small group of representatives of the Students' Union to make sure the students were part of the problem-solving. A weekly email from the Principal was sent to all staff and shared with the members of the Board. A small group of board members including Chair, Deputy Chair and our two higher education experts came together with the Principal and the Dean of Students as the Cobra Group to discuss overarching issues including those pertaining to the City, the Office for Students, our student/staff welfare, the status of the sector and our industry, and the likely financial impact on the Guildhall School in best and worst case scenarios.

We took an early decision to deliver the entire summer term online, knowing that even if the lockdown was lifted earlier, the specialist nature of the one-to-one teaching and the reliance on large and close gatherings of students in ensembles, orchestras and plays would be problematic given that social distancing rules would likely still be in place. This decision was discussed and agreed with Peter Lisley who is leading the Covid 19 Gold Group for the City of London Corporation.

This was not a popular decision for students who were concerned that online experiences would not meet their expectations and would not warrant the fees they were being asked to pay. This dissatisfaction was paramount amongst international students who were not going to be able to experience the performance opportunities for which they had come to the Guildhall School. We have put some plans in place for students to make up some of these activities during the Autumn term but there are still lingering concerns and our Students' Union is involved with the rest of the NUS in making representations to government.

During this phase we concentrated on resourcing remote teaching for both students and staff and increasing training capacity for staff, many of whom had never taught in this way. Staff then began to redesign the entire Summer term programme across all higher education disciplines and within the under 18's programme. This has been a herculean effort and the staff are to be congratulated on reframing courses and getting newly tailored programmes and a new timetable to students in time for the commencement of the Summer term. The students have appreciated the efforts of the staff and I can report that currently, students and staff are concentrating on their new programmes and working towards the achievement of all learning outcomes by the end of the academic year.

We are now entering the next phase which is the planning for September commencement of the new academic year and the physical reopening of the buildings. We intend to plan for a number of scenarios in case social distancing measures inhibit a full performance programme.

The School has been active as a member of Conservatoires UK, UUK, UUKi (UUL International), the Specialist Institutions Forum of UUK, and the Creative Industries Forum in registering our concerns over the past weeks especially those that affect small and specialist conservatoires. We are currently awaiting the government response to UUK's proposals for a package of support for Universities.

A major positive of the crisis we find ourselves in, is that School board member, the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor Alderman William Russell will have his term of office extended by one year. Culture is a major theme of his programme and we are now looking forward to picking up planning for events and supporting him in many of the activities which bring focus to arts and culture. Although the launch of our Institute for Social Impact has been postponed, we are still in

discussion regarding a new date for the following year and looking forward to the fundraising evening at Mansion House to celebrate the Guildhall School's 140th anniversary.

Lynne Williams, Principal, Guildhall School of Music & Drama

Tel: via MS Teams

Email: principal@gsmd.ac.uk