

DSC Annual Report 2016

# The Goldsmiths Community: Alumni, Community & International Students

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# Introduction & Background

The Alumni, Community and International Students group's purpose was to research how well the Goldsmiths alumni and international students feel connected to and supported by the university and how successfully students feel the Goldsmiths community interacts with the Lewisham community and vice versa.

Where these three areas intersect there is the potential for rich and creative collaboration - alumni and current students forming networks both locally and internationally to contribute to developing their skills, enhancing research, work and community based activities in their chosen field of study and beyond.

## Aims & Methodology

The aim of this project is to define some of the main issues affecting Goldsmiths alumni, community and international students and to provide recommendations for the institution to improve these issues.

The following quantitative and qualitative methods were used:

- DSC Annual Project Student Survey (total 629 responses)
- Meetings with relevant staff members
- Attending 'Goldsmiths Connect' Launch
- Interviewing students, staff and members of the public

Five key questions were asked to students in the DSC Annual Project Survey:

- Which of the following Goldsmiths Alumni benefits would you use? (*Goldlink Magazine, Goldlink Online, Goldsmiths Reunite, Alumni Library Membership, Confirmation of awards & transcripts, Alumni Fee Discount, Careers+, Club Pulse Gym Membership Discount, Goldsmiths Memorabilia*)
- What would enhance your experience as a Goldsmiths Alumni?
- How much does Goldsmiths College value the diversity of the students' background?
- As an international student how supported do you feel at goldsmiths on a scale of 1 - 10.
- Do you get involved in activities or events held by the local Lewisham community?

# Results & Recommendations

1.

## International students need more housing options.

As international students that were unable or chose not to live in student accommodation are unable to view alternative housing options before they arrive in the UK, often they need to find temporary housing such as AirBnb, hostels, or staying with friends. These options can be expensive and overwhelming, as the time required to stay in temporary housing before finding accommodation is unknown, and the students are overwhelmed with their new environment.



*“Staying in a hostel is not really that great, especially when you’ve just moved somewhere and you’re exhausted and you’re trying to figure everything out”*

We also heard from many international students who did not know to apply for housing on the first day and therefore did not get a location or price range that they prefer, which was intimidating to people who do not know the area well. These international student often have not lived, or even been, to London before they arrive for their course. Many are unfamiliar with the area and the landscape of housing in the UK (rent guarantor, letting agents, etc.) before they arrive. Though the University of London housing site is appreciated, the information and options provided do not cover all students, and this information is not proactively sent to every international student.

*“When I arrived in first year I hadn’t gotten into halls and had to find accommodation very quickly by myself.”*

*“My initial intention was to live in the halls of the university. However, the place offered to me was not on my budget. Maybe, more information about the students should be taken into account in the assessment of accommodation applications.”*

Lastly, student accommodation is not the best option for all international students, particularly international postgraduate students. Many have come as couples, families, or mature students that do not want to live in shared accommodation.



*"I knew that I didn't want to live in student housing"*

*"My partner, cat and I moved to London together. The University offered no options or help in searching for a home for our family from abroad, so we were stuck living in terrible conditions in limbo for six weeks and ended up having to pay a full years rent upfront as Goldsmiths could only be a guarantor for £500 per month, which was nowhere near enough"*

*"The students are really young in halls"*



**For further evidence, please see filmed interviews:**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0By7bo3AgwYrFVm4wS0NaWml0WXc>

## **Recommendations**

For giving international students more housing options:

### **1.1**

Temporary housing for students when they arrive, e.g. explore the possibility of using student halls for the for initial two weeks at a reduced rate or provide a space to connect students that may have temporary spare rooms

### **1.2**

Proactively communicate housing options for international students prior to their arrival, e.g. reach out to them early in the summer

### **1.3**

Housing options for couples, families, mature students, and those who otherwise do not want to live in student accommodation

## 2.

### International students need more transitional help.

International students frequently brought up the difficulties they face arriving in the UK without having a support system. Acclimating to living in a new country is a difficult process, and it can be overwhelming to know where to turn for help. Students did not feel that they were proactively reached out to before arriving to ensure they were prepared for their transition. While it is appreciated that information to help ease transition does exist, it was difficult to find or given too late.

*“The information given to international students arriving from different countries on what and how to deal with the moving and start of uni is extremely non-existent and unorganised. I remember being completely lost about housing, transport and other social security issues even after having moved here for over a month.”*

*“Goldsmiths doesn't reach out enough to its international students. There need to be better inductions and especially for students that come in a week or late due to visa issues that took time. These students often feel lost when they come here. Students also sometimes feel nervous/hesitant to contact the international office. it would be of help if the international office reached out to them.”*

*“I didn't really realise how much of a culture shock it was until like halfway through the year”*



**For further evidence, please see filmed interviews:**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0By7bo3AgwYrFcEFGcXR5Y3A1ZU0>

## **Recommendations**

For providing international students with more transitional help:

### **2.1**

Make general information about living in London (banking, off-campus housing guides, a list of trusted letting agents, where to shop for food, school and housing supplies, information about phone companies, rail discounts, travel information, etc) geared specifically towards international students and sent directly to them as soon as they have confirmed their place as well as available on the website and physically in the Student Centre

### **2.2**

An international outreach desk for all international students during enrollment including an introduction to the international officer

### **2.3**

A buddy system using the student ambassador scheme to pair a few international students to a student ambassador who can help with overall transition at the beginning of the year

### 3.

## Enhance Goldsmiths 'Connect'

Initial research and discussions with students led the group to realise that there is currently a lack of online platforms for students to connect with other alumni in order to form networks with other graduates and access employment or volunteer opportunities within the graduate community.

When asked what would enhance their alumni experience, current students identified a need to feel connected, supported and valued. The ability to easily maintain contact with tutors, fellow students and to network with other alumni in their field were key concerns. Student comments from the survey include;

*"To be kept in the loop, be invited to most events when possible and have frequent get-togethers and opportunities to meet new students and give them advice."*

*"More talks and speakers that alumni could go to - keeping us engaged with Goldsmiths"*

*"Specified Networking events"*

*"The ability to keep easily in contact with tutors and the university"*

*"A network for alumni to collaborate on future ventures"*

*"Connections to other Alumni in the field of work I wish to enter"*

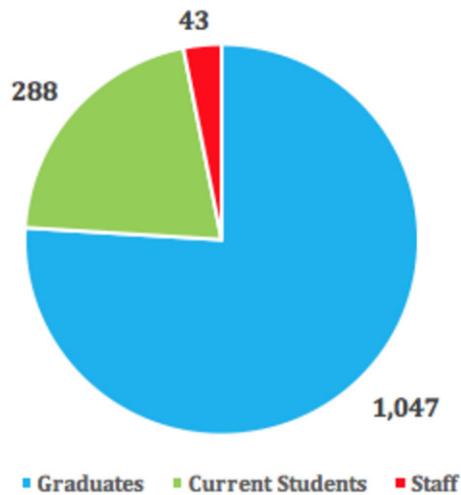
*"To help me continue with my dreams and goals even in countries outside UK"*

In February 2016 the Goldsmiths 'Connect' platform launched which we feel is a hugely positive step towards fulfilling the needs identified. Goldsmiths 'Connect' is an online platform allowing alumni and current students and staff to enter conversations with one another. The new network is open to all wherever they are in the world – and in their careers. Goldsmiths Connect will allow members to network, share expertise, post jobs and begin longer-term mentoring relationships based on a range of matching criteria.

Initial statistics provided by the Head of Alumni Relations /Development and Alumni show that the platform has had a successful launch with 1,378 members signing up including 288 current students, 1,047 graduates and 43 staff. The majority of users have indicated they are there for networking which supports the evidence we have gathered in the student survey.

*“Goldsmiths Connect is people powered”*  
-Head of Alumni Relations /Development and Alumni

### Goldsmiths Connect Members



## Recommendations

To support the continuing development of Goldsmiths 'Connect':

### 3.1

A programme of Alumni talks, presentations and workshops from a variety of disciplines which will help to encourage students to join the platform.

### 3.2

A calendar of Alumni networking events to link in with the Careers Service to highlight the benefits of joining the platform to both students and alumni.

#### 4.

## Goldsmiths students want an easier way to engage with the community.

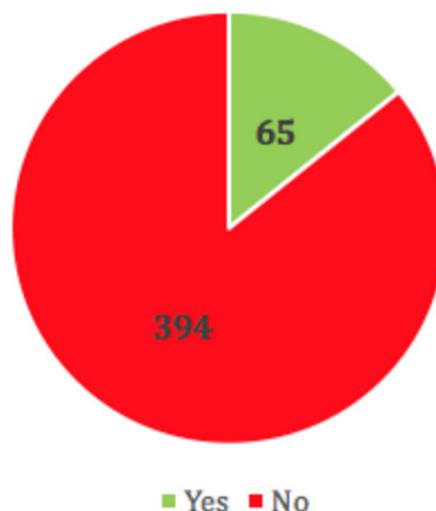
We are aware that there is work ongoing within the University to tackle the topic of community engagement, the findings of which are to be revealed in the near future.

We, like Goldsmiths, see this area as important as effective community engagement can help Goldsmiths College to take better decisions, understand the impact of our services or policies on the local community, build trust by breaking down barriers and lay the foundations of long-term partnerships. We would be keen for any suggestions we have covered in this report to feed into that if relevant.

Initial research conducted through the Goldsmiths Annual Project survey, as shown in the graph below indicates that most students did not engage with the Lewisham community through events or activities. Building on this, research was conducted to find out - what are the main barriers to community engagement and participation?

Mixed method was used to collect data - group interview and a survey with some local residents. Group interviews encouraged active discussion in a welcoming, familiar environment. Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues of barriers to wider community participation. However, we acknowledge that limitations exist to this method of data collection as it is difficult to be sure that all student voices are represented. Targeting postgraduate students as a focus group allowed their voices to be heard as they may be often excluded from a wider engagement exercises due to their time constraints.

**Do you get involved in activities or events held by the local Lewisham community?**



## Findings:

### 1.

Unclear definition of effective student engagement in Lewisham community. Those students interviewed, all acknowledged that they do participate socially in events such as going to club, attending gigs but they were not sure if this could be seen as effective community engagement.

*'I have gigged at the Amersham arms many times, not too sure if this is seen as engaging effectively with the community.'*

*'My idea of student community engagement is volunteering, going to schools or businesses giving up my time to help others, I have not done this.'*

*'I have lived in Lewisham all my life so I feel as if I engage with the local community but maybe not necessarily in a constructive way to volunteer my time.'*

### 2.

Living outside of Lewisham and time constraints seen as barriers to engagement and participation. Many students felt that living away from the Lewisham community provided a barrier to their community engagement. It appeared that they did not see Lewisham community as their main community as they only commuted to university for lectures and returned after. They also expressed lack of time as postgraduates, which placed constraints on their engagement.

### 3.

Centralised data system of events, activities, volunteering opportunities, jobs needed to help overcome barriers to student community engagement.

Over the past few years, Goldsmiths has increased their efforts to engage locally to attract the best and brightest from the local community, by providing a range of bursaries and scholarships. Student community engagement has become a focus and is highly regarded by the institution. Projects such as Illuminate and Open book have helped to break down barriers to participation in Goldsmiths community and should be regarded and promoted.

## **Recommendations**

To help engagement with the community:

### **4.1**

Continue the outreach work with local community through focused approach on student engagement. Link to Lewisham Life could be placed on Goldsmiths website, as well as VLE and student newsletters. Also the Events link on main page of Goldsmiths website could include a link to Lewisham Life so students and members of the public are aware of community events, volunteer and job opportunities.

### **4.2**

Promote personal and social benefits of student community engagement during welcome week. Promote signing up to weekly emails from Lewisham life magazine. Advertise Lewisham community events. During freshers week, community focused option could be included.

### **4.3**

Establish regular contact between Goldsmiths library and Lewisham libraries to promote services and free events within the local community.

## 5.

### People from the local community want to engage with Goldsmiths.

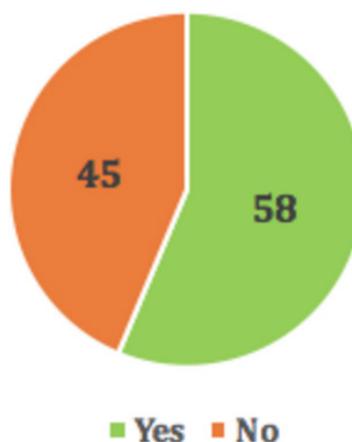
We surveyed 103 local people in total, 69 in Deptford and 34 in Brockley. Though this is a limited catchment of people we feel there are recurring themes which we will highlight.

#### Findings:

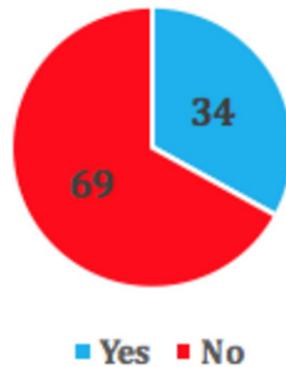
It must be noted that even people who didn't feel Goldsmiths was part of their community didn't necessarily perceive of Goldsmiths in a negative way. In many cases they had simply not yet had occasion to attend an event at the University, with many not having even walked on to campus. The overwhelming amount of locals we spoke to were keen to be advertised to regarding what events were happening at Goldsmiths.

There was a tendency for local teenagers we spoke to and children to be interested in evening classes and using the facilities Goldsmiths offered such as the gym or for sports. Suggestions for how this could be improved included collaborating with local spaces within the community, and moving out of the immediate campus that Goldsmiths offers.

**Do you feel like Goldsmiths University is part of the community that you live in?**



### Have you ever been to an event at Goldsmiths?



If yes, what event?

*"Sunflower planting"*

*"To see Jeremy Corbyn (a student society event)"*

*"I went to the christmas concert"*

*"I went to the cinema"*

*"I took my kid to an Open Day"*

If no, why not?

*"Isn't [Goldsmiths] just for people who have done degrees?"*

*"I have kids. I don't know if I could bring them along with me"*

*"Events are elitist and not accessible"*

*"I am busy with work"*

*"I've never been invited"*

*"I am new to the area and haven't really heard what is available"*

What could Goldsmiths do to be more a part of the community you live in?

*"I am a businessman and would like to advertise jobs to students as well as advertise my business. I don't have a clue how to do this"*

*"Work with some local studios and spaces"*

*"Events I can bring my kids to"*

*"Religious events"*

*Kid: "Let me play football [on the Green]"*

## **Recommendations**

To help the local community engage with Goldsmiths:

### **5.1**

Utilise local noticeboards to advertise a monthly programme of public events. These can be put into local community centres and spaces such as the Deptford Lounge.

### **5.2**

Branch out of the immediate campus. Co-host/fund/support events in local spaces.

### **5.3**

Make it easier and cheaper (or free) to book rooms during non peak times such as weekends.

### **5.4**

Engage the local community through their children and hold more family friendly events.

### **5.5**

Getting involved in politics doesn't have to be polarising, the University getting involved in local campaigns such as 'Bring back the Deptford anchor' is unlikely to alienate anyone and hosting debates with political leaders on issues such as the EU referendum would be welcomed by all.

### **5.6**

The Students' Union offering their space to local groups when it is not being used, or inviting the community into history month events.

### **5.7**

Increasing the amount of local people who go on to study degrees at Goldsmiths.

# Conclusion

From the results of our findings and focused research we have noticed the recurrence of communication of existing services and platforms being the key issue in all three of the above topics. By providing recommendations for each researched issue and category, we aim to make it easier for the institution to take even the smallest of steps that will result in the biggest positive impact for current students, alumni and the wider community of Lewisham.

