

Testimonies

Stop Centralisation - Keep our professional services staff in Sociology!

October 2021

STUDENT VIEWS ON THE PROPOSED CENTRALISATION OF STUDENT-FACING SERVICES “BLUEPRINT”

It is important to consider the value adding role of PGR support staff in student retention. As a daily point of contact with knowledge of my progression, [the PGR secretary] was a safe person in the department for me to approach with potentially sensitive concerns... when I asked her what to do about these problems she directed me to relevant services in the graduate school. Without these resources, I would certainly have likely dropped out. This would have costed the university upwards of £40,000 in lost tuition and thousands more in kind contributions from my scholarship.

Anonymous PhD candidate

Full testimonial from the same student:

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to you today to testify to the indispensability of PGR support staff to the completion of a PHD at goldsmiths. I want to speak specifically to the role previously held by Bridget Ward in the sociology department and her indispensability to my continuance in the program.

I want to underscore how in her role Bridget worked to make the department more efficient. My PHD has been an administrative nightmare. The complexities of my scholarship meant that various components of my PHD involved ,at any one time, between 5-7 administrators from different departments across Goldsmiths. Bridget acted as a central administrator, providing continuity in contact between the various aspects of my award and the various corresponding departments. Without Bridget, not only have these processes slowed substantially, but I anticipate it will require substantial re-training of academic staff. These staff are *already overburdened* by the administration of their own students, not to mention the burdens of their own teaching and research. In this way, the PGR support staff function to make the department (and goldsmiths) *efficient and consequently cost-effective*.

In addition to making the department more efficient. It is important to understand the *value added* of a regular point of contact acting at an arm's length from the PHD. The PGR support staff are not only administrating degrees, but fostering important relationships between PHDs and Goldsmiths over the course of our degrees. PHD students have complex evolving needs as we progress through the PHD. Bridget acted as a repository of not only institutional information, but

personal information about each student's progress and needs. Not only did she help me ensure the trajectory of my degree held steady over the last three years, but she routinely put me in contact with others in the department who might add value to my degree.

Finally, it is important to consider the value adding role of PGR support staff in student retention. As a daily point of contact with knowledge of my progression, she was a safe person in the department for me to approach with potentially sensitive concerns I was reluctant to bring to the department. Acting with a high degree of professionalism, when I asked her what to do about these problems she directed me to relevant services in the graduate school. Without these resources, I would certainly have likely dropped out. This would have cost the university upwards of £40,000 in lost tuition and thousands more in kind contributions from my scholarship.

It seems to me that in a department as large as sociology and in a university as decentralised as Goldsmiths, that a PGR support staff member is crucial and would strongly recommend based on my own experiences that the role be retained in the sociology department. While I appreciate the need for and interest in centralising administration at goldsmiths, I would recommend that these cuts should be done carefully. As a sociologist, I am cognizant that institutions are like organisms, with each 'organ' serving an important role in the sustenance of the whole. In keeping with this organismic metaphor, I would suggest that your cuts, if necessary, be surgical—lest you cut an important artery in the circulation of institutional knowledge.

Yours faithfully,

Anonymous PHD Student

My experience at Goldsmiths so far has been shaped and supported by staff across the university workforce. From lecturers in seminars, to security on campus and professional services supporting virtually, the institution is nothing without the people within it. Departmental administrators are already overstretched and their work is crucial to the running and care of university life. It is their understanding of the department and the staff and students within it, that facilitates a vibrant learning environment. The students of Goldsmiths stand in solidarity with those staff who have enabled our education to continue throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Amelia Donkor, MA

Over the past three years I've spent at Goldsmiths, knowing that there's always someone within our department handling our everyday concerns has helped maintain our experience of learning here: things like figuring out important dates, handling issues within our own department, and managing the flow of information between students and academics. Each individual department benefits from having their own admin, and attempting to create some minimal cost saving by bringing them all together (and the redundancies that I imagine will follow) is only going to create further workload for the staff that remain. This is further jeopardising the quality of our education.

Luka Sotelo, BA Sociology

Violet is one of the most kindest and helpful staff - from academic queries to personal matters she always helps in whatever way she can. Violet is appreciated by many students and makes our academic lives that much easier. Clare was very understanding when it came to extenuating circumstances. The admin staff in the department have a good rapport with the students - a lot of us would of struggled without their directive help. They are always available and responsive even during these difficult times
Alia Moobe BA sociology and criminology 2022

Sociology Admin staff at goldsmith were so crucial and incredibly useful while studying sociology at goldsmith they made my experience so much better. They were there ready to help with any questions that I had throughout the years of studying, and without them my degree would have gone a completely different way. I felt very comfortable to be able to ask the questions outside of academia that were crucial in being able to get a grip on what I was expected of me on the course. It made my experience at goldsmiths very unique and having spoken to other students at other universities this is was what stood out to me and made me appreciate studying at goldsmiths. I believe that they are an integral part of the course and they are there to smooth over the most important worries that myself and I know many of my peers found the most nerve wrecking. I believe the student experience in sociology department without the administration team would be completely different and would make me think twice about studying at goldsmiths without them.

Najma Ibrahim BA Sociology 2020

The department admin at Goldsmiths has been really helpful - especially over the pandemic they answered a lot of my questions and concerns and it would have been very difficult without their guidance and advice.

Zulekha Mohammed BA Sociology 2021 and Dionnte Shianne BA Sociology 2020

The admin team in the Sociology department at Goldsmiths have provided essential information to me over the course of my time at the University. During the pandemic, when contact was limited, they always kept me up to date, providing me with valuable information about what was going on at the University

(guest lectures, events and opportunities). Without these emails, I would have missed out on some pretty great talks! The labour required to research and share information about events and opportunities, that may interest sociology students, is crucial and ultimately leads to higher turnouts at these events. Furthermore, this work ultimately leads to students being able to access and gain more from their experience at Goldsmiths.

BA Criminology Student

Clare was the person I turned to when I had any issues that I needed support with outside of my course content. Clare was always extremely helpful due to her extensive knowledge of Goldsmiths and their administration system.

Holly Robertson, MA Human Rights, Culture and Social Justice

Over the past four years, Goldsmith's administration team have provided me and my fellow students with essential support. They are the first point of contact for all administration queries and discrepancies relating to our courses and I have counted on them on many occasions to enable my full participation at Goldsmiths. The administration team are indispensable.

Angela Loum, BA Sociology, MA Human Rights, Culture and Social Justice

The departmental administrators for my department (Sociology) have been able to provide me with important, much needed support throughout my course that I would not have been able to get as easily through a centralised system. A specific example is in 2020, when I accidentally received another student's provisional coursework results, I was able to quickly email my department and within 20 minutes the issue was resolved

Anonymous Third Year BA Sociology Student

The COVID-19 pandemic has exponentially ramped up the pressure on academic members of staff, professional services and students. Myself, alongside many students, have been juggling our families, caring responsibilities, jobs, and keeping up our studies. I now know that this is not only the case for students, but all members of staff, working tirelessly to keep teaching and learning occurring. Dealing with these pressures and succeeding in our academic studies would not have been possible without the invaluable, unwavering guidance of our professional services staff, whose warmth, expertise and awareness of the wider university, its services and processes are worth more than what Goldsmiths SMT claim.

I feel it is necessary to add my own experience to this. During the first year of my BA Anthropology and Sociology Degree, I was diagnosed with severe dyslexia and

dyspraxia. When I received my initial diagnosis, I was hesitant to reach out for support and refused to accept measures put in place. It was the Anthropology and Sociology support staff, alongside the disability team, who encouraged me to see my disabilities, not as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of strength. These staff members ensured that I had the necessary adjustments put in place, which enabled me to flourish throughout my undergraduate degree and gain a scholarship to a top university for my Masters. I have seen many doors open and I'm forever indebted to those who have encouraged me to pursue my education.

I know that my story and testimony is not alone. The professional services staff are the backbone of Goldsmiths and it sickens me to see consistent cuts, during a period of huge unprecedented societal turbulence. These are the committed people who make Goldsmiths what it is and their invaluable, central contribution cannot be ignored anymore. Goldsmiths SMT, please listen to your staff and collaborate with them to work out a solution to this frankly horrific situation the university finds itself in.

Anonymous BA Student

A Department Administrator/coordinator is a key role for any progressive University Department to have. The role is often fulfilled by someone able to provide specific organisational and pastoral support, rather than any particular expertise in the academic subject matter. Also, given the nature of the role they are able to specialise in all things of value for a smooth administrative and pastoral support process for both staff and students alike. Therefore, a University would be foolish in my view to not invest in such a key departmental specialist role. As not doing so risks this being reflected in the level of support that both prospective and continuing students need. This in turn will result in the Department unable to coordinate effectively to deliver the professionalism that students should be able to expect from any University they choose to study with.

Renée Sheehan

MPhil/PhD Visual Sociology Pathway (year 2, part-time)

Goldsmiths administrative and support staff are by far the most supportive and caring that I have experienced as a staff member (having taught at 7 universities) and as a PhD student, there is no way I would have finished my studies without them. They are central to creating an atmosphere that is caring and community-like for students and staff alike. Compared to other universities I've worked at, Goldsmiths has the most bare-boned administrative infrastructure at the departmental level. How they manage to operate at present is unfathomable, and to consider redundancy is disastrous in both the short and long term running of the department and university.

Dr Miranda Iossifidis, former PhD student, Research Associate in Urban Planning, Newcastle University

I would not have completed my PhD studies in 2016 without the extensive emotional and administrative support I received from Bridget Ward. She was instrumental to all of the postgraduate students during my time at Goldsmiths. The department and academia often felt hostile to early academics. Bridget singlehandedly made the postdocs feel they belonged. I am tremendously disappointed to hear that the admin staff in the department risk redundancy. Please reconsider this decision for the sake of current PhD students and Goldsmith's reputation.

Dr Ulla McKnight, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex

Violet and the other staff were my saviours when I did my BA and MA (even though I had to leave the MA due to family issues). I don't know if she is still there but the work they have done and still do is not credited enough.

Arlene Taylor, Sociology BA

I cannot fully express how important Bridget Ward was to my success in my PhD. Bridget knew everything about everything - always organised, practical, and helpful. But more than this, she was a constant source of support and grounding. A "quick visit" to Bridget's office pretty much always turned into an invitation to chat over a cup of tea. Her ability to tell at a glance if you were struggling was uncanny and she'd always take the time to offer care and a listening ear. The academic staff are obviously crucial to the research and teaching at Goldsmith Sociology, but it's the professional support who make things happen and provide the consistency and organisation that underpins a strong department. The first person to welcome me to Goldsmiths Sociology was Bridget and she was there throughout my entire PhD. I've worked at numerous universities in my career and no one stands out quite so much as Bridget.

Dr Sarah Burton, Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow, City University

The Goldsmiths sociology administrators have continued to be an asset to the department. They have helped my peers and me with any department-specific concerns that we have had regarding essays and general queries. I have felt that they can answer any question I have and try to resolve issues ASAP. The Sociology administrative team are an essential part of the department and enrich our post-graduate experience.

Rhea Ebanks-Simpson, MA Human Rights, Culture and Social Justice, PhD Sociology.

I successfully completed a PhD in the sociology department in 2011. The support I received from the department's admin staff was critical. From providing day to day guidance, through to personal support and - most critically - making the department a supportive environment in which to study. It would have been so much harder to have succeeded in my studies without the department's fantastic staff. I'm sure that there would be a severe negative impact on the sociology PhD programme if they were no longer present. **Dr Allan Day, former PhD student**

The administrative staff at Goldsmiths Department of Sociology provided crucial support for me during my Phd. This ranged from helping with practical questions about my teaching schedule or administrative forms to having a quick chat over a cup of coffee in the eighth floor kitchen of Warmington Tower. Their support throughout my Phd was of a different, but equally important order, to that provided by my academic supervisors. They knew how things worked (and didn't), they knew which direction to point me in if I needed help, and they always had a reassuring word or insight to offer when I was struggling with my writing from having observed numerous students passing through the Phd process over the years. The warmth, humanity and good atmosphere created by the Goldsmiths Sociology administrative team undoubtedly helped me successfully complete my PhD, while the pleasant atmosphere they created made me feel a sense of comfort and belonging throughout my time in the department.

Dr Christy Kulz, Research Associate, Technical University, Berlin.

I am dismayed to hear about the threats to professional services staff in the Sociology department. Claire Jarman and Bridget Ward's roles, in particular, were essential in helping me and others to navigate the complex administrative aspects of the PhD process and teaching roles (GTT/AL positions), providing an essential point of contact for PhD researchers and fostering a supportive postgraduate community in the department.

Chloe Peacock, PhD Sociology (2016-2020), ESRC Postdoctoral fellow, University of Bristol

I am dismayed to hear of the SMT's decision to centralise professional services staff. This is alarming not only because of the clear and obvious detrimental effects it will have on students and academic staff, but because it highlights to me that decision-makers are ignorant of the kind of support students and academic staff need in order to succeed/deliver exceptional research and quality teaching. I have trouble imagining what it will be like for dedicated help to not be available to future cohorts and academic staff. As a MA student, PhD, GTT/AL and GTT/AL rep in the department over the past 5 years, there have been countless times where I've needed to call on almost every member of the department's professional services team (at the time, namely Claire Jarman, Bridget Ward, Chloe Nast, Clare Jarman and Violet Fearon), whether it was in learning how as a

PhD student I could apply for (non-PhD) research grants, seeking support and know-how in the organisation of affordable student-led research conferences and events, and figuring out new ways to help build a stronger PhD community and providing new tools to help support GTT/ALs. I do not see how centralised staff would have ever been able to help with any of this, particularly when the problem/request was atypical - as it almost always was, otherwise I would have been able to find everything needed in a handbook or solved it by speaking directly with the relevant service. If SMT does push through this change, it will be an incredible loss to the department and to the university as a whole, with the greatest loss being the accumulated years of experience, and the unique care and support that every member of the professional services team has been able to provide.

Adrien De Sutter, PhD Sociology

To whom it may concern,

I have been a PhD student at the Sociology department for five years now and, before that, did my MA programme (Critical & Creative Analysis) at the department, too. While I have been away from College due to the pandemic for more than a year now, it is absolutely disheartening and - to be very honest - infuriating that the department's administrative staff, which has done tremendous work during the time I have spent at Goldsmiths, is supposed to be sacked. I guess I don't have to explain to you that writing a PhD can be a time of serious distress. All sorts of tensions, questions, (self-)doubts and various sorts of day-to-day practical issues build up. In such situations of distress - and I'm sure every single PhD (or MA) student at Goldsmiths has experienced them - it makes all the difference to know that there is someone on the 9th floor of Warmington Tower who is able to help via non-bureaucratic means.

While all administrative staff who I had contact with at the Sociology department have been tremendously helpful, kind and warm whenever I contacted them, my closest contacts were to Bridget Ward, responsible before her leave for PhD students. Again, it made all the difference that Bridget had known the department for years, had personal contacts to both other administrative and academic staff and, perhaps most of all, had the time and the detail of knowledge to deal with my concerns in a manner that was always personal, always quick and very non-bureaucratic and, almost always, even absolutely heart-warming. It is impossible for me to imagine that someone sitting in a centralised office in the main building, having no relationship to the Sociology department and its members, having not met the incoming cohorts of students every year can even approximately provide the same quality of service that the department's administrative staff have provided for years and from which I have profited in so many instances.

To be very clear here: Centralising administration will have a devastating effect not only on student experience in the department, but also - and ultimately - on the quality of academic work that will be produced at Goldsmiths' Sociology department. With centralised admin, PhD students will have one more bureaucratic hurdle (among a myriad of already existing ones) that they will have

to deal with. Standardised answers are not helpful for students. They want and *need* someone who knows them and their supervisors, who knows the department and its community, who knows the specifics of the programmes, who knows the staff and who knows all the little ‘tricks of the trade’ that - oftentimes - make it so much easier and, in fact, *effective* to do what we’re supposed to do: produce high-quality academic work. Standing in queue at a centralised administration for whom I’m only one among a thousand students won’t help that at all. It is absolutely clear that centralisation will have multiple adverse effects on the quality of output that comes from Goldsmiths’ Sociology department.

Clearing the 9th floor of Warmington Tower will rip the soul out of the department. I hope you’re aware of that.

Fabian Namberger, PhD Sociology PhD and former MA Sociology

The PhD process has many bumps, curves and twists as well as smooth paths. I know that I wouldn’t still be doing a PhD if it was not for the guidance, care and practical support Jennifer Mayo-Deman administrator at STACs and Bridget Ward in the Sociology Department offered me. Jennifer helped me to navigate taking an interruption, changing departments and support whilst my father was starting treatment for cancer. Bridget helped me to feel welcomed in the Sociology department and helped me to find my way around. If I had a question, Bridget would guide me, and if she didn’t know the answer, she knew someone who did. Paradoxically, it is because this support is so efficient, caring, good and seamless, that it appears invisible to the non-observant eye and can easily be overlooked and dismissed. However for PhD students, it is an essential part of fostering a vibrant and creative learning environment.

Brenda Herbert, PhD Sociology Student

I have been dismayed to hear the recent plans to cut the number of professional services staff in the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, and across the college. I was a student for close to ten years across the departments of History and Sociology, and during that time was very fortunate to be supported by some fantastic PS staff. When I first arrived at Goldsmiths I was a first generation university student, and undertaking a degree was an incredibly daunting process and I had only a really limited understanding of what it entailed in terms of assessment processes and systems of support. The PS staff in both departments were incredibly supportive and friendly, and I never felt like I was a burden for asking a question or seeking help. During my first term, I remember Violet Fearon in sociology helping me to tipp-ex out my name that I had left in the corner of every page of one of my first essays. Though a small act of kindness, it was one that stuck with me. I returned to Goldsmiths as a PG student, and this was in no small part due to the culture and atmosphere that PS staff play a big part in fostering. As a doctoral student I was fortunate to be supported countless times by Bridget Ward who would go out of her way to support PhD students. By cutting PS

staff, Goldsmiths will be sabotaging a culture of student care and support that has been experienced by countless cohorts of students. This will undoubtedly have an impact on student experience, but more importantly I feel it is an immoral act that de-values and disrespects the enormous work of staff who have served the institution for many years and who are vital to its future.

Liam Berriman - BA History and Sociology 2003-6; MA Social Research 2007-8; PhD Sociology 2009-13.

My career following Goldsmiths has revolved around change management. Moving and evolving practices are integral to future proofing any institution or business. When this is done however, a complete and thorough review of the role and impact people have on business performance is integral. Upon hearing of the review taking place currently, I was dismayed to hear that Goldsmiths are proposing to remove key points of contact within the Sociology department, in the name of efficiencies. During my time at Goldsmiths, Violet was the most important contact I had. She possessed Encyclopaedic information about what to do, where to go, how to manage my studies. She was the gatekeeper, sign-poster and support. As a young adult, away from home you need the stability of having a dedicated point of contact to guide you. This isn't something that can be replaced by a machine, and is key to the success of thousands of students success.

By not having these roles in place, with the in-depth knowledge required, you are at a material risk of limiting and hindering outcomes for students, and therefore reducing the appeal of students attending the university.

Funding across the board is difficult to manage, it seems therefore nonsensical to risk poor PR, reduced support for students and reduced funding. I urge you to reconsider this proposal.

Charlotte Towne (nee Gibson) BA Sociology & Politics 2009-2012

I am writing as a former Masters student, PhD student and postdoctoral researcher in the sociology department at Goldsmiths, to express my utter dismay at the current state of affairs caused by the ongoing restructuring of the university. I am particularly concerned about the threat of redundancy that I have learned is hanging over the heads of many Goldsmiths professional services colleagues.

I spent over a decade at the university in my time first as a student and then as a member of staff, from the start of my Masters in Social Research in 2004 to the point at which I left my role as Research Associate in 2011, when I started a lectureship at Lancaster University. I look back on this time incredibly fondly. I could scarcely begin to describe the many ways in which the experience changed my personal and professional life.

The sociology department that I knew then provided a deeply stimulating intellectual environment that would, in time, nurture a cohort of sociologists who would go on to have transformative impacts across the discipline and beyond. I am

quite convinced this could not have happened without the formal and informal networks of support that were made available. The department as I experienced it was an incredibly supportive place, with both academic and professional services colleagues making it somewhere where students and early career staff felt valued, heard, and were provided with the room they needed to grow as individuals, scholars, and colleagues. There is much that I could say about the members of academic staff who made this happen, a number of whom are still in the department. However, given the threat at present is to professional service colleagues, I will restrict myself to commenting on their influence on me and on the department, as I knew it then.

I especially want to write about the work done by Bridget Ward. During my fairly lengthy period as a PhD student (six years in total, including some periods part time), Bridget was the primary point of contact for the ever-changing postgraduate student body. Dealing with postgraduate and PhD students is no easy task. Even then, in a much less rapacious, instrumental, and downright exploitative moment in the history of the UK academy, anxiety amongst students was rife. What Bridget did so well, and with such care and humanity, was to help manage some of these anxieties, by acting as a calm and highly competent mediator between PhD students and the department. This of course meant fulfilling practical duties to a high standard - being highly knowledgeable about the formalities around academic progress, knowing exactly which people or services to direct us to, helping manage the micro-politics of office sharing, and so on - but the role entailed so much more. What Bridget did so often was to simply take the time to listen, to really listen, and only once she had listened, to provide the precise forms of practical advice and support that we needed.

The accumulation of these kinds of skills - knowing the very real practical and emotional challenges that postgraduate students, PhD students and early career colleagues are confronting, and knowing not just what to do about them but how - and the transfer of these skills between colleagues, do the slow and incremental work of building university communities. I experienced first-hand how work such as this, undertaken not just by Bridget but the many professional services colleagues I came to know at Goldsmiths, succeed in knitting the informal webs of relations that - even as they remain so often unseen, unrecognised and undervalued - are the utterly indispensable support for the wide of range of often more visible and more explicitly valued range of activities which drive universities.

When I look at what the department and the wider university continues to achieve, I am frankly astonished that anyone could contemplate the kinds of acts of naked vandalism to this delicately assembled community, incorporating academics, students, and professional services staff, that are being mooted. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconsider, by withdrawing the threat of redundancy to professional services colleagues at Goldsmiths.

Dr Joe Deville, Senior lecturer, University of Lancaster

I was horrified to learn that Sociology admin staff at Goldsmiths have been put into redundancy consultation. When I did my MA at CUCR (2003-4) Bridget Ward was

admin staff, but was a much bigger part of the organisation than that. Bridget was a kindly listening ear for students, including me. But Bridget also had an understanding of the processes of Goldsmiths, and the interconnectedness of CUCR to other institutions, and to the disciplines it professed, than the title 'admin' could ever cover. I did my PhD in Sociology and Bridget was there through that too. The other admins I encountered in sociology and at CUCR later carried on their involvement in the same spirit. They were always far more than 'admin staff'.

Goldsmiths *was* a place which people can be nostalgic about. I am one of the least nostalgic people, but I am nostalgic about Goldsmiths in the early 00s, because its social networks on the ground were not just a bunch of instrumentalised 'roles'. The place had a realness to it that I have not seen anywhere else, including the universities where I have since taught.

The damage currently being done to the standing of Goldsmiths could be irreparable. Do the wreckers under orders from the ex-London College of Fashion power understand how this is viewed, in Manchester, in South Wales, in Canada, all over the place? I talk to people all over and everyone can see what is going on, and everyone agrees that a very precious culture they were once part of is being gleefully smashed up.

The people wrecking Goldsmiths now will only understand all of that in terms of 'branding', but they are in fact wrecking the brand. A friend of mine has a PhD halted as he takes a break, but is questioning picking it back up precisely because of what is happening there. These people still have a choice though, they could see the stupidity of it. I hope they do.

Dr Steve Hanson, former MA and PhD student.

The professional service staff in sociology provided a caring and calming sanctuary within the stormy experience of doing a PhD. Despite their busy workload they found time to get to know us students and to provide support and guidance that was invaluable. The role they play is highly specialised rather than work that can be distributed among academic staff. Their role is essential to the functioning of the department and it is shocking that the college refuses to hear something which all their staff and students are telling them so clearly. Save these jobs!

Dr Phil Thomas, former PhD student

I was shocked and surprised to find out that Goldsmiths are planning on centralising department administrative staff as I don't understand how the department will continue to be run at its current standard this way.

As the first in my family to attend university and a mature student being able to speak to knowledgeable and helpful staff quickly has been indispensable for me

during my undergraduate degree and will continue to be during my masters, I'm sure.

I remember my first week of university when I received my timetable and realised due to childcare, I wouldn't be able to attend two classes that week. I was terrified and didn't know what to do as I had just given up a full-time job to attend university and it didn't occur to me that classes may be as late as 5pm meaning I wouldn't be home until after the childminder had finished working. I visited Violet's office on what was the first of many occasions and the issue was resolved quickly and my classes were changed. It was always lovely popping in to say hi to Violet if I was passing and made me feel part of the department. Violet has continued to be incredibly supportive during the pandemic also and no matter the time of year always responded to my queries quickly, always with an answer or signposting me in the right direction. I also spoke to Clare Lewis in my second year who arranged with the module convenor for me to change my chosen module, again very quickly. As a parent with many responsibilities the speed and kindness with which the department staff have supported me during my time at Goldsmiths have been essential to my wellbeing and at times my continued study.

I understand the university may well be attempting to decentralise administrative duties to cut costs, but this is our money that we are paying- have we even been consulted in this massive, proposed change?

Kelly Mills, BA Sociology & Criminology, MSc Social Research

I am quite saddened and concerned to hear yet another situation and change to staffing at Goldsmiths. I must say my experience over the past 2 years has not gone as I had expected, with various strikes and so forth, and now this.

Having been in this position outside of Goldsmiths where the department was to be centralised ('change management'), and redundancy threats were carried out, I can only envisage the long term implications – so this is quite unnerving.

The lovely Violet and other members of the administration team have not only been the first point of contact, but have been personable, warm, and truly kind. Moreover, extremely efficient in their work. The 121 non-judgemental help, support, advice, reassurance, encouragement that I have received has not only solved difficulties, but has eased stresses, worries, doubts and anxieties – which has honestly kept me going! Without the support I have personally received, I most definitely would have left by now.

Also, knowing that I can go to a module specific team provides additional reassurance, which for personal reasons has also been a huge support. So for me, they are invaluable to the students, and to the functioning of Goldsmiths.

Grateful BA Sociology with Criminology student

Having an MA administrator who knew the Department intimately, was on first name terms with all the academic staff, was familiar with the many different sociology modules and was plugged into all the potential upcoming changes in the department was absolutely crucial to the really positive experience I had here as a masters student. I emailed Clare Lewis so many times and she always responded very quickly and extremely helpfully. Having that personal relationship meant I was always confident in being able to navigate the (often complex) administrative side of my academic studies, which gave me the space to focus on the fascinating content of my course. Starting here as a PhD student without the sociology PhD administrator has been a very different experience. While the academic and remaining administrative staff have been exceptionally helpful and accommodating I am aware how much pressure they are under and miss the support of a dedicated administrator to facilitate this experience.

Rachel Cummings, PhD Candidate, Sociology

I was recently emailed about the university's decision to centralise administrative staff and I'd like to write this email to register that I think (from my personal experience) this decision is a mistake. Goldsmiths is the 3rd university I've attended in the UK and I've found the sociology administrative staff (particularly Clare) much more helpful than any general admin staff I've emailed or been in contact with at any of my previous universities. They've always been very prompt at replying and knowledgeable and have made my time at Goldsmiths that little bit easier. Often people email administrative staff about matters they're very stressed about or about complex matters and having in-department staff who reply promptly makes all the difference.

Heidi Marchant (MA Gender Media and Culture)

I graduated in 2020 in the Photography and Urban Cultures MA. I would like to state my support and wish strength and persistence to the staff.

Throughout my master's at Goldsmiths I've had the privilege to meet with and work together not only some of my most influential teachers I've ever had, but also the most helpful administrative staff I've ever seen. My year there with Brexit and the start of Covid was full of uncertainty, yet every time I had questions, when I was unsure where and how to go forward, I could count on the departmental staff to help me out, point me in the right direction. Clare Lewis, Alan Stanley, and the rest of the sociology department professional staff are some of the most wonderful people I could always count on if I needed assistance. Without them, I can't imagine my Goldsmiths experience, they made life so much easier.

Balazs Bekker, MA Photography and Urban Cultures

STAFF VIEWS ON THE PROPOSED CENTRALISATION OF STUDENT-FACING SERVICES “BLUEPRINT”

Our research administrator is an absolute gem. While I have struggled to get appointments with central research services, she makes space for ‘drop ins’ to discuss possible research bids and is able to give timely and encouraging advice. Putting in a research bid would be many times harder without her help. Additionally, she does loads to support research events, offering guidance on budgeting, suggesting great cost-saving efficiencies and so on. Having her expertise available (and often at short notice) in the Department is so valuable.
Jennifer Fleetwood (Senior Lecturer).

Our administrators, Violet, Chloe, Paula, Kelsie, are the heart of the department. They know the programmes, modules, students, staff inside out. They have the institutional memory, competence, skills and patience that is vital for a big department such as ours to run smoothly and answer students’ and our queries. These are not only ‘technical queries’. I can’t count how many times Violet’s knowledge of students’ academic histories has allowed me to help students who were seriously struggling with anxiety, or how many times Chloe’s hard work has fixed problems created by the constant turnover in Research Services. To take this wealth of expertise and generosity out of our departments is unthinkable and damaging.

Sara Farris

Since my time at Goldsmiths, Professional Services staff have been at the core of my ability first to learn and later on to teach and work in the Sociology department. As a former Sociology PhD student, Bridget Ward was not just for me, but for our entire cohort, the person who we could always count on. We knew where to find her, she knew us, our files, PhD supervisors, and where we were in what can be a long-winded and complicated PhD process - and supported us based on this knowledge. The same is true for Violet Fearon, Paula Ktorides, Kelsie Williams, Chloe Nast and was for Claire Jarman and Clare Lewis, who have now left us (not unrelated to the threats of restructure to Professional Services) when it comes to all student and research coordination and administration. Our professional services team is crucial for me as a Lecturer in the department to be able to work with students, and support and teach them adequately. Only thinking back to the queries they helped me with in the last few weeks to get ready for teaching, dealing with them required their detailed knowledge of our degree programmes, cohorts and many other matters. Centralising this work would endanger and lose this crucial knowledge and competence - and I would lose my ability to do my work as a consequence. It is their integration in the department and their presence on the 9th floor of Warmington Tower that makes all our work most effective and allows students and us to have a point of contact that we can

all rely on. We simply cannot centralise these roles without impoverishing them and thereby ruin what has always worked best in college - besides the fact that threatening our colleagues with redundancy is fundamentally wrong.

Svenja Bromberg (Lecturer)

I do not know how I would have managed as convenor of the MA in Human Rights, Culture and Social Justice without Clare Lewis (the then PGT programme officer) and Kelsie Williams (Clare's replacement). They stay on top of all the administrative and bureaucratic aspects of the programme and are always the students first port of call when there is a problem: helping them navigate the central services maze or just quickly resolving issues for them. Their absence was really acutely felt last week during induction when a student and I were left literally wandering the corridors of Goldsmiths. The student's multiple emails to different parts of College's central services had been redirected a hundred times to the point where we still had no idea who we needed to speak to in order to resolve her enrollment issue and could not find a human being we could ask. In the past all that was needed was a quick trip to the 8th or 9th floor of Warmington Tower and one of our wonderful department admin team would always be there to help!

I also need to say how impossible it is to apply for and sustain grants at Goldsmiths without a Department research administrator. As it is, it can be nightmarish trying to find anyone to speak to about simple issues like mistakes in the budget, complicated expense claims, contracts, visas for visiting researchers, reporting processes. Because central services has such a high turnover of staff, everytime I have had to do something on my grant I have had to deal with a new person to whom I have to re-explain the specifics of my project and my funding. Thankfully I have had Chloe Nast to act as the liaison and the repository of past knowledge which has mitigated some of this. She knows what my projects entail, who in the Department has already encountered similar problems, where to find templates I can draw on rather than re-inventing the wheel and has also had to step in a number of times when - because they don't understand my project - central research services have made a mistake that has cost all of us a lot of time and stress. I can honestly say, without Chloe in the Department I would think twice about applying for any big grants as I simply cannot manage the administrative workload alongside my teaching, research and other Departmental responsibilities.

It also seems incredibly inefficient to pay a Reader's salary and then make someone waste endless hours (not of their choosing!) on photocopying, filling out forms, making bookings - all of which could be done faster and cheaper by an administrative assistant in the Department (something we lost long ago!). In terms of value for money, good administrative support means College could get a lot more out of academic staff. The corporate law firm I previously worked in knew this. They understood the importance of good, decentralised administrative

support to get the best out of their legal staff. While I left corporate legal practice to become an academic in a public institution for a reason, I find it bizarre that even as we are becoming more corporatised we don't even seem to actually implement corporate best practice!

Kiran Grewal (Reader)

I want to specifically focus on the role of our research administrator. Goldsmiths' research office has been failing for the last ten years. There has been constant turnover, with an endless series of new staff members on short term contracts, or leaving very soon after they began their job. The failure of the research office has been primarily a failure of senior management to create stable conditions and appoint the right people under the right conditions. This has led to innumerable problems and (near-) disasters, such as missed audits and reporting deadlines, endless stories of expenditures allocated to the wrong research grants and so on. Sociology has been incredibly successful with 7 ERC grants and counting and innumerable other high-profile grants. All of these grants were only gained because of the work of our departmental research manager (and despite the failings of the research office). Our departmental research manager has been instrumental from alerting people to relevant research grants, to helping them write and prepare their grants all the way to managing their grants. Without her crucial presence in the department, sociology would not be the research success it is. While there might be theoretical advantages of having a centralised research office, as long as the existing research office is not functioning 100%, with motivated long-term employees in charge and an SMT that understands and properly supports research, the removal of departmental research support will lead to disaster and most importantly the drying up of research proposals within the department and the wider university.

Paula, Violet, Kelsie and Chloe are indispensable members of the Sociology department. In this short note, we want to focus specifically on Chloe's role, who is our Research Administrator. Chloe is hands down a pillar of our research strategy and research productivity as a department. We are a high achieving department in research grant income and research activity (funded and unfunded), and we have a vibrant research community across all career stages, supported in part by our Research Centres and Units. Grant capture, research activity (even when not funded) and research culture, all require a strong infrastructure in order to run smoothly and to allow PIs and their teams (as relevant) to **do the research**. This is what Chloe does: her knowledge of Goldsmiths systems and processes (finance, HR, payroll) **as these relate to research** is unparalleled. These central systems and processes are ill-suited to research and the complexity of the projects that many members of the department carry out, something we have repeatedly stressed to the Director of Research and Enterprise. At the moment we are able to carry out our research **because Chloe** supports members of staff in making these systems work. Chloe is meticulous in supporting us in how we document grant expenditure and keeping recordings - something Research Services don't do, and which is vital for reporting on grants and for audits of grants; it has been the case on several

occasions that research finance has had to come to Chloe to borrow her immaculate archive in order to prepare the accounts for grant final reports and/or audits. Chloe has created many of the good research management practices that we as a department follow, and for which other departments have sought our advice on. Without Chloe, and with such maladept to research systems and processes, it will be impossible to continue to operate at the very high research standard that we do. This will effect not only the research culture of the department with knock-on long-term **effects for any future research assessment exercise** but will also have a short- and medium-term **devastating effect on income from grant capture** and the **decimation of our research culture**. Our current, centralised research services (research services and finance) will not, as they currently stand, be able to compensate for the ‘deletion’ of Chloe’s post. Research services have now been understaffed and with a high staff turnover for at least the last couple of years, if not longer, and there appears to be no plan or strategy for remedying this. Finally, we are a department that prides itself on research-led teaching. In one sense then, we might say that it all starts with Chloe! We simply cannot lose Chloe from the department.

Beckie Coleman (Reader) and Melissa Nolas (Senior Lecturer), co-Directors of Research

I am a Wellcome Trust research fellow in the Sociology department, and before this, a Mildred Blaxter postdoctoral fellow (funded by the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness). It is hard to imagine my time in the department without our research administrator, Chloe. She has been my ‘go-to’ person for all research-related knowledge and has navigated me through my postdoc and now fellowship. Chloe’s door is quite literally always open. As an example of just how helpful and personable Chloe is, I am reminded of the first time I met her. I was applying for my postdoc. And rather than having to come into the university to sign a document, she very helpfully (and to my surprise) offered to bring this to me because she knew I worked near her home. I couldn’t believe how generous and collegial this was, which seemed to be at odds with many standardized, centralized systems of administration, and it confirmed to me that this department was the place for me. She has always been on-hand to advise me and has overseen everything from my expenses claims, HR matters, including my maternity leave, what best grant money to next apply for, drawing up legal contracts and dealing with the invoices from the artists working on my project. Where there has been high staff turnover and fatigue within centralized parts of the university like research services, finance services and HR, resulting in poor communication, Chloe has not only been a constant source of advice, but has taken up any issues I’ve had and got them resolved quickly (despite these constraints). My time in the department would have been drastically different without her and if I am successful in my next funding bid (which Chloe, of course, helped with), I dread to think what it will be like without her as somebody to go to and discuss and address my research-related queries and problems.

Fay Dennis, research fellow (2017-present)

I have spent 16 out of the last 21 at Goldsmiths as a student and then as staff. I have experienced 'in the round' the essential work that our Sociology professional services do. Violet Fearon has been the UG administrator since I was an undergraduate. I know therefore how having someone so calm and professional and who has a deep knowledge of the structures and systems of the department, and of College, makes a huge difference to the 'student experience'. People like Violet are the glue that holds the College together. It is unforgivable to think that this is a role that could be 'deleted' without a profound impact on staff and students alike. I have also been massively helped by Chloe Nast in applying for and managing grants. At a time when research services have been under pressure and seem to have a fast turnover of staff, Chloe is indispensable in steering us through the application process and management of projects. There are a few reasons that Sociology has a successful record of bringing in grants and one of the main ones is Chloe Nast. Paula Ktorides is new to our department this term but has stepped up and thrown herself into our department life and is going the extra mile for us during this time of terrible turbulence.

Our professional service staff had to take on huge amounts of extra work during the pandemic and move to online teaching. I am absolutely furious that this is how their efforts are being met by the College.

Emma Jackson, Senior Lecturer

As a lecturer within the Sociology department at Goldsmiths University of London since 1999, I have significant oversight into the structural changes that are occurring. The Undergraduate Programme Coordinator is a vital source of nuanced local knowledge about the department's learning and teaching structures and processes. The centralisation of this role away from its departmental hub will inevitably impact on vulnerable students that will be left to navigate complex labyrinthine channels interfaced by a disembodied MyGoldsmiths app.

Pamela Odih BSoc.Sc, PhD

As a member of staff who has worked closely with Departmental Administrators, first as Senior Tutor in the Department, and then as MA Director, I can confidently say that those roles would have been impossible to do well, or at all, without the knowledge, close attention, and care the team give staff and students. With no-one to turn to for a quick response to find out about changes in regulations to set up and run courses, when deadlines are due that are deep in the College machinery that no-one else tells us about, where to find documents we have to fill in to make changes to our own courses, what to do when the vle isn't working properly, how to change webpages, who to contact in College when everything is

constantly being reorganised, names of sections changed and no one replies to your emails.... And that's not to mention trying to help individual students negotiate the labyrinth of bureaucracy to get the help they need to complete their degrees... The chaos that will result for all of us without the Admin team who knows us and the students, who responds to our needs with intelligence and kindness, and who knows how to find out what is going on in the rest of College bureaucracy, is truly unimaginable!

Kate Nash, Professor of Sociology

It is a misery to learn that the jobs of the professional staff who hold this institution together are under threat. During the time I have been at Goldsmiths I have held large grants, run two research centres, supervised postdoctoral students and doctoral students, convened and taught on very many core and optional modules with varied and sometimes complex assessment criteria, and taken on significant administration roles connected to the undergraduate programmes. **Not one of these jobs could be done without the professional and personal support of the professional staff.** The professional staff in this institution represent a unique set of qualities. Not only do they have long-term working knowledge of the institution and institutional mechanisms, they also know the individual staff who they are supporting, and the particular conditions they may be facing in any particular year. On top of this, they are also familiar with individual students and their histories. As a consequence, they **enable the institution to work** in a way that anonymous sets of rules and procedures, implemented by remote strangers, can never do. To take just one person as an example of the stellar qualities that have characterised the professional staff in Sociology over the years: Violet Fearon has literally been a rock on which thousands of undergraduate students - and plenty of staff members, including myself - have leaned. Her knowledge of the different undergraduate programmes and their various assessment procedures is encyclopaedic. Every year she finds the time, in her always calm, always patient, always warm, way to safeguard, support, and sort out the problems of the people who find themselves in her office. The way that Violet meets the demands of her job cannot be replicated. Remote, centralised, administration will lead to alienation and animosity. There is barely a business management course in the country that would support such a model. Sociology have already lost two outstanding professional staff members - Claire Jarman and Clare Lewis. Prof. Andrew Barry, who was once at Goldsmiths and was HoD of Geography at UCL when he snapped up Claire Jarman, commented to me on the inexplicability of Goldsmiths, letting her go. I agree with him. The threatened loss of Violet and all other fantastic admin staff, Chloe Nast, Paula Ktorides and Kelsie Williams, is a decision that frankly borders on insanity, and it can only spell institutional, professional, and economic disaster.

Mariam Motamedi-Fraser, Reader

A few years ago, in the process of reporting back to the funder on a large grant, I very nearly had a nervous breakdown in dealing with research services/finance. I do not mean this metaphorically either. I end up in tears at my GPs office asking for a sick note. The idea of losing Chloe from the department and having to deal with our centralised services in relation to research fills me with absolute dread; I trust Chloe with all things research administration, pre- and post-award. I know I can go to Chloe with any question related to how to navigate byzantine college systems. I trust Chloe's judgement and the processes she has set up for us in the department. I know that Chloe keeps a back-up of all expenses, claims, invoices etc etc. I am very, very concerned for Chloe and her role in the department; and what this will mean for doing research in the future while still employed at Goldsmiths. I have similar things to say about Violet, Paula, Clare, Claire, Bridget, and Kelsie who are all brilliant with our students, who are knowledgeable and who all really care about how students and staff experience the department and their degree programmes, and go over and beyond in looking after everyone. **Anonymous**

Our administrative staff are central to the very ecology of intellectual cultures of learning and care at Goldsmiths. Why are the warden and the SMT choosing to destroy what actually works for students and staff? Departments are sustained through the skills, dedication and commitment of our administrators. While academic staff come and go (unfortunately at high speed at the moment, due to the hostile environment generated by College management), it is the administrators who keep the departments operating consistently; they are the engine of the institution. They are not anonymous bureaucrats but are people who keep students, staff and College administration on the move from one academic calendar to another. By taking them out of the centre of departments, you are creating a huge chasm in the maintenance of departments. We are being stamped with centralised models of university governance that have no respect for the ways in which intellectual and administrative values are sustained within departments. SMT need to learn by looking at departmental administrators to appreciate what actually works rather than what doesn't work at Goldsmiths.

Nirmal Puwar (Reader)

I worked at Goldsmiths from the beginning of 2012 and the end of 2015 as a Professor of Sociology and, later, as a Pro-Warden. At the time Bev Skeggs was the head of sociology and the atmosphere was fantastic. The professional staff were fully integrated into the fabric of the Dept and participated in all day-to-day activities of the Dept and would often join colleagues in the evening after work for drink and food. They were brilliant at translating abstract ideas about teaching, research and administration into practical solutions. They took pride in their work and many had worked at Goldsmiths for many years and had fabulous organisational memories and knowledge of local networks and workarounds when formal structures failed. I am still

in friendly contact with a number of them many years after leaving Goldsmiths and have taken pleasure in seeing them develop their careers.

Roger Burrows, Visiting Professor

I have been at Goldsmiths for the past 20 years: initially as an undergraduate student in the Dept of Anthropology, then as a PG student in the Sociology department (MA Culture, Globalisation and the City; MA Social Research; PhD), before eventually becoming a member of academic staff in 2011. The one constant during my time spent across different depts and roles has been the professionalism, knowledge and competence of ALL dept administrative staff (UG, PGT, PGR & Departmental Coordinators, Research Administrator, Senior Administrator, DBM).

With specific regards to my current role as Director of UG Programmes, I am reliant upon the expertise of Violet Fearon and our Senior Administrator (currently Paula Ktorides and Clare Lewis before her) in order to do my own job effectively and efficiently. The Dept has already keenly felt the loss of our DBM in 2020, as well as a reduction in the total number of professional staff in the dept; the loss of any member of the dept team is a loss of institutional memory and an increase in workloads for remaining staff.

Students do not simply come to us with quick, easy questions: they have complex lives and educational trajectories, and the specialist knowledge of our administrative staff is vital to allow academic colleagues to support students on their journeys. Very often - as both UG Director, but also as a Personal Tutor and lecturer/ seminar leader - I am able to quickly resolve issues due to the quick reactions and expertise of our fantastic professional team who know students personally, understand how College-wide processes work, but also have a close familiarity with the specificity of our programmes, modules and teaching needs. Conversely, the areas that have seen the greatest levels of student dis-satisfaction over the past two years have been in centralised services (such as timetabling).

I am deeply concerned that the centralisation of all administration will lead to dis-organisation and a worsening of the student experience. Not only will students be re-directed to a centralised service that knows nothing of their particular circumstances, but academic staff will also have to constantly liaise with multiple staff outside the dept - who are not familiar with our programmes - in order to adequately support students. I can only see that this will add yet another layer of complexity to relationships between staff and students, and that there will be lengthy waits contacting a general service (as opposed to a dedicated member of staff based within the dept). It is already frustrating as a member of academic staff when I have to spend time fielding complaints from students that are the result of a break-down in centralised processes, such as timetabling, enrolment, or IT, rather than the fault of the dept. I cannot see how we will be able to function coherently as a department and provide students with the support that they both need and deserve without our dedicated departmental administrative staff; they are all an integral part of the functioning of the Sociology Dept -

Vik Loveday (Senior Lecturer and Director of UG Programmes)

All of our departmental administrative colleagues, Paula Ktorides, Chloe Nast, Violet Fearon and Kelsie Williams (and Claire Jarman, Clare Lewis, and Bridget Ward when they were working in the department) provide fundamental and irreplaceable support to the work and daily life of the sociology department. Moreover, our colleagues now threatened with redundancy have held the department together over a profoundly destabilising couple of years. Here I want to emphasise the value of the work of Violet Fearon and Kelsie Williams as undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes coordinators.

I'm one of the senior tutors in the department and I couldn't do my work in this role without their support and invaluable knowledge of College systems, procedures and regulations, and their highly responsive contact with students and with other academic colleagues. Violet and Kelsie are contacted by hundreds of students, to whom they are known by name, and in turn, they know the circumstances and histories of students. Their close knowledge of our students and of programme and module requirements, and their institutional memory and knowledge, allows them to quickly respond to queries about assessments, sort out seminar clashes and find speedy resolutions to the complex problems that students bring to them. In the last few weeks, Violet and Kelsie have been instrumental in resolving several complex situations with students with progression queries and issues with their records.

The warmth, care and engagement that Violet and Kelsie bring to the work they do for our students simply cannot be scaled up to outside of the department. Following earlier cuts to the departmental administrative team all administrative colleagues are already working way beyond their contracted hours. We need **more** administrative colleagues in the department, not to cut further the few we still have. We know that having a departmental administration team is a highly effective way of working and gives a responsive, reassuring, and direct service to students.

When students come to us with problems, we need to sort them out quickly. If a student misses several weeks of teaching because of a timetabling issue or some confusion over what they should be doing, they are at risk of becoming disengaged from their programme. If a student had to email a generic inbox, faced a lengthy wait for a reply and felt they were being sent in circles, this risk will only increase. Making our administrative colleagues redundant is a recipe for student dissatisfaction and attrition.

Katherine Robinson, Lecturer and Senior tutor.

Because the Change Management team will say we 'resist change' it is important to emphasise that **we welcome change when it is for the better**, and to point out that we have changed our administrative processes and structure many times without prompting from outside the department, but in order to serve the needs of our

changing context, a changing department and student body. The Sociology Department's current administrative structure is efficient and works as a team precisely as a result of its responsiveness and openness to change and its adaptability. We are known within Goldsmiths as an administratively 'best practice' department. Moreover, the administrative team also understands that efficient - and thoughtful - administration is crucial to the well being and the students' ability to learn. This is a profound role that they play in the department and is what cannot be replicated centrally. The student who feels supported from those delivering their degree programme is the one who thrives, who can concentrate on their learning and who succeeds. Despite the recent attacks on our administrative structure - the refusal to replace our DBM, driven out by the forecast of centralisation, for a start - that is what we strive for and that is what will be lost by the centralisation of the administration where overworked administrators will struggle to respond the increased numbers requiring assistance.

We can see that the plan to centralise administration is going to lead to miserable colleagues, miserable students and miserable academics, and something precious about our working and learning conditions will be lost.

Professor Vikki Bell, former Head of Department

The Sociology administrative staff are crucial to the functioning of our department. They are highly competent, committed and essential staff, which our department cannot afford to lose. The College now wants to 'delete' the roles of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Administrators, together with the Research Administrator. This is in addition to having already lost the posts of Department Manager and Postgraduate Research Officer!

Goldsmiths claims it delivers excellent teaching. The Undergraduate and Postgraduate Administrators in our department ensure that this happens. I would not be able to deliver my teaching without them - particularly in the face of the ongoing failure of central College services to support students and teaching. The Undergraduate and Postgraduate Administrators consistently work beyond their roles to help students negotiate university systems, organise the essential administration of teaching, and very importantly, are a constant source of support for our students. They know our programmes, our students, and our systems, and this expertise and commitment is irreplaceable. I have worked closely with these staff over many years, and I have seen what a difference they have made to the student experience, and to the delivery of excellent teaching. Having dedicated staff in the Department is crucial. It is entirely predictable what a serious negative impact not having these staff will make upon student satisfaction!

Goldsmiths also claims it delivers world-class research. The Research Administrator has been essential to the department undertaking this research. The Research Administrator has made it possible for us to be a highly research active department, and run many large international funded projects. She has supported early career researchers, principal investigators, research bids, and research centres and units. As a principal investigator, I have also worked closely with the Research Administrator, and her support has been crucial in dealing with the serious administrative failures of the central College research office over many years. Her subject specific knowledge and expertise have been crucial to the development of this highly successful research

culture. To lose the Researcher Administrator will clearly significantly impact upon our ability as researchers to deliver world-class research.

The loss of these staff will mean that academic staff will face a highly increased workload, on top of our already increased workload due to reductions in existing academic staff. This will obviously mean that we will not be able to carry out our core functions of teaching and research, let alone to the excellent and world-class standard that Goldsmiths promises. Academic staff need administrators to manage all the crucial work that is necessary for us to teach and research. By 'deleting' these administrative roles, you will prevent us from providing excellent teaching to our students, and under-taking world-class research - both of which you claim to value.

Kirsten Campbell, Reader in Sociology

As an early career academic, coming to the Sociology Department with a postdoctoral mobility fellowship from Switzerland, I have benefited and continue to benefit tremendously from the help of the Research Administrator of our Department. She was the first contact person at Goldsmiths who helped me with the budgeting of my proposal and administrative support needed for a successful application. Upon my arrival she has been equally important in integrating me into the department, providing me with necessary logistic help, but also information about research-related resources and many more. Her experience and expertise are essential for both newcomers and long-standing staff. She coordinates and communicates systematically any new research news across the Department, shares weekly information on national and international funding available for research. I am sure losing her will significantly undermine the attractiveness of Goldsmiths for international scholars and will drastically impact the success rate of future funding applications. This decision will undoubtedly threaten world-class research of Goldsmiths.

Faten Khazaei, Postdoctoral Researcher

Our Sociology support staff are a vital part of what makes the department a special place. It is simply preposterous to think that their years of specialised knowledge, deep understanding of the needs of students, and the dense tissue of relationships built up over years of working closely in the department could be merely deployed into a larger centralized support machine. The evidence for doing more with less is so little it might as well be none at all. As for improving support by centralisation, again, there is little reason to believe it will work. The members of the support staff do outstanding work, as attested to by present and former students. They are our colleagues and friends. It is appalling that they should face the loss of their positions and livelihoods because of this opaque 'restructuring'. I join the call for a halt to this destructive course of action.

Brian Alleyne, Senior Lecturer in Sociology

Over the 14 years that I have been associated with the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths as a visiting tutor and research fellow, I have found the administrative staff an indispensable fount of specialist knowledge and advice. Claire, Clare, Kelsie and Chloe have shown inexhaustible patience in supporting me, especially when I temporarily took over some of the teaching and marking while a colleague was on leave. I just simply couldn't have done it without them. They are the "go to" resource for students, too, where their experience invariably finds a speedy response to even the trickiest questions. They are gems.

Peter Coles, Associate Lecturer.

I find the decision to remove our exceptionally dedicated and knowledgeable Professional Services staff and replace the vital work they do with a centralised and impersonal 'hub' to be baffling. These are highly skilled colleagues who each play a vital role in the efficient running of the Department, and supporting academic colleagues and students alike, with their encyclopedic knowledge of impenetrable College systems. They do this routinely with grace, compassion, and very often good humour. In the time I have been teaching at Goldsmiths, I knew that whenever I, or a student, had a problem, I could either email or walk across to Claire Jarmon, Clare Lewis, Violet Fearon, and Chloe Nast, and watch in awe as they were able to quickly provide an answer within minutes. Both Paula Ktorides and Kelsie Williams, although relatively new, settled into the Dept and immediately took to the respective challenges of Senior Department Administrator and Postgraduate Administrator providing much needed and appreciated support to the Department. They are all currently working beyond maximum capacity especially following the loss of half of the Departmental administrative team - losses that have not been replaced and that they are having to cover for. It represents a shameful exploitation of their time and goodwill. To add to the stress they are already experiencing through this culling and the proposed reallocation of staff who have displayed professionalism and loyalty to the College and the Department, some for many, many years, is not only cruel, but self-destructive. There is no evidence to suggest that centralising administrative services within College will produce a more efficient running of College, but plenty of evidence from other Institutions that demonstrate the opposite. We already know that student dissatisfaction largely centres around the frustrations they experience with the centralised services currently in existence, such as finances. Listen to their concerns!

We know that our Admin team not only perform their respective roles but the historical knowledge many of them carry is invaluable; they know our Programmes, they know us, they know the students we attract - and importantly - they often act as bridges that our students turn to when they feel unable to come to us. These relationships are important and play a significant role in creating a positive student experience within the Department. Students appreciate the personal connections they form with our Professional Services colleagues; the reassurance they feel in continuity and in knowing that Violet, for instance, is responding to their personal concern, because they know and trust her, is immeasurable. Our Postgrad students on our taught Masters programmes, like us, relied heavily on the dedicated support that Clare Lewis, and now Kelsie Williams offers. So many former and current PhD students have spoken emotively of the pivotal role Bridget Ward played in their experiences here. We depend on Chloe for her vast knowledge of College systems in the processing of

research-related admin and for her knowledge of sociologically relevant sources of research funding; this is a depth of knowledge that is not offered by Research Services. We rely on the experience Paula provides as Senior Department Administrator - a role that should be a DBM - for the smooth running and co-ordination of the Department and the support she provides to the HoD. These are all roles that go beyond two-dimensional job descriptions. As Academic staff, we feel the same way too. Aside from the fact that Academics often make for terrible administrators, we also have great affection and respect for our colleagues. They deserve job security and a pay rise, not these threats of redundancies.
Fauzia Ahmad, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Deputy Senior Tutor.

I spent seven years at Goldsmiths (2012-2019) as a student as well as a GTT/AL and without the enormous empathetic support offered by the department administrative team, I could not navigate the challenging journey. Bridget had always been very helpful and had literally become like a family member to the students, giving them a great deal of care both practically and emotionally. Clare and Violet had also helped me a lot to work as a member of staff at the department -no matter how busy they were, they had been open for any trivial questions. Now I left the UK and have been working as a research fellow of the department in my home country, and Chloe has been a great help in communicating with the relevant other departments to handle my queries anytime across distance and time-difference. It will be a huge loss for the university if the students, who must be in more difficult circumstances under the Covid-19 pandemic, could not receive the benefits that I could have fortunately received. It is clear that the physical distance between the buildings caused by the centralisation would be an emotional distance between students and staff, and hence I am very concerned about the negative impact of this policy on students' mental health and academic performance. And more than anything, it is really sad to see that the university management team does not value the people and their highly professional performance in the same manner as we do. I sincerely hope that the warm, supportive, and encouraging community that I was able to enjoy will continue at Goldsmiths.

Kaoru Takahashi (former PhD student/ research fellow 2019 -present)

First of all, I must say thank you to Bridget again, as what all PhD students have done in the acknowledgement of their theses. Without her help, my PhD journey would be harsher. Bridget knows everything, either admin procedures or emotional support. For me the 9th floor of Warmington Tower used to be a harbour for all PhD students. It is true that I had received resources from the student centre, but it seems to me that the support from department staff is essential. Even though Bridget is retired, there are still several fantastic admin staff in the department, and more might come to support students, if this space is not taken away.

Dr. Ming-Te Peng, former PhD student, postdoctoral researcher

I am the Senior Tutor in the Sociology Department. I have just spent an hour and a half talking with a student and trying to help him. He started his first year in October 2019. His story is long and complicated; he is not clear about parts of it because he does not understand the whole set of events as they unfolded during the Covid crisis and the lockdowns, relating to him, his exams, money for his fees being sent to the wrong places, and the complex systems and processes of the College. He suffered from medically certified anxiety, he had family caring responsibilities and he did not have IT equipment or connections that were up to the job of studying remotely or of getting the help he needed. I have been trying to help him to sort out this two year complexity which has led to him being kicked out of the College. I could not have helped him without Violet Fearon, our brilliant Undergraduate Programmes Coordinator. She remembered the student and some of his issues; she understands the complex systems, finance, fees, possible SORs, how to deal with the student's ABSs and how we might transform them retrospectively into ABMs. So Violet and I together are trying to save this student's degree; our ability to do this might be an entirely life changing event for this young man, who is in fact currently no longer a student at all. We have been working on this for an hour after office hours. Perhaps we will succeed. The university is a community of scholars, run by scholars. We need the help of professional staff to be able to look after our students in the way we have always deemed to be necessary. I think without Violet, without our support staff, this student would not get a degree. With her, I hope we'll find a way to give him another chance. Transforming that chance into an education is his responsibility, and ours. But without Violet, I could not have helped him. These kinds of issues crop up all the time, they are rarely simple, they need the personal attention of a team that knows what it's doing.

David Hirsh, Senior Tutor, Sociology

Professional staff in the sociology department are indispensable. As departmental undergraduate admissions tutor, I spend a great deal of time coordinating and attending recruitment events, assuring potential applicants of the department's and Goldsmiths' ethos that means they'll be known and cared for by staff and won't get 'lost'.

Sociology has a diverse student body, with many students being the first in their family to attend university and understandably nervous in facing the unknown. An extensive body of research shows that all further education students, and particularly those from widening participation backgrounds, benefit from personal contact and pastoral support within tutorial and administrative systems. The presence of knowledgeable, personable, and approachable sociology professional staff goes a long way to easing that transition and making students feel at home.

All students, taught and research postgraduate students as well as undergraduates, can face study-related issues as well as various other personal pressures. And when they do, the simple fact is that professional staff are often the initial and main ongoing point of contact for students within departments. This is a *physical* link, *between people*, students and professional staff, on a face-to-face basis. Moreover, non-student-facing professional staff also regularly field queries and interact with students. Through these personal contacts with professional staff who know their

names, students establish trust and build relationships with the department and university.

The loss of department-specific, student-facing roles would have a profound effect on students, leaving them without enduring professional staff support and contact throughout their degree. Students benefit immensely from their relationships with professional staff because of the genuine commitment and care from professional staff as people. As such, the consummate professionalism of professional staff and their heartfelt support for students is invaluable to the department and university. This much appreciated human resource cannot be truly quantified but it can be lost, and along with it the quality of the student experience and good, hard-earned reputation of the sociology department and Goldsmiths. Departmentally-based professional staff must be maintained, valued, and invested in as central to the health and ethos of the institution and its commitment to students.

Brett St Louis, Senior Lecturer and Admissions Tutor, Sociology

I am writing as a post-doctoral fellow and a former student at Goldsmiths (BA Sociology, MA Social Research). I am also writing as someone who has experience of working as an undergraduate administrator in other organisations. Firstly, I would not be here as an ESRC SeNSS research fellow if it were not for the direct assistance of Chloe Nast. The application process was immensely detailed and complicated, and required knowledge of and liaison with different members of departmental staff to help me complete the application - the head of department, current mentors, staff with knowledge of available spaces and resources - to help me plan and cost my proposal. It also required knowledge of the application software which I was guided through, and the financial nouse to go through my costs, point out errors, add VAT, and work out the split of costs between funder and department. Chloe was kind, patient and did her job well. If I had had to manage this myself, or between myself and my mentor, I can say with confidence I would not have obtained this fellowship and it would have been a huge amount for my mentor to take on herself, with no certain prospect of success. I also would not be sitting here in an office with a functioning computer, door key, IT account and heater - Chloe used her knowledge, skills and relationships to obtain all of these things without having to get HR involved.

As an undergraduate student at Goldsmiths I was dependent countless times on Violet's patience and on her in-depth knowledge of departmental processes and resources. And it made me feel like there was a reliable, permanent and human connection to my degree. I have held temporary jobs at other institutions as an administrator, both where the departmental relationship with students is strong, and where services have been centralised. In the latter, it was like ripping the heart out of the staff-student relationship. Our door was permanently closed and we were expected to turn away anxious students and their worries and send them to anonymous, automated online centralised services. Our job seemed primarily to become collecting data to measure the university's performance. Administrative staff in the department had a high turnover because they were managing a huge workload, often working late, but without the reward of that student contact which made their job matter. Human relationships matter to teaching and learning and work, and tacit, informal knowledge can rarely be replaced. I urge you to reconsider this decision.

Maisie Tomlinson, ESRC SeNSS Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology, and former student

As current Head of Department in Sociology, I have expressed my grave concerns about the plans proposed under the PSB many times in the context of School Leadership Group meetings and elsewhere. My concerns chime with those of all the other Heads of Department within our School, and they underscore those so eloquently set out by departmental colleagues and students above. I do hope SMT and Council will not dismiss this strength of feeling as mere 'resistance to change'.

Monica Greco, Sociology HoD

SOCIAL MEDIA TWEETS / CAMPAIGN

Les Back

<https://twitter.com/AcademicDiary/status/1445035364251545604?s=20>

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<https://twitter.com/AcademicDiary/status/1445039774578974721?s=20>

David Hirsh

<https://twitter.com/DavidHirsh/status/1445060171668000774?s=19>

Emma Jackson

<https://twitter.com/EmmakJackson/status/1445645184637681667>

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