

OPEN STUDENTS' UNION

Student Leadership Team (SLT)

06 – 08 February 2026

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Update

The SLT is asked to:-

- i) **receive** an update on the work of the EDI and Belonging Team
- ii) **receive** an update from the Support Groups

Introduction

1.1 The EDI and Student Welfare Team would like to update the Student Leadership Team on work towards our EDI objectives and provide an update from our current support Groups.

Updates from the EDI and Belonging Team

2.1 Individual Representation

The team have been busy over the quarter focussing on lowering the number of open cases by chasing status and closing cases where we are no longer needed. Between them, our administrator and advisor have been working together to ensure new cases and enquiries are addressed within our service level agreements and that students continue to be satisfied with our service.

In recognition of both their efforts we received the following email from a student who they supported:

“First of all, I would like to thank you for your continuous support with my case.

Dear Alexandria, you are very, very much appreciated for all your emails and for encouraging me to actively participate in the investigation. Without your opinion, I would likely not reply to the conduct officer, and the outcome of my investigation would probably be much worse than it is now.

Dear Chibwe, thank you for your email and for taking the time to review my case. I replied to the conduct officer as advised, explaining exactly what happened during the exam and how I arrived at the final answers.

The outcome of my investigation is “no case to answer” and “no further actions will be taken”. I have received my overall module result: Grade 2 pass. I was 1 point away from a distinction, which, after over 4 months of waiting for communication from OU, leaves a bit of bad taste. I’m taking a break from the OU now. Still have a final report from my last module in the degree to finish, but after this, I decided not to continue my education with an MSc. I don't want to go through this again.

Thank you again for your help. I would not have been able to do it without you, and I would probably get a penalty for something I didn't do.”

2.2 Library Study Volunteers

Our new volunteers have settled in nicely and the first half of the academic year has been a busy one. Since September we have received a huge 77 requests which takes our total to 853. I expect we will hit 900 by our next update at this rate!

2.3 Latest Hoot for Students in Secure Environments (SiSE)

The 8th edition of our Hoot for SiSE made its way to students this month (January) and upon taking into account reader feedback is focussing mainly on support for students on release. Articles include:

- An update on OpenSU's work
- An extensive article on 'what you need to know about studying after release'
- Information about how the OU Careers service can support SiSE
- A writing challenge and introduction to sketching
- A mind gym with sudoku puzzles and a quiz.

This edition also begins with some great feedback we received in the summer. An extract is here below:

“Just the chance to study and learn through OU has made my depression begin to lift and has given me a much more positive outlook for the future. I am now looking at obtaining funding for my courses, and would not have known any of this was even possible unless another prisoner had passed me a copy of The Hoot newsletter through my door. So thank you to everyone at The Hoot.”

2.4 OU Students Connect Group numbers

Our team continues to support Groups and Clubs on the OU Students Connect platform.

There has been a steady increase in Group members joining this space since our last report:

- BAME Group – 141 (up 64 members – almost doubling!)
- DSG – 554 (up 181 members)
- OU Pride – 270 (up 73 members)

We reported last time that there had been ‘a huge increase’ of 823 students to the platform since July 2025. That pales in comparison to this quarters update where there has been a staggering increase of 2,239 for a total of 4,626!

2.6 Allyship Hub

The Allyship Hub is near to completion, being put together online by the MarComms team. It has dedicated pages for how to show up as an ally for different communities, looking at - but not limited to - gender and identity, race and ethnicity and disability. It is an interactive space for students to learn from and increase their knowledge on how to be an active ally. The site is aimed to go live in LGBT History Month, with the first video recording from the allyship event delivered by Rachel Padilla for students to access.

Our new LGBTQIA+ Rep, Alex, has lots of ideas for additions to support allyship for LGBTQIA+ Communities and we will continue to work with them to continuously add resources to the Allyship Hub as we move forward.

2.7 Clubs and Societies

As you will have seen, the Organisational Fun report was delivered in November and brought with it a number of recommendations across various areas of our work. It highlighted a number of areas where improvements could be made and in particular: Structure of student groups, clubs, and societies, membership governance and data visibility, risk management improvements and defining student opportunities holistically. One of the recommendations was to implement an EDI Policy, a draft of which has been presented to the Board of Trustees for their consideration and approval.

In terms of Clubs and Societies more broadly, a discussion is taking place at the Board of Trustees meeting itself as to how we are to move forward with these activities.

2.8 Volunteering

Accessibility training for volunteers

Since April 2025, 80 volunteers have completed Accessibility Training, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to support inclusive practices. This initiative aligns with our strategic goal of ensuring volunteering is welcoming and accessible to all students, regardless of background or ability.

Volunteering Strategy Steering Group

The Volunteering Strategy Steering Group met to discuss

1. Offer a clear, inclusive appreciation, reward and recognition programme.

The team has produced drafts and aim to share the proposed reward and recognition programme with the staff team in January 2026 then consulting groups of volunteers in February 2026 to ensure a truly cocreated programme is offered.

Volunteer demographic data

Volunteer profiles were updated to include demographic data collection. Volunteers, and those that are interested in volunteering are now able to provide use with key information that will enable us to understand those that engage with us. At present we are working with the OU Data Team to provide comparative data sets so that we can interrogate the data, to identify how representative our volunteers are of the community that we support. We launched the demographic data collection in October 2025 and we have around 130 records, we are still working to ensure that all active volunteers have had the opportunity to provide this data if they wish. Since this feature is not attached to the

creation of a volunteer profile, we should have a much clearer understanding who we attract to volunteer too.

Strategic partnerships

We are progressing the development of new, flexible volunteering roles by working closely with OU departments, including the Independent Rep Team, and OU Archive Team and we are working on developing a number of new roles.

Beyond the University, we have begun engaging with external partners, including a Reading- charity, to expand the range of roles available that are short term and remote. We are only seeking an association with those that match our values and where we can demonstrate our community impact.

Update from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Group

3.1 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Group Committee

Chair – Danielle Bagnall
Vice-Chair – Florence Bull
Secretary – Navjot Sandhu
Comms Officer – Farah Javed
Events Officer – Monet McKenzie

3.2 Total number of official members – 228

3.3 Engagement on OU Students Connect New Threads – 3 threads (2 Committee meeting, 1 student) Thread themes – Student introduction, panel event and Committee meeting.

3.4 Engagement on Facebook New Threads – 1 (started by Committee) Thread themes – Welcome Week

3.5 Key Messages from the Committee

- The committee is commencing back into their roles after the festive break.
- Facebook membership has increased by 10 new members, and OU Connect increased by 68, this is due to my advertising on Facebook.
- The BAME Book Club has contributed to the first reading suggestions. Social media posts are being planned with an expected 4-6 monthly reading suggestions.

- The first Welcome Week event has been booked for the Cultural Celebration online event on February 1st.

Update from the Disabled Students Group

4.1 Disabled Students Group Committee

Chair – Clare Charlton
 Vice-Chair – Becky Fowler-Monk
 Secretary – Nicola Shrewsbury
 Comms Officer – Felicity Burgess
 Events Officer – Natasha Oseni

4.2 Total number of official members – 1293

4.3 Events Held/Planned

- Disability History Month Special – Annually
- DSA special session – Termly
- Christmas Quiz – Annually
- Working with Tutor - Termly
- Blue Monday – Starting the year with purpose
- Dry January
- Parental Mental Health Day
- Reynauds Awareness
- Endometriosis Awareness Month

4.4 Engagement on OU Students Connect

New Threads – 49

Thread themes – 71% were about ND/MH/disability support/queries, 20% were about Open SU/DSG, also about Library and social chat

4.5 Engagement on Facebook

New Threads – 151

Thread themes - 32% were about DSG/equipment/mentor queries, 13% were about social chat, 12% were about general OU discussion, 11% were about benefits/student finance, 8% were about disability support/queries, 7% were about Open SU, 4% were about reasonable adjustments for study and 4% were about ND support/queries, also about exams/TMAs/EMAs/extensions, MH/wellbeing support/queries, alternative formats.

4.6 Key Messages from the Committee

- New events lead now in post - Natasha
- Rules and code of conduct slides to be show during all drop in sessions.
- Members are still signing up to the FB group but are now actively encouraged to sign up to the official Students Union group through Open SU.
- We are also continuing to provide links to library sessions as we keep getting questions about referencing and studentship, so all members are now encouraged to sign up also to that page on FB.
- Becky to write and submit article about having Reynauds to the Hoot. Clare will be writing one relating to mental health. The DSG committee have a planner with the monthly disability awareness sessions so events can be planned to cover as many areas as possible.
- The committee have also relocated the conversations from FB to MS Teams and we now have a set item on the agenda for a health and wellbeing check in.

Update from OU Pride

5.1 OU Pride Committee

Chair – Kit Renard

Vice-Chair – Kellin (KJ) Daniels

Secretary – Oskar Lawson

Comms Officer – Kathy Richardson

Events Officer – Kevin McErlean

5.2 Total number of official members – 553

5.3 Recent Events

- Mourn The Dead Fight For The Living
- Vigil for Trans Day of Remembrance
- Winterfest
- Christmas day loneliness event
- New Years Day loneliness event

5.4 Social Channels

The OUSU Pride support group has 213 members, which is up 63 members from October 2025.

The private OU Pride Facebook group has 970 members.

5.6 Key Highlights

- We welcomed a new LGBTQIA+ rep Alex and are working closely with them on a variety of topics.
- Kit and KJ worked with the SU in the latter part of 2025 on the Trans Action Plan.
- The calendar Oskar was working on with the SU (Rachel) is close to being ready to publish.
- Kit and Oskar have joined the LGBTQIA+ working group at the OU.
- The committee is working hard to reach out to staff and groups at the OU focused in LGBTQIA and EDI spaces and has been in contact with many staff members and groups.
- The committee is currently working on the January welcome week event.
- The committee is working with Rachel Padilla on producing a workshop on Allyship.
- As well as trying to post regularly, acknowledging our internationally celebrated or times of remembrance.

Report compiled together by the EDI and Belonging Team with help from the Support Groups.