

OPEN STUDENTS' UNION

Student Leadership Team (SLT)

18 – 20 July 2025

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 Belonging 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

We were delighted to welcome a new team member in April who has joined to help us administrate the service. This has allowed us to work on splitting out the more complex cases from those that require just signposting or information.

We have also begun to migrate over to a new Case Management System with AdvicePro, a system specifically designed for services such as ours. It will allow us to pull much richer insights to show us where any trends lie within the university.

2.2 Library Study Volunteers

We continue to receive requests at pace and are racing towards our next milestone with 771 requests received to date. We are

currently working towards our summer recruitment ready for the new academic year. We have also worked to make some changes to the request form to make it easier for our volunteers to get the students their resources.

2.3 OU Students Connect Group numbers

Our team have continued to support Groups and Clubs on the OU Students Connect platform. With our new Belonging Officer, we have been encouraging Clubs to use this platform for their activities and hope to have more Societies do the same in time.

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

- BAME Group – 67 (up 12 members)
- DSG – 324 (up 39 members)
- OU Pride – 153 (up 36 members)

There are 1564 students on the platform now, an increase of 322 since the last quarter.

2.4 Responses to Government Consultation

Recently we have worked with the Student Policy and Insights Officer to respond to two Government Consultations: The proposed welfare reforms and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (ECHR) consultation on their code of practice. The latter forms part of the largest response to an ECHR consultation ever seen.

2.5 Clubs and Societies

Our Belonging Officer has been busy getting to know our numerous Clubs and Societies. Most recently we welcomed the new Body Doubling Club and held the Societies Committee AGM. If you would like to read more about what our Societies are up to please read our State of Societies report.

We're also happy to report that we have instructed Organised Fun to help us review our Community activities, including Clubs and Societies. Organised Fun is the only national consultancy dedicated to student opportunities, with extensive experience working with higher education student unions. Established in 2019, they specialise in enhancing student engagement through societies, clubs, student media, fundraising, and volunteering. Their expertise includes project management, strategy development, and evaluating student-led initiatives. Needless to say we're very excited about working with them.

- 2.6 **New EDI Representatives on SLT**
We're very excited to welcome the first ever Disabled Students Rep (Aimee Prior), LGBTQIA+ Students Rep (Lauren Atkin-Hill) and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Rep (Rochelle Benjamin). Each rep will work closely alongside their respective Support Group as well as represent the voices of their communities on various OU and OpenSU initiatives.
- 2.7 **Neurodivergent Students Priority Project Update**
The ND priority project is moving along well, the report was used in a presentation by Natalie at the OU's EDI committee which resulted in an increase of support offered by the OU. We hope to work closer together on it and action some of our priority areas for student support.

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 – 179**
- 3.3 **Engagement on OU Students Connect**
New Threads – 5 (1 started by Committee, 3 started by members)
Thread themes – Introduction, Meet-Ups
- 3.4 **Engagement on Facebook**
New Threads – 6 (1 started by Committee, 6 started by members)
Thread themes – Ramadan, Politics, Student Charter
- 3.5 **Key Messages from the Committee**
- Facebook membership has increased by 2 new members and OU Connect by 22
 - The BAME Book and Movie Club is selecting the first combined topic.
 - A Cultural Celebration series has been implemented, the first post will be released on Hoot.
 - Plans for an 'Inspirational People' project are continuing.

- Informal Coffee Sessions for students under discussion, (with ice breaker activities, quizzes and social elements).
- Social media engagement requires further planning.

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 – Vacant

4.2 Total number of official members – 1052

4.3 Recent Drop-In Events

3 x monthly drop ins

1 x Welcome Week

1 x Student Voice/ Representation Special

1 x Mental Health Special

4.4 Engagement on OU Students Connect

New Threads – 60 (34 started by Committee, 26 started by members)

Thread themes by Committee – 74% ND/MH/disability support/queries, 26% about OpenSU/DSG

Thread themes by Members - 62% about OpenSU, also threads on DSA/equipment/mentor queries, social chat, general OU discussion, disability support/queries, ND support/queries, deferral/leaving and benefits/student finance.

4.5 Engagement on Facebook

New Threads – 167 (57 started by Committee, 110 started by members)

Membership thread breakdown

25% were about DSA/equipment/mentor queries,

23% were about OpenSU,

There were also posts about Exams/EMAs/TMAs/extensions,

reasonable adjustments for study, social chat, general OU

discussion, disability support/queries, MH/wellbeing

support/queries, ND support/queries, benefits/student finance and DSG.

Committee thread breakdown

44% were about ND/MH/disability support/queries
35% were about OpenSU/DSG,
There were also posts about the library, social chat and OU.

4.6 Key Messages from the Committee

- The DSG have held a number of drop ins over the past few months, we have had special sessions on mental health where members found it useful to share some of their concerns and feelings, it was an honour as to how everyone opened up and shared.
- We have also had a session to share faculty specific session to discuss any concerns or problems in the teaching and a lot of questions were answered.
- July is Disability Pride Month for 2025. This is an opportunity for us all to celebrate some of the great or challenging things we have achieved. The drop in will aim to discuss this and we have a quiz set up for the end of the month.
- Going forward we hope to invite Mel Green to attend to discuss mental health and during invisible disability awareness month Clare has invited Mila who is a contact from the National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (via NHS role) who is doing a PhD in working with a chronic invisible condition, by November she hopes to have initial findings and she has agreed to share with the students.
- In December we will be having a quiz and small celebration of how far we have come as a committee and support group.
- EDI and Belonging Team have confirmed that the post of Events Officer is out for co-option. This post will be vital to the functions which the DSG can continue to deliver and allow a sharing of responsibilities surrounding the Thursday Drop in sessions which are largely chaired by the chair and vice chair as that is where the capacity is. We would also like to link in and support a range of addition information sessions and student support.
- In recent months there has been an issue with personal treatment between members and towards the DSG Committee. While we are capable of managing this and working supportively together as a team, this is agreed that it is unfair as we are students too and its clear we have to keep making this clear. Some of the behaviour is disrespectful comments and treatment. We have agreed to continue pushing and upholding the support group rules and those for drop ins. This note is to make the SLT aware of the battle which committee members have experienced in previous months.

Update from OU Pride

5.1 OU Pride Committee

Chair – Kit Renard
Vice-Chair – Kellin (KJ) Daniels
Secretary – Vacant
Comms Officer – Vacant
Events Officer – Vacant

5.2 Total number of official members – 430

5.3 Recent Events

- April: We hosted our International Lesbian Visibility Day Drop-In, which had ten attendees.
- May: We were going to host our Eurovision Quiz but this had to be cancelled.
- June: We hosted a Pride Crafternoon focusing on creative writing, with thirteen attendees. We're hoping to have more of these even though Pride month is officially over as there was a lot of interest expressed in keeping them going.

5.4 Unfortunately the Chair, Marli-Ann Norman has had to step down from their role, but we would like to thank them for all their hard work over the last 6 months. The Vice-Chair has stepped into the role of Chair and the Secretary was happy to step up to support them in the Vice-Chair role. Lauren Atkin-Hill, our new LGBTQIA+ Rep has also been lending their support in their new role. We are currently co-opting for other members of the team and encourage anyone interested to apply.

Verity Robinson
Head of EDI and Belonging