

Student Leadership Team (SLT)

17 – 19 October 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 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

It has been a very busy time for the Individual Rep Service. June to August is always our busiest period of the year, and this year was no exception, we received a total of 120 new enquiries, which is a 25% increase compared to the same period last year.

This increase is particularly noteworthy because the service has done very little promotional work compared to the previous year. The higher number of referrals has meant that we've had to extend our response time from 3 working days to 5 working days to help manage the increased demand.

Alex and Chibwe, continue to work hard to improve the administrative process of the service, as this is a different way of working to what has been done over the past 2 years, and with an increased number of referrals.

Academic Misconduct continues to be the most common type of enquiry we receive during this period, making up 42.5% of all 2025 referrals. To improve student awareness expected academic standards and the support the service offers, we have contributed newsletter articles in July and September. It is our aim to continue to provide similar articles, to help prevent the number of students finding themselves under investigation or ensure that students have the right support when subject to an investigation. Chibwe is currently contributing to Priority Project 6: Academic Experience, which focuses on Academic Misconduct and the impact of delayed investigations on students.

Alongside advice work, we have now implemented the Advice Pro database, which will help improve reporting and overall efficiency for the service. Chibwe and Alex are currently in the data tidy-up phase for the migrated data and are customising the system to make sure we're getting the best out of it.

Student Feedback: My journey was incredibly difficult. The university refused to listen to my story or even acknowledge my situation. I felt dismissed and powerless. But the team at Student Advice and Individual Representation Service never gave up on me. For nearly three years, they supported me—writing letters, making phone calls, and standing by my side every step of the way. They believed in me when no one else would. Thanks to their unwavering dedication and persistence, I was unexpectedly offered my degree. I truly couldn't have done it without them.

2.2 Library Study Volunteers

We have just inducted 7 new volunteers who will join the 6 volunteers who have opted to continue with the service. This role once again proved to be one of our most popular with 74 applicants putting themselves forward. Hopefully as the awareness of the service grows, requests might also grow and we can recruit more volunteers.

We spent some of the summer months making some updates to the request form so that our student volunteers can provide exactly what the students need.

It won't be long before the request will flow in and we'll be marking our 800th request!

A student sent us the following feedback about the service via post: "Words cannot do justice to describe what a lifeline this service is. We live in an information and data age. The lack of access to the Internet is the equivalent of not being able to read or speak Greek and Latin in the old days. Having this access point for research is heaven-sent."

2.3 Latest Hoot for Students in Secure Environments (SiSE)

The 7th edition of our Hoot for SiSE was posted to students in July and included articles on

- the Individual Representation Service,
- changes to the Library Study Request form,
- the Take 5 to Age Well project,
- Resources available for the LGBT+ Community,
- a Crosswords and Sudoku section and
- 4 student submissions from current or past SiSE, amongst some other relevant content for SiSE.

Most of the articles were also posted on the online [Hoot](#).

We recently received some great feedback about the publications, with one student saying that "the Hoot is always a hit, even with non-students who always ask for copies, as they prepare to study in due course."

2.4 Lending our Support to Students in Secure Environments (SiSE)

Ross, our VP EDI is keen to see how else we can support this community of students who so often can be overlooked. As part of his conversations he was asked to lend support to a business proposal the OU's SiSE team have made to the university asking for Access courses to be free of charge to students in prison (who meet certain criteria). Knowing that prisoners studying with the OU are 40% less likely to reoffend, Ross knew that this change could mean better retention for these students at level 1 and above and wrote a statement to support the case.

2.5 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 – 77 (up 10 members)
- DSG – 373 (up 49 members)
- OU Pride – 197 (up 44 members)

There are 2,387 students on the platform now, a huge increase of 823 since the last quarter.

2.6 Allyship Hub

The Allyship Hub is underway, with the project plan finalised and initial conversations taking place with MarComms. This Hub will serve as a dedicated landing page, providing a variety of resources, tools, and interactive activities for both students and staff. Its purpose is to support individuals in developing a deeper understanding of what it means to be an active ally, both within the OU and in their personal lives.

The Allyship Hub will explore the various ways in which people can show up as allies across a range of intersectional identities. It will offer guidance on how to engage meaningfully with and support marginalised communities, recognising that allyship is an ongoing practice that must be embedded into everyday actions and behaviours.

This initiative forms an integral part of EDI and Belonging's Business Plan and directly supports the OU's five-year Race Equality Charter project plan. Enhancing the capacity of allies to be more active and informed is a key element of that strategic framework, and the Allyship Hub will play a vital role in delivering on those objectives.

By fostering a culture of allyship, the Hub aims to contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate OU community, where all individuals feel seen, heard, and supported.

2.7 Clubs and Societies

Our Belonging Officer has been busy getting to know our numerous Clubs and Societies with many new clubs and societies looking to become affiliated over the next few months. Membership of clubs is currently 15,424, up by 682. 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. We have held focus groups and have released a survey to members of the various clubs and societies to help with the review. We are thankful to everyone who has engaged and contributed so far. We are also excited to have the various clubs and societies take part in the various welcome week events.

2.8 Race Equality Charter Action Plan

As part of the OU's Race Equality Charter (REC) submission due in December they have been created seven action plans arising from data collected from surveys and focus groups that took place over the last year. A number of initiatives have been identified where Open SU can help and support the positive changes for Racially Minoritised students. Activities include promoting governance opportunities inclusively, fostering an inclusive sense of belonging for all students and helping to advertise anti-racist training materials for students.

2.9 Volunteering

The volunteer offering continues to grow in reach and impact, with key developments across accessibility training, community engagement, storytelling, and strategic partnerships.

These initiatives are designed to enhance the student experience, foster inclusive practices, and create meaningful opportunities for connection and contribution for our volunteers.

Volunteering

2.10 **Accessibility training for volunteers**

Since April 2025, 61 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.

2.11 **Fostering community and connection**

Volunteering continues to offer a sense of community and connection particularly for students studying remotely. We are inviting current volunteers to help us understand their motivations for volunteering and the impact of volunteering through storytelling. We are actively collecting volunteer stories to showcase the impact of their contributions and inspire wider engagement. Ongoing efforts to celebrate and recognise volunteers are key to sustaining motivation and building a culture of appreciation and this will be the first step and focus for the Volunteering Strategy Steering Group.

2.12 **Volunteering Strategy Steering Group**

The Volunteering Strategy Steering Group has been established as part of the Open University Students Union's efforts to develop a more inclusive, accessible, and impactful volunteering strategy; the aim of this group is to:

1. Offer a clear, inclusive appreciation, reward and recognition programme.
2. Offer more flexible, meaningful, and accessible volunteering roles that align with skills, talents and interests of the wider community
3. Empower volunteers to co-create volunteering initiatives that enable them to connect, learn and share their ideas, skills and talents.

The steering group will be made up of current staff and student leadership team, current volunteers and we will be welcoming new

those that have not volunteered with us before, to bring a fresh perspective to the group.

2.13 Skills, Talents and Interests Matching

We would like to offer new roles that meet the needs of our students. We have created an optional form where current volunteers share the skills that they have and want to use, areas of interest, their talents, availability and motivations for volunteering.

The aim of this project is to create a database so that we can make data-based decisions about volunteer roles and projects.

We are including current volunteers so that we can trial, scale and monitor the initiative. Current volunteers are all trained and onboarded which make this a less resource intensive way for us to start.

We hope that by addressing any challenges that arise with a small group of volunteers will enable us to create a more robust student led volunteering offering in the future.

2.14 Strategic partnerships

We are engaging with OU departments to identify opportunities that are short-term, flexible, and student friendly. A presentation and brochure have been developed to support these conversations, and we are scheduled to meet with the OU Archive Team in November. Additionally, we are exploring collaboration with the Careers and Employability Team (CES) to integrate volunteering into career development pathways, enhancing employability and lifelong learning.

We are also looking at collaborating with charities and organisations with similar values to offer new roles and exploring concepts of voluntourism.

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 – 188

3.3 Engagement on OU Students Connect
New Threads – (2 started by Committee and 1 on cultural celebration, 5 started by members: 1 Talk, 1 Meetup, 1 Introduction 1 Committee and 1 Curry Night)
Thread themes – Introduction, Meet-Ups, Cultural

3.4 Engagement on Facebook
New Threads – 6 (1 Event, 1 Study, 1 Writing Fellowship, 1 Admin Wellbeing, 1 Welcome Week, 1 research)
Thread themes – Admin Wellbeing, Welcome Week, Research

3.5 Key Messages from the Committee

- The committee is experiencing communication issues as many members have been unresponsive during the summer holidays.
- Facebook membership has increased by 5 new members, and OU Connect increased by 36.
- The BAME Book and Movie Club is being designed by Monet, using Fable. Planning 4-6 monthly reading suggestions.
- Two posts have been drafted for release on Hoot for a cultural celebration. Farah as engaged in helping to research.
- Plans for an 'Inspirational People' project to be released, aligning Hoot articles with events.
- Informal Coffee Sessions planned for October.
- A Skills Session is being held by Danielle for the BAME Committee members to aid in getting the most out of their roles.
- As requested, BAME is working on a 'Standing Firm in Power and Pride' article for The Hoot.

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 – Scarlet James

4.2 Total number of official members – 1177

4.5 Engagement on Facebook

72 threads on Facebook.

33% were general OU discussion,
15% were DSA/equipment/mentor queries,
11% were Open SU,
8% were social chat,

There were 7 threads on OUSC:

57% were Open SU,
29% were reasonable adjustments for study, and
14% were ND support/queries.

From our committee,

51 threads on Facebook.

41% were ND/MH/disability support/queries,
35% were Library,
14% were Open SU/DSG,
also threads on social chat and OU.

There were 28 threads on OUSC, 68% were ND/MH/disability support/queries, 29% were Open SU/DSG, and some were OU-related.

Also threads on:

reasonable adjustments for study, disability support/queries,
MH/wellbeing support/queries and
ND support/queries.

For the team:

There were 28 threads on OUSC,
68% were ND/MH/disability support/queries,
29% were Open SU/DSG, and some were OU-related.

4.6 Key Messages from the Committee

- New events lead is now in post for the remainder of the year – Scarlet

- We have made links to the group rules for both OU Student Connect and FB, we will be continuing to encourage students to use OUSC.
- Adherence to the group rules has not been perfect and additional monitoring required, actions being taken.
- Members are still signing up to the FB group but are now actively encouraged to sign up to the official group.
- We had one month off but we have continued to provide advisory services on topics such as DSA, benefits and support which we have now provided a specific weblink for students to gather data independently.
- 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.
- Another recurring question is the presence of a WhatsApp group for the DSG which we are unable to support.
- Hoot article about Dyslexia and being a student has been submitted by Becky; other articles are planned.

Events Planned

- Wellbeing weeks and months are being included in the forward planner and plans for Hoot articles where special drop ins cannot be completed or where we are doing both events and Hoot articles.
- Already planned and in the diary, the Pain Awareness Month bingo just past;
- Forthcoming – stress awareness Month
- Take 5
- Invisible Disability Month
- Disability History Month
- Mental Health Awareness
- Dyslexia Awareness
- Menopause Awareness and
- ADHD Awareness
- Our plan is to engage the members to ascertain if anyone wishes to present/host/write for these.
- Working with your Tutors Session
- Welcome Week – we will be hosting a stall on the 27th and on the 2/10 a presentation and Q&A session.
- Christmas Quiz Bonanza

Authored By: Clare Charlton, Becky Fowler-Monk and Felicity Burgess

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 Social channels

- Total number of official members – 458
- The OUSU Pride support group has 213 members.
- The private OU Pride Facebook group has 976 members.

5.3 Recent Events and Events Planned

- The Pride Committee set up a stall at the in person Welcome Week event at Milton Keynes on the 27th September 2025.
- On the 3rd October 2025 the Pride Committee will be hosting a teams based Welcome Week event that will include a Pride themed quiz.

5.4 Key Messages from the Committee

- There has been three new committee members who have joined: Kathy Richardson (Comms officer), Oskar Lawson (Secretary) and Kevin McErlean (Events Officer) and unfortunately, the LGBTQIA+ representative, Lauren, has stepped down and this role will be co-opted.
- Kit and KJ are working with the SU on a Trans Inclusion Action Plan in response to declining and removal of support for trans people in law as well as making sure the OU/SU considers the struggles of trans people at the OU/SU and they receive the support they need.

- Oskar is working with the SU to produce an EDI focused digital calendar that can be subscribed to, with the aim to hopefully help staff, students and the public also celebrate important EDI related events.
- Kathy has been working to restock the Pride Committee's pride related merch for current/future events as well as working with Kevin to produce the current events

EDI and Belonging Team