



**STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)
9 – 11 February 2024**

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Student Leadership Team (SLT) held via the Teams space from 2 – 9 February 2024 and in person on the 10 February 2024.

PRESENT

Margaret Greenaway – President (Chair)
Gareth Jones – Deputy President
Natalie Baker – Vice President Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)
Michael Bryan – Vice President Administration
Nichola Connolly – Faculty Representative for Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)
Cazz Flowers – Vice President Community
Isabelle Hoyet – International Representative
Kaz Murphy – Faculty Representative for Open & Access
Mark Walker – Vice President Student Welfare
Matt Porterfield – Student Member of Council
Jack Flaherty – Faculty Representative for Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)
Pauline Robinson – Faculty Representative for Business and Law
Kelly Coker – Vice President Student Representative

IN ATTENDANCE

Gabriella Cull – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (minutes)
Kate Dungate – Head of Digital Communications
Beth Metcalf – Chief Executive
Dan Moloney – Director of Engagement
Verity Robinson – Head of EDI & Student Welfare
Samantha Smeraglia – Executive Support Administrator (live tweeting)
Jessica Smith – Associate Director: Projects & Services
Amy Undrell – Head of Strategy and Insight
Tom Mitchell – Projects Manager (part)
Alison Lunn – Associate Director: Finance and Compliance
Elie Sear – Campaigns Officer (Content creation)
Emily Cox – Content Officer (Content creation)
Mandy Turner – Projects Officer (Business Services)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the SLT to the February meeting. She gave a special welcome to the observers and staff who were attending their first SLT meeting.

B. ABSENCES

Stephen Hughes – Ireland Representative (apologies received)

Nigel Patterson – Faculty Representative for Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM) (apologies received)

Lou Robinson – Vice President Engagement (apologies received)

Elizabeth Scully – England Representative

C. MINUTES

- C.1 The minutes from the meeting held on the 7th of October 2023 were approved via the Teams space.

D. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

- D.1 None raised.

SECTION A: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 1 February – 8 February 2024

1. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES SLT 02/24/1

- 1.1 An SLT member flagged the vast disparity between the societies' reported balances. They raised concern over one of the societies being given a grant, despite it having a good balance in their account already. VP Admin outlined that there are a number of contributing factors which determine a societies account such as membership numbers and the activities they charge for. He assured the SLT member that grant applications are carefully reviewed, taking in account the unique circumstances and funding levels of each society.

2. RECEIVED: EDI & STUDENT WELFARE UPDATE SLT 02/23/2

- 2.1 The SLT were pleased to see highlights of successful projects, namely the launch of the EDI newsletter, the introduction of Accessibility Considerations training and the successful bid for Accessibility training for all staff.

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES SLT 02/23/3

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

- 3.1 An SLT member queried whether the Appointments Committee is split between Academic/Operational (SLT focus) and Governance (Trustee focus) and if not whether it should be split accordingly.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Taken at the meeting on Saturday 10 February 2024

4. GROUP UPDATES

- 4.1 The DSG Chair, Clare Charlton introduced herself. She outlined that she hasn't been in post long and as a result the DSG hasn't met yet, but she looks forward to bringing an update in the next SLT meeting on what the group have been up to.
- 4.2 The OU Pride Chair was not in attendance, so no update provided formally, but an update paper was written and shared with the SLT as part of the online Teams meeting.
- 4.3 The SLT welcomed Clare and thanked her for attending the meeting as an observer.

5. CAMPUS 2030

SLT 02/24/5

- 5.1 The Student Council Member presented to the SLT a presentation on potential plans for Campus 2030. The presentation outlined the advantages of the proposal and examined the reasons for the campus move to happen. The Student Council Member sought views from the SLT so he could take them back to the next Council meeting when a vote on Campus 2030 will be taking place. He wanted to ensure he will be voting as informed as possible.
- 5.2 The need to wait until the business case is presented was outlined by the Deputy President. He recognised the importance of seeing all the facts and figures before making a judgement but did express a level of scepticism.
- 5.3 An SLT member questioned what would happen if nothing was done and the longevity of the OU if it stayed how it currently is. The Student Council Member iterated that something must be done; with the growing number of mainstream Universities now offering distance learning, the OU is losing its USP. Additionally, the OU along with other Universities is facing financial difficulties and a reduction in student numbers. Other concerns raised focused on Campus 2030 actually coming to fruition successfully.
- 5.4 The Student Member of Council thanked the SLT for their thoughts on this.

6. PRIORITY AREAS UPDATES

- 6.1 The first priority area to be discussed was **EDI & Accessibility**.

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

- 6.2 Rachel Ishmael, EDI Projects Officer, was in attendance to present a proposal for a BAME Students Officer. The benefits of having a BAME Students Officer were outlined and included; diversifying the Association, ensuring representation on the SLT and that BAME voices are heard, helping to close the attainment gap and finally a BAME Officer would help address specific issues related to BAME students.
- 6.3 The EDI Projects Officer, along with the EDI and Student Welfare team were seeking approval from the SLT for the generation of the new role. The SLT were supportive of the proposal as a whole and raised some issues that the Association currently faces, including a lack of BAME student engagement in general, no sessions at the Student Voice Festival were led by BAME students. They recognised the importance of having a BAME Student Officer on the SLT going forward.
- 6.4 **RESOLUTION:** The SLT voted unanimously in favour of having a BAME Student Officer. The role will be active in the 2024-26 elections.
- 6.5 Updates were then provided on the EDI and Accessibility projects;
- 6.6 **EDI Newsletter** – Project Sponsor, VP EDI confirmed this project is completed with the newsletter scheduled to go out in March.
- 6.7 **Assessment for ND students and support for ND students** –VP Student Representation, one of the Project Sponsors, outlined that this project has had a slower start but there are plans for a focus group and survey will go out during Neurodiversity week. A meeting will be held on Monday 12th February with the steering team to discuss how to take this project forward. She confirmed there will also be a debate on this at Conference and plans for neurodiversity cafes.
- 6.8 **Action plan for General Accessibility training** – An update was provided in the EDISW paper so the SLT were directed to the paper to hear more on this project.
- 6.9 **Action plan for Trans Students** – Project Sponsor, VP EDI, outlined that the last few weeks have been difficult for trans students and the OU Pride group. She explained they are still waiting on the trans-inclusion statement to go live but praised the group for being able to continue their work despite facing adversity. Work on this project has been paused for now.
- 6.10 **Present at Conferences on EDI/Distance-Learning issues** – FASS Rep, one of the Project Sponsors, provided the update, outlining that there has been lots of research undertaken to identify potential conferences, but they have faced difficulty getting slots to speak at relevant conferences with limited conversations with contacts. Jack and another SLT member will however be attending the WONKHE conference in March as they have gained two tickets for the conference and will feedback after.
- 6.11 The second priority area to be discussed was **Association Awareness**.
- 6.12 **Increase Association presence on module websites and OU study app** – WELS Rep concluded that the trial of module site news is now completed. The Association posted about the Annual Membership Survey on module sites and was found to be successful with a 1300 engagement increase.

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

- 6.13 **Update 'Being an OU student' OpenLearn course and add to Study Planner –** The President made a new Association video which was then posted on Open Learn. Some key messages that came out of the video were that the Association 'is like a Union' but for OU students and that every OU student is automatically a member. Another video is pending for March.
- 6.14 **Grow the Hoot and introduce Module Reviews –** VP Student Representation outlined that the group will be setting their priorities in the first meeting they have together. An introductory post written by VP Engagement was posted on the Hoot. The Association logo has also been embedded on the Hoot to ensure students understand the Hoot is produced by the Students Association. Categories have recently been introduced, making it easier for students to search specific articles.
- 6.15 **Build Tutor Awards and Volunteer Recognition Events into the Association Cyclical Calendar –** The International Rep updated the SLT on plans for this event. She sought their feedback on combining the Tutor Awards with a volunteer recognition event and it running online. Responses were mixed with some SLT in favour of a joint bigger event, however others expressed concern over joining them together in fear of volunteers being overlooked/overshadowed by the tutors.
- 6.16 The third priority area to be discussed was **Representation.**
- 6.17 **Make changes to Senate Reference Group –** The Student Member of Council highlighted the changes that were made. These included; name change from Senate Reference Group (SRG) to Student Senate Reference Group (SSRG), changing membership so students can nominate themselves and groups can nominate reps and meetings now being conducted online which has seen an increase in attendance.
- 6.18 **Campaign on Student Finance –** The President met with the University's Minister at a round table back in December, raising the continued lack of maintenance support for Part-Time Distance learning students. This is ongoing, and dialogue continues between ourselves and the minister. Since the meeting, an email has been received and the minister and his team are currently examining this further.
- 6.19 **Engage with students around the General Election -** VP Student Welfare highlighted that videos were done by the SLT to say they have voted, in an attempt to encourage other students to vote. The campaign is also focusing on ensuring broadband access for everyone and preventing students on universal credit from being penalised.
- 6.20 **Consult on changing name to 'Union' –** A consultation approach is being taken to determine whether changing the name from Association to Union is worth the time, effort and resources. The group have been working with the PVC-S as they are running a consultation on this on behalf of the Association. Following the consultations, insights will be gathered from the data to determine the outcome. The SLT will have the data ahead of the April SLT meeting and it will then go to the BoT for final decisions as to whether to ask Conference to vote on the matter.
- 6.21 The final priority area to be discussed was **Community and Engagement.**

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

- 6.22 Aluminate Chat Platform Development and Pilot** – The Head of Strategy and Insight updated the SLT on the progress of the Aluminate Chat Platform, outlining that the app will be launched to the SLT and Groups first and will be officially live on the 1st March 2024.
- 6.23 Isolation Awareness Month** – A lot of campaigns and sessions were run as part of Isolation Awareness Month. This project is now completed.
- 6.24 Community events focused on Faculty/School/Theme** – The International Rep confirmed this project is on track, however a challenge they have faced is encouraging new hosts to host sessions. Currently, the same hosts are volunteering so there is a great need to encourage more hosts.

7. STUDENT FACING ISSUES

- 7.1** The previous student facing issues discussed at the October meeting were; Incorrect Module Descriptions on website and Last minute errata changes on assignments. The actions that came out of these discussions are outlined below:

ACTIONS: Incorrect module descriptions on website

- The STEM Rep and VP Academic Voice were allocated ownership of this with an aim to discover who is responsible for publishing module descriptions on the website. As the STEM Rep was absent from the SLT meeting, an update on this will be provided in the Teams space.

ACTIONS: Last minute errata changes on assignments

- The President and FBL Rep volunteered ownership of this issue with staff support from Head of Volunteering and Representation. This work is ongoing due to the complexity of the issue and number of parties involved. The President will seek further clarification on the current guidance concerning changes to module materials and TMA/EMA questions.

- 7.2** The top two student issues voted for this meeting, via the student issues reporting tool were:

- Reachability of the Student Support Team in case of problems
- Online tutorials and day schools

7.3 Reachability in case of problems

The International Rep highlighted the extent of this issue, which is particularly affecting international students and students who work full-time as the OU's student support is not open on weekends or weekday evenings. Additionally, she raised that making calls to the student support team is very costly for these students abroad so suggested a few changes which included; use of Teams or WhatsApp for calls instead of landline, operating a call back service, having an online chat or ticketing service and finally having SST members work in shifts in order to accommodate more time zones as well as students who work full-time and students who work shifts.

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

- 7.4 The SLT unanimously agreed that the OU Student Support team (SST) only operating between the hours of 9 – 5:30 is completely unacceptable for a distanced-learning University who tries to appeal to international students. The SLT noted that this issue does not only affect international students, but also students who work full-time, whether they live in the UK or elsewhere.
- 7.5 **ACTION:** To understand the scale of the problem, the International Rep will collect feedback from students on this issue. She will request feedback through different methods, including a post within the international newsletter.
- 7.6 **ACTION:** Digital Communications team to set up a poll on social media regarding what time they would like the OU Student Support team to be available. The Content Officer to then share the results in the Teams space.
- 7.7 **ACTION:** Associate Director: Projects and Services to chat to the Head of EDI and Student Welfare team about setting up meetings with the SST.
- 7.8 **ACTION:** Some members of the SLT to consider the impact of this within the nations.
- 7.9 Online tutorials and day schools
Discussions on this centred around student's desire for tutorials to resort back to face to face and for day schools to be conducted in person as well. It was made clear though that the OU are very hesitant and unlikely to operate these in a face to face setting, like they used to, so the SLT's focus should be on improving student's experience of the online ones. A consistent problem with operating these online is the platform they are run on, Adobe Connect, which is not compatible with all tech equipment and is seen as outdated by many students as the video element is not apparent/rarely used. An SLT member also commented on the inconvenient times when the tutorials are run, often scheduled in the Tutor's favour, not so much for students.
- 7.10 **ACTION:** Chief Executive to follow up with Josie Fraser on the progress of online tutorials and Adobe Connect as a platform.
- 7.11 **ACTION:** Faculty Reps to gain feedback from students on online tutorials and day schools and feed this information back to the SLT.
- 7.12 **ACTION:** The Chief Executive to collate all the feedback from students on online tutorials and day schools and share in one place for the SLT. A shared document may be created to enable collation of evidence.
- 7.13 The Director of Engagement explained that alongside the Deputy President, they have been working on developing a series of position statements. They will look into developing one on online tutorials.
- 7.14 **ACTION:** Director of Engagement and the Deputy President to get together and develop a position statement on online tutorials.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bye-laws

8.1 The Associate Director: Finance and Compliance outlined that several changes have been proposed to the bye-laws and they have recently been shared with the Board of Trustees at their meeting the previous week. These changes are listed below:

- Section 4 to specify the composition of the CEC (SLT) in terms of roles, in readiness for the 2024-2026 elections. The proposal builds on the trial of recent co-opted roles, retaining the VP Student Welfare role, replacing VP Education with 2 roles (VP Student Representation and VP Academic Student Voice). It is further proposed to split the VP Engagement role across VP Academic Student Voice and VP Community and to add 2 additional representation roles - BAME Representative and Sustainability Representative. All proposed changes comply with our Articles.

□ Section 15 to allow for flexibility in the type of accounts return/declaration to be submitted by Societies to maintain their affiliation to the Association. In addition, to introduce a 3 tier system of managing concerns raised about Societies, more reflective of what happens in practice but to ensure support to resolve issues before considering disaffiliation.

The SLT were then asked to review and approve the proposed changes in the Teams space.

ACTION: The SLT to review and approve the proposed changes to the bye-laws by Monday 19th February 2024.

8.2 HLMs

The Deputy President and Associate Director: Finance and Compliance were both unknowingly awarded HLMs for all their hard work and efforts put in to helping the Association and OU students as a whole.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

9.1 The next meeting will take place Online over the weekend of the 26 – 28 April 2024.

Action Log		
Item in the Minutes	Action	Action holder
7.5	To understand the scale of the problem, the International Rep will collect feedback from students on this issue. She will request feedback through different methods, including a post within the international newsletter.	Isabelle Hoyet

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the SLT

7.6	Digital Communications team to set up a poll on social media regarding what time they would like the OU Student Support team to be available. The Content Officer to then share the results in the Teams space.	Emily Cox
7.7	Associate Director: Projects and Services to chat to the Head of EDI and Student Welfare team about setting up meetings with the SST.	Jess Smith
7.8	Some members of the SLT to consider the impact of this within the nations.	Gareth Jones, Jack Flaherty, Isabelle Hoyet
7.10	Chief Executive to follow up with Josie Fraser on the progress of online tutorials and Adobe Connect as a platform.	Beth Metcalf
7.11	Faculty Reps to gain feedback from students on online tutorials and day schools and feed this information back to the SLT.	Nichola Connolly, Jack Flaherty, Kaz Murphy, Nigel Patterson, Pauline Robinson
7.12	The Chief Executive to collate all the feedback from students on online tutorials and day schools and share in one place for the SLT. A shared document may be created to enable collation of evidence.	Beth Metcalf
7.14	Director of Engagement and the Deputy President to get together and develop a position statement on online tutorials.	Dan Moloney and Gareth Jones
9.1	The SLT to review and approve the proposed changes to the bye-laws by Monday 19 th February 2024.	All SLT members