SLT 07/23/M

STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)
14 – 16 July 2023

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Student Leadership Team (SLT) held via the Teams space from 10 July – 14 July 2023 and in person on the 15 July 2023.

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
Russell Hussain – Deputising for Vice President Education
Kaz Murphy – Faculty Representative for Open & Access
Nigel Patterson – Faculty Representative for Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM)
Lou Robinson – Vice President Engagement
Elizabeth Scully – England Representative
Raed Townsend – Wales Representative

IN ATTENDANCE
Gabriella Cull – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (minutes)
Kate Dungate – Head of Digital Communications (part)
Ciara Linehan – Media and Admin Assistant
Beth Metcalf – Chief Executive
Dan Moloney – Chief Operating Officer
Allan Musinguzi – Head of Volunteering & Representation
Verity Robinson – Head of EDI & Student Welfare
Samantha Smeraglia – Executive Support Assistant (live tweeting)
Jessica Smith – Associate Director: Projects & Services
Amy Undrell – Head of Strategy and Insight (part)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A.   PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the SLT to the July meeting. She gave a special welcome to the VP Education Deputy who was attending his first SLT meeting since being appointed. She also gave special thanks to the observers who were in attendance.

B.   ABSENCES

Stephen Hughes – Ireland Representative (apologies received)
Paul Reid – Scotland Representative
Laura Marulanda-Carter – VP Education (apologies received)

C.   MINUTES

C.1   The minutes from the meeting held on the 23rd April 2023 were approve 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 3 February – 10 February 2023

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1.   RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES   **SLT 02/23/1**

1.1   The Deputy President questioned what the requirements are when it comes to AGMs. The Head of Community responded to explain that with the Society Committee AGM, societies aren't obliged to attend. When it comes to their own AGM, it can vary depending on each individual society's constitution but there's an expectation to have one to sign off their annual accounts and annual report. Though, the bye-laws don't specifically state that each society must have one.

1.2   The STEM Representative, who is also Societies Chair, explained that due to active members leaving and moving on to other endeavours, the Alchemy society has been struggling. Subsequently, he has been negotiating a merger with Fusion, the Physics and Astronomy society, to create an expanded physical sciences society, which will be named Fusion.

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

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

4.   RECEIVED: STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT   SLT 02/23/4

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION
Taken at the meeting on Saturday 29 October 2022

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5.   GROUP UPDATES

5.1   The DSG Acting Chair, Rebecca Phoenix, provided an in-depth update on the Group. Currently, there are 8 committee members and they have recently co-opted 2 members. The group's membership stands at 1086 members, with an expected increase following September's Freshers events. She outlined that alternative formats continues to be the Group's biggest issue they're faced with but work continues to try improve the issue. The DSG will also be celebrating their Birthday during Freshers and therefore will be running events to celebrate the occasion, including a social media takeover and a quiz on the history of the DSG.

5.2   Patrizia Pugliese, OU Pride Secretary, updated the SLT on the latest from OU Pride. They have recently appointed a Communications Officer who will work on promoting the group across various platforms with an aim to engage more students and increase awareness. There has been no increase in membership, however Patrizia highlighted that this is likely due to students being busy with their TMAs. She outlined that they are aiming to become more active, firstly through articles on the Hoot.

5.3   Larresha Fabunmi, Vice Chair of the Black and Minority Ethnic Group, introduced herself to the SLT. She has only recently been appointed but is looking forward to getting started. She illustrated that the Group's main focus currently is Freshers and Black History Month.

5.4   The SLT thanked the Group observers for their insightful updates.

6.   STUDENT FACING ISSUES   SLT 07/23/6

6.1   The top three issues voted for on the student issues reporting tool were:
- Reduction in response from OU Staff
- Access to Tutorials with your own Tutor
- Languages used in TMAs/EMAs

6.2   Reduction in response from OU staff
The SLT recognised the varying experiences students have regarding their tutor and OU support. The VP Education Deputy outlined that STEM seems to be most affected by the varying differences of tutors, as seen from comments in the forums. The SLT acknowledged the need to try make experiences for students more consistent.

6.3   VP Admin suggested setting up a roundtable with tutors to try understand where discrepancies are being made. An FAQ document could then be created following this, on students' most common questions and the answers given by the tutors. VP EDI

explained that we first need to consult the faculties and work out what best practice is within each faculty.

6.4 **ACTION:** The actions that came out of this discussion were:
- Gather evidence on different experiences in the faculties
- Gather evidence on Tutor perspectives and insights
- Gather evidence on guidance/instructions given by faculties
- Share comms with students around avenues for support

6.5 <u>Access to Tutorials with your own tutor</u>
The Deputy President explained that the OU's policy is that in most instances one tutorial must always be recorded and one designated as non-recorded for each tutorials topic. There are a small number of occasions where this does not apply. However if a student chooses the to attend the non-recorded one, then it might not be with your own tutor. VP Engagement emphasised that each tutor has a specialism so most tutorials will be led by the expert of that field, which often results in a tutorial not with your tutor. Additionally, it came up in discussions that one student rep had not had a recorded tutorial, which goes against the OU's policy. The President said she would investigate this further to understand why two of the student rep's modules had not been recorded.

6.6 **ACTION:** A Faculty rep to investigate the lack of recorded tutorials on these particular modules and escalate it to the relevant people in the OU.

6.7 VP Education Deputy acknowledged that some students aren't always aware of 'how to be a student', particularly if they haven't come from a higher education background. VP EDI and the Associate Director: Projects & Services proposed that a mechanism for students to share tips on 'how to be an OU student' could be very beneficial. VP EDI suggested embedding this system into the website so students could be encouraged to share what has helped them to be an OU student, and it could function similarly to 'the hidden University'.

6.8 **ACTION:** The actions that came out of this discussion were:
- Seek involvement in the new process which is being developed by the OU
- Explore 'How to be an OU student' page on the website to help manage expectations including reminding students that they don't always have to attend tutorials with their tutor, and may find other tutor's delivery style more suited to them.

6.9 <u>Languages used in TMAs</u>
The SLT commenced their discussions on this issue by first recognising that exams don't suit every student and they can be a very stressful experience for some. There were queries whether all modules have to have an exam, and if alternative formats of the exams could be offered such as open book exams.

6.10 VP EDI highlighted the importance of the Plain English Policy which should be endorsed by the OU.

6.11 **ACTION:** The SLT to push the OU to adopt the Plain English Policy.

6.12 The SLT recognised that the work needed to resolve this issue should join with the ongoing work on neurodivergent issues. The Head of EDI & Student Welfare will take this forward alongside ongoing work agree at the April SLT meeting.

7. STRATEGY 23-25

7.1 The Head of Strategy and Insights presented the plans for the upcoming strategy and outlined the next step; the Board of Trustees are due to sign the strategy off in 2 weeks time. SLT and student views have been integral to shaping the strategy to this point and today was the final opportunity for feedback from the SLT. The STEM representative emphasised the importance of looking at qualitative measures, more than quantitative.

7.2 Comments were also made about the change of safe spaces to dedicated spaces, to support the experience of students and our limitations, VP EDI supported this. It was also noted that freedom of speech bill would likely be a large strategic project needing consideration.

7.3 The SLT gave their full support of the new strategy and thanked the Head of Strategy and Insights for her efforts.

8. ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY PRESENTATION

8.1 VP Engagement and the Associate Director: Projects & Services presented to the SLT an overview and latest updates from the Environment and Sustainability Working Group. An action plan was created a few months back with four main objectives – Impact, Engagement, the University and Policy. Progress made within each of the objectives was outlined, as below.

8.2 Impact – The upcoming strategy features a sustainability element, with a particular focus on embedding decisions which have sustainability in mind. Additionally, the Group have made some changes to the Travel and Subsistence Policy. The next step for this objective is to create a baseline using the OU's SPARK tool.

8.3 Student Engagement – Lots of events have been ongoing to increase student engagement in this area. During Student Voice Week, VP Engagement ran a session on Sustainability which ended up with the highest turnout out of all the other Student Voice Week sessions. They have also seen an increase in the number of students taking up the Carbon Literacy training, following an announcement about it in the newsletter. Additionally, in June, the group got on board with the Big Green Week campaign which saw a series of events and posts shared.

8.4 University – The group now has representation on the Sustainability Steering Group and the Sustainability Coordination Group and is continuing to make contacts across the University. They have made progress on the printed books issue, campaigning to the University to make an opt-out option for students who don't want to receive printed materials.

9. PRIORITY AREAS UPDATES

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

9.2 Head of EDI & Student Welfare outlined the steering group's goals for the next 6 months:
- Launch of an EDI newsletter
- Alternative formats in exams for students with neurodiverse conditions
- Roll out general accessibility training for all volunteers and staff
- Increase work for Trans and Neurodiverse students, ensuring the Association is adequately representing all students
- Present at Conferences eg WONKHE and on what we do to help long-distance learners

9.3 The steering group had received a proposal from the Neurodivergent Club lead to merge the Neurodivergent Club with the DSG. The Head of EDI and Student Welfare sought opinions from the SLT on this.

9.4 SLT members appreciated the collaborative efforts between the Clun and the Group. DSG was recognised as a supportive network of people who as a group have vast knowledge on things such as applying for a DSA. Additionally, having more members in DSG means more experiences and ultimately makes the group more relatable and representative to a wider pool of students. On the contrary, some SLT members identified risks of the proposal which included; the Neurodivergent voice could diminish when merged with the DSG and, having different people with different needs in one group could be contentious due to the barriers they each face varying and therefore needs to be handled sensitively.

9.5 The Wales Representative acknowledged the risks involved and outlined that if the merger was to happen, it needs to be a gradual transition.

9.6 **RESOLUTION**: The SLT voted unanimously in support for the Neurodivergent Club to merge with the DSG with all 11 SLT members voted in favour*

    *Following the meeting, further information that was not available to the SLT at the time has come to light and this decision is now under review and further consultations.

9.7 The next priority area to be discussed was **Association Awareness.**

9.8 Head of Digital Communications outlined the steering group's goals for the next year:
- Have a presence on module websites
- Have a presence on the OU Study app
- Lobby for the OU planner to include Association events
- Set up an Association Wikipedia page

9.9 She then provided some updates on what has been happening within the Group:
- A Hoot working group has been formed and these will meet in early August
- Two new Digi Comms staff have been appointed and will start on the 1st and 14th August
- The next newsletter will include information on the SLT and the Hoot

- There will be a push for Freshers unboxing videos
- Comms will go out about end of year meet ups to try increase attendance

9.10   A challenge that the group are foreseeing is the end of year results day in Cardiff, with an expectation that some students will question why Cardiff was chosen as the location.

9.11   Following the huge success of the Tutor Awards, the steering group wanted to receive feedback from the SLT on whether we should be celebrating Students, rather than Tutors. Many SLT members expressed that they would like to see the Tutor Awards continue, as well as starting up a new awards system for Students. Issues regarding staff capacity were raised here though.

9.12   **ACTION:** The Project Manager for Conference to look into building both the Tutor Awards and Student/Volunteer recognition into the cyclical calendar.

9.13   The next priority area discussed was **Representation.**

9.14   The group's upcoming goals are outlined below:
- Proposal to make changes to the Senate Reference Group (SRG)
- Improve student engagement around General Election – remind students about voter ID
- Set up and run a Student Finance Campaign
- *The final goal is of a confidential nature so is being reserved to the confidential set of minutes. The discussions around this are also reserved to the confidential minutes.*

9.17   The final priority area to be discussed was **Communities and Engagement.**

9.18   The Associate Director: Projects & Services updated the SLT on the Illuminate project. There will be a 1 year pilot of the app, with Groups and Club members trialling it first. The group have faced a continuous challenge with getting single sign-on but have recently made a break though with the OU agreeing to allow students to access the app via single sign-on.

9.19   The other goals for this steering group are listed below:
- Set up and run a campaign for Isolation Awareness Month. The aim is to raise awareness of the services the Association offers through student stories, social media takeover, meet ups, social events and quizzes.
- Community events to be focused on faculties, schools and specific themes, rather than the current location-based events
- Use Freshers to celebrate long-standing societies

9.20   VP Community reiterated that the goal is to target specific schools via specific meet ups, using resources that we already have to avoid further recruitment. Some SLT members proposed people in the faculties who would be keen to set up faculty-specific online and in person events, recognising how valuable these individuals could be. There would need to be accessibility considerations when meet ups and other events

are planned for face to face attendance. VP EDI outlined that meet ups have a better turnout when there is a theme, so this is something to also consider.

9.21 **ACTION**: Community team and VP Community to review meet ups, looking to run only themed/faculty specific meet ups in the new academic year (Freshers onwards)

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SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

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10.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

   SLT Reports
10.1 The Deputy President reiterated the importance of the SLT reports and the completion of the MS form as recently there had been missing responses as well as a lack of content. He sought views from the SLT on what could be done to improve how they report what they have been working on and how better to complete the MS form. Suggestions included; making the questions less restrictive, including an AOB and 'work in progress' section, SLT members to create an activity log so they don't forget what they have been up to when it comes to the time of completing the form and finally, tweaking the wording of some of the questions.

   ACTION: The Deputy President to meet with the Head of Executive Support and Staff Welfare to edit the questions on the MS form to make it easier to fill in.

10.2 Replying to emails/posts
   The President acknowledged that some of the staff team, particularly the Executive Support and Staff Welfare team have had to chase some SLT members consistently when asked to confirm attendance, confirm meal choices, room bookings etc. She reminded the SLT that deadlines must be adhered to and if you cannot attend an event, then to let the event lead know straight away. She outlined the time wasted when staff are having to send multiple emails and messages to get a response.

11.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

11.1 The next meeting will take place face to face over the weekend of the 6 – 8 October 2023.

Action Log		
Item in the Minutes	**Action**	**Action holder**
6.4	Gather evidence on different experiences in the faculties Gather evidence on Tutor perspectives and insights Gather evidence on guidance/instructions given by faculties	All SLT members

	Share comms with students around avenues for support	
6.6	Faculty rep to investigate the lack of recorded tutorials on these particular modules and escalate it to the relevant people in the OU	
6.8	Seek involvement in the new process which is being developed by the OU Explore 'How to be an OU student' page on the website to help manage expectations including reminding students that they don't always have to attend tutorials with their tutor, and may find other tutor's delivery style more suited to them.	All SLT members
6.11	The SLT to push the OU to adopt the Plain English Policy.	All SLT members & EDI team
9.1	The Deputy President to meet with the Head of Executive Support and Staff Welfare to edit the questions on the MS form to make it easier to fill in.	Gareth Jones & Gaby Cull
9.12	The Project Manager for Conference to look into building both the Tutor Awards and Student/Volunteer recognition into the cyclical calendar	Tom Mitchell
9.21	Community team and VP Community to review meet ups, looking to run only themed/faculty specific meet ups in the new academic year (Freshers onwards)	Cazz Kay & Peter Turner