



## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Student Leadership Team (SLT)

21 – 23 April 2023

### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update & OU Students Association Groups

The SLT is asked to:-

- i) **Receive** an update on the Association's EDI work.
- ii) **Receive** an update from the Support Groups.

#### 1. 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.

#### 2. Updates from the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA) Steering Group

- 2.1 At the last meeting of the EDIA Steering Group we had Debi Gregory, Chair of the Neurodiversity Club, join us to talk about the biggest barriers student members in the Club have been facing. Debi highlighted a number of challenges that we should be aware of:
  - There are lots of examples where students are being actively encouraged to leave their studies as the OU student support staff don't believe the student will

cope or has exhausted the existing tools at their disposal that might help the student

- Self-diagnosed, where encouraged and widely accepted is problematic for students as the OU requires a formal diagnosis for the student to receive reasonable adjustments
- Important to be aware that students 'identify' as neurodivergent and they therefore see it as an 'identity' and not a 'disability'
- Disabled Student Profile – Student Support Team staff are adding information to these that is inaccurate
- Subtitles are required not only for students with hearing impairments but also visual processing disorders
- Disabled Students Allowance issues – not enough support available to help student complete their paperwork

2.2 The EDIA Steering Group will next be considering how to take this information forward and would like to thank Debi for attending the meeting and sharing the above with us.

2.3 At the last Student Leadership Team meeting in January there was a discussion around Alternative Formats and extensions. As a result of this conversation, Dan Moloney has created an action plan to challenge the OU in this area.

2.4 As part of this work we also reconvened an Accessibility Standards Group with a staff only membership (though the work is directed by the EDIA Steering Group. The justification here is that most of the work that needed to be done was operational and so having students in the Group was not the best use of student voice.

### **3. Completed or Planned EDI Work**

3.1 A [blog on The Hoot](#) was written for Holocaust Day of Remembrance at the end of January (27<sup>th</sup> January) which received some good engagement on the Hoot itself.

3.2 In an effort to broaden our usual engagement and reach we wanted to celebrate a new awareness day this year to see whether it would allow us to reach a different audience. We launched a campaign for International Book Giving Day (14<sup>th</sup> February) where we raised awareness of book poverty and encouraged students to donate to their local drop off point. We also ran this campaign across the Association and OU Staff team as well as the SLT and we collected over 500 books that were then donated! Tom Mitchell in the EDI and Student Welfare Team wrote a [Hoot blog about the project](#).

3.3 Race Equality Week was over the 6-12<sup>th</sup> February but unfortunately we only found out about it the week before so were unable to do a big campaign for students. However, each day during the week had a challenge for people to complete which

we shared with Staff and SLT. Natalie Baker also [wrote a Hoot article](#) wrapping up all the daily challenges and reflecting on the week.

- 3.4 University Mental Health Day didn't have a theme this year and as there's been so much in the media about the Cost of Living we thought we'd share money saving tips. We encouraged students to share their tips as well as sharing support from the OU and Association and [consolidated them all in a Hoot Article](#).
- 3.5 The Groups Review Steering Group came together at a hybrid meeting in February which was really useful in terms of gathering our recommendations. Some of the outcomes we were able to test almost immediately as we needed to plan elections for both OU Pride and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups. We will be sharing the recommendations and full report soon but this has taken up a lot of the Teams time and efforts.
- 3.6 We have also started working on the third edition of the Hoot Magazine for SiSE, which to date has our most bespoke articles for SiSE than the previous two. We also have an article submitted from a Student in prison as well as an article from the OU's SiSE Team promoting study with the OU.
- 3.7 We received a letter from a student in prison asking for our help in raising a complaint against the OU and our Student Advisors within the Individual Representation team are working on this. We hope it might be an example of how we can expand the service to Students in Secure Environments.
- 3.8 We recently had Neill Boddington, Senior Manager Innovation in Academic Services, join our Staff Huddle to talk about the Mental Health and Wellbeing services the OU support. This has given the team lots of ideas on how we can help to promote these in future.
- 3.9 We have the following planned campaigns for the next few months:
  - Promoting and introducing the new OU Pride and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Group Committees after elections (April)
  - Deaf Awareness Week (2-8<sup>th</sup> May)
  - Carers Week (5-11<sup>th</sup> June)
  - Pride Month (June)
  - DSG's 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday (June)

#### **4. Groups Update**

- 4.1 We have just finished running elections for both OU Pride and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Groups. As the Committees are brand new (just announced last week) there will be no update papers from either Group.

**Verity Robinson**  
**Head of EDI and Student Welfare**

## **Student Leadership Team (SLT)**

**April 2023**

### **REPORT FROM THE DISABLED STUDENTS GROUP (DSG)**

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#### **1. Committee Updates**

The current committee is made up of 6 members – 1 chairperson and 5 general members.

Becca Phoenix - Acting Chair  
Vacant - Events and Communications Officer  
Vacant - Secretary

Marilyn Salstrom - Committee Member  
Katie Hickmott - Committee Member  
Nichola Connolly - Committee Member  
Hannah Burns - Committee Member  
Felicity Burgess - Committee Member

Since the last report in January, Stephanie Stubbins has stepped down from her role as committee member and Laura Cranstoun has stepped down as Secretary. Marilyn Salstrom stepped down as Chair in February, becoming a general committee member, and Becca Phoenix has now left the position of Events and Communications Officer vacant to take up the role of Acting Chair.

Following our co-option process in January, 4 new members were elected to the committee. 1 was unresponsive, 2 have since stepped down from their roles, and 1 remains on the committee. We are hopeful to fill some of our open vacancies soon, prioritising officer roles and using those who applied for co-option but were unsuccessful the first time around.

We have held monthly committee meetings on:

24<sup>th</sup> January  
28<sup>th</sup> February  
28<sup>th</sup> March

Natalie Baker, VP EDI, has been present at each of these meetings and we find her presence and input very useful as well as having her ongoing support.

## **2. Group Membership**

Registered Members: 1048 (up 33 since February)

Facebook: 2351 members (up 27 since January)

Twitter: 675 followers (up 21 since January)

We have seen a steady increase in membership on all our platforms once again. This is due to our active committee work, ensuring that we are present, engaging with students on social media, hosting regular events, and reacting to the needs of our membership using interactive tools to get feedback.

## **3. Communications**

### Newsletter

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> (winter) edition of the Newsletter was published in February and can be found on our dedicated section of the association website.

The committee has made the difficult decision to pause the Newsletter indefinitely due to our limited committee and the workload involved for both the committee and the association to get this out to our members.

We found that the most useful aspect of the Newsletter was the ability to reach all our registered members via email and so will be sending out regular emails to our members to keep them updated from now on. We trialed this with our most useful drop-in session and had one of our highest turnouts so far (20 attendees in total). We are hopeful that if we continue to do this, we will increase engagement both with our events and overall.

### Social Media

Twitter continues to be our least active platform and so we have shifted focus away from there to focus on our other platforms: Facebook and the forums.

We continue to post the #sharingpositivity and #NDandMHAchievements hashtags on both Facebook and the Forums with varying degrees of engagement.

## **4. Events & Activities**

### Drop In's

We continue to hold our monthly drop-in on the last Friday of each month. We have also found that engagement is increased and our members get more out of the sessions if we structure them with a theme and give out information.

We have held the following events since our last SLT report:

26<sup>th</sup> January – Freshers information session

27<sup>th</sup> January – DSG collaboration with the ND club

24<sup>th</sup> February – EDI session with Natalie Baker presenting and an appearance from the Peer Representation Service

31<sup>st</sup> March – Mental Health and Wellbeing information session with a short Quiz

Our next event in April is planned to be around studying and planning for EMA's and exams with a disability – we are hoping to have a special guest for this.

As mentioned earlier, we are hoping to increase our engagement with events as much as possible. We considered changing the date and time however decided at the last committee meeting (28<sup>th</sup> March) that we should try other strategies first. Both having structured themes and advertising via email seem to be successful so far.

#### Collaboration and Representation

4 committee members attended the Groups Review in person on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February. 1 of our members also completed Mindapples champion training on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> of February.

We have been in communication with the faculty of STEM who have invited us to their next meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April to discuss accessibility in virtual fieldwork.

#### Awareness Days Campaign

We are continuing to raise awareness of various issues which affect our members and wider society on our platforms. Our January Freshers event included a prize draw where the winner was able to choose a cause for us to promote on our platforms. We will keep this model in mind for future events where prizes are involved.

At our last committee meeting, the idea was put forward to ask our members what we should be celebrating each month as there are too many events to promote all of them and the committee often had to decide arbitrarily. It was then suggested that we post a poll on our Facebook group rather than asking members freely. There has been good engagement on this post which has informed what we will be promoting in April. We plan to continue this and may email this out instead in the future to reach more members.

## **5. Student issues & challenges**

We receive enquiries from students on all our platforms (Facebook, Forums, Email) about many different issues concerning disability and related topics.

There have been many posts on the Forums recently concerning student's interactions with the Open University including inaccessible module material, confusion surrounding forums and miscommunication or difficulties when interacting with Student Services.

We encourage students to email us directly if they have not already done so as we can then signpost them to the right place or try to help them resolve their issue without escalating it.

We receive many posts on our Facebook group concerning studying and Student finance but our thriving community means that our members often help each other with these enquiries. Our committee members interact with these posts if needed but most of the time our members support each other.

We have received several enquiries on the forums concerning the process for joining the DSG. Many students have found this difficult, and it has been a barrier to them joining. This is something we will be in communication with the association about in order to ensure the joining process is as accessible as possible for all students.

## **6. Any other initiatives or updates**

### DSG Birthday celebrations in June

We are planning to celebrate our birthday in June with a range of different activities. There have been a few ideas raised so far including:

- The launch of a new social media platform e.g. Instagram
- A social media takeover on the Association's pages
- An investigation into the history of the DSG
- Interviews with past committee members
- A birthday party drop-in which may include a quiz or other activity

We will be planning for this on Microsoft Teams as a committee using a dedicated post in our Events and Campaigns channel.

**Becca Phoenix**

**Acting Chair**

**For and on behalf of the Disabled Students Group**

