SLT 04/24/M

STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)
22 April 2023

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Student Leadership Team (SLT) held via the Teams space from 14– 21 April 2023 and live online on the 22 April 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 Rep for Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)
Cazz Flowers	Vice President Community
Stephen Hughes	Ireland Representative
Laura Marulanda-Carter	Vice President Education
Kaz Murphy	Faculty Rep for Open & Access
Nigel Patterson	Faculty Rep for Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM)
Paul Reid	Scotland Representative
Lou Robinson	Vice President Engagement
Elizabeth Scully	England Representative

IN ATTENDANCE

Linda Aradi	Projects Officer, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (morning only)
Denisa Bartova	Volunteer & Representation Administrator (afternoon only)
Hannah Burns	Disability Support Group (DSG), Committee member
Gabriella Cull	Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (live tweeting)
Kate Dungate	Head of Digital Communications (morning only)
Beth Metcalf	Chief Executive
Dan Moloney	Director of Engagement
Allan Musinguzi	Head of Volunteering & Representation
Patrica Pugliese	OU Pride, Group Secretary
Verity Robinson	Head of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Student Welfare (morning)
Samantha Smeraglia	Executive Support Assistant (minutes)
Jess Smith –	Associate Director, Projects & Services

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Before the meeting started, each SLT member attended a 45 minute catch up with their priority area steering group to discuss updates and progress in their area.

A.   PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the SLT to the third meeting of their terms She gave a special welcome to the Group members who were observing the online SLT meeting

- Hannah Burns – DSG Secretary

- Patrizia Pugliese – OU Pride Secretary

B.   ABSENCES
Mohai Eddine Hadit - International Representative
Ben Mansell – Faculty Representative for Business and Law
Raed Townsend – Wales Representative

C.   MINUTES

C.1   The minutes from the meeting held on the 11th February 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 14 – 21 April 2023

---

1.   RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES   **SLT 04/22/1**

1.1   The SLT received the report of affiliated societies.

2.   RECEIVED: EDI & STUDENT WELFARE & GROUPS UPDATE   **SLT 04/22/2**

2.1   The SLT received the report of EDI & Student Welfare, plus Association Groups.

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES   SLT 04/22/3

3.1 The SLT received the Report of the Board of Trustees.

4. RECEIVED: STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT   SLT 04/22/4

4.1 The SLT received the Strategy Performance Report.

5.FRESHERS FORTNIGHT 22J AND 23B EVALUATION   SLT 04/22/5

5.1 The SLT received the evaluation of Freshers Fortnight 22J and 23B.

6. UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE 2023 EVALUATION   SLT 04/22/6

6.1 The SLT received the evaluation of the University Challenge 2023 team recruitment.

**7. GROUPS REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS   SLT 04/22/7
  (CONFIDENTIAL)**

The SLT received the review of the Association Groups which had been conducted by Projects Officer (EDI), with a separate agenda item scheduled for discussion of the proposed recommendations.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION
Taken at the meeting on Saturday 22 April 2023

---

8. GROUPS UPDATES   SLT 04/22/8

The SLT heard introductions and brief overviews from the representatives from DSG, and OU Pride.

8.1 DSG Secretary, Hannah Burns gave updates on: the recruitment of new committee members; and the availability of monthly drop-ins and a quarterly DSG newsletter.

8.2 OU Pride Secretary, Patrizia Pugliese was newly elected to the role and introduced herself to the SLT with a brief overview of her background and aspirations. The Pride Events Officer has recently stepped down due to workload pressures, so a meeting with the committee has had to be rescheduled for next week, to discuss the group set-up.

9. PRIORITY AREAS AND FOLLOW UP DISCUSSIONS   SLT 04/22/9

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

The Head of EDI and Student Welfare gave an update from the steering group, with a focus on upcoming events that support the groups focus on themes of Mental Health and Loneliness:

9.2   This year's EDI Conference will be run as a series of roadshow events, to provide outreach and bitesize topics intended to increase student awareness and engagement. Sessions could also be linked to certain awareness campaigns or calendar dates, so events do not have to be repeated later in the year.

9.3   This year's Mental Health Awareness Week (15-21 May) theme is "Anxiety", with ideas for highlights led by the Projects Officer (Student Support and Welfare). SLT will receive requests for photos & video clips on things that make people happy – from music, colours, hobbies, images, food, to people or learning etc, that can then be shared over time. Concern was expressed that events do not overlap with Loneliness Awareness Week, 12 - 16 June 2023, which has a different focus.

9.4   The Projects Officer (EDI), suggested replacing individual and time-consuming Group newsletters with an EDI newsletter – something that all Groups could contribute to and use to promote their events and topics/activities of interest.

9.5   The Head of EDI made SLT aware that there continues to be conflict between our members with gender critical views and those who identify as trans, intersex and non-binary. SLT were asked to reach out for support if they needed it, OU Pride are working on a letter to ask the University for clarification on student expectations.

9.6   Discussed in this section was the <u>CONFIDENTIAL</u> **Peer Support Services Recommendations** paper.
Update: a public announcement about the service was posted online on 5 May 2023, so this section of the minutes can now be shared.

      The potentially controversial recommendation to close the service was discussed. VP EDI talked about underuse of the service and that closure could be a positive opportunity to release volunteers to support other activities. The OU's Careers and Employability Services (CES) offer student volunteers accredited qualifications, so that could be promoted as an option.

9.7   **RESOLUTION:** 13 SLT members voted in favour of the recommendation to close the service, with no objections.

9.8   Also discussed in this section was the <u>CONFIDENTIAL</u> **Groups Review** paper.
Update: only the paper was confidential, due to the OU data contained.

      Recommendation 4.1.5 was for Groups to minimise activities that would mean duplicating services provided elsewhere, or that risk providing incorrect advice. Group focus on the core values of nurturing a student community and amplifying the student voice of minoritised communities, should help to make Group workloads more sustainable.

9.9   **RESOLUTION::** SLT members voted in favour of recommendation 4.1.5, with no objections.

9.10   R*ecommendation 4.1.6* was that for Committees to be as effective as possible, the VP EDI continues their support in following up and raising issues, and that the SLT helps

create signpost information to common member enquires that the Committees can display on their website and / or share via their platforms.

9.11 **RESOLUTION:** SLT members voted in favour of this recommendation, with no objections.

9.12 **ACTION:** Head of EDI will set up a Teams channel for SLT/staff/Committees to enable more immediate responses to student queries that fall outside the Groups' remit.

9.13 **ACTION:** The SLT will help create signpost information to common Group member enquires, that Committees can share on their website and/or via their platforms.

9.14 *Recommendation 4.1.7* was that Committees use channels through the SLT to raise issues identified via student requests, to improve student services in the long-term. For example, if disabled students are unsure about their entitlements, the Committee could feed back to the relevant OU department about the need for information available on this to be made clearer.

9.15 The STEM Faculty Representative recommended Groups each send a representative to the Societies committee, to promote cross-learning and support.

9.16 **RESOLUTION:** SLT members voted in favour of recommendation 4.1.7, with no objections.

9.17 *Recommendation 4.1.9* was that each Group consider offering membership to members of the relevant community only, and not to allies or friends of that community. Such an approach is commonly adopted within the Higher Education sector and intended to protect minoritised communities who find safety and understanding amongst people with shared lived experiences.

9.18 **ACTION:** Given the length of discussion and concerns raised about the impossibility or desirability of policing this recommendation, it was agreed that Projects Officer EDI would clarify exactly what approval is being requested for and bring a reworked proposal back to SLT for discussion and approval.

9.19 *Recommendation 4.2.5.* proposed that only the Chair of each Group is elected, in view of low student engagement at elections but still recognising the authority and value OF a democratically elected representative. Once in post, the rest of the Committee would be appointed by a panel consisting of the Chair, VP EDI and a member of the EDI and Student Welfare Team. The Panel would be given awareness training on unconscious bias and the selection process will be anonymised.

9.20 **RESOLUTION:** SLT members voted in favour, with one objection on the grounds of Group democracy and accountability.

9.21 VP EDI thanked the Projects Officer EDI for her outstanding help and support in working with the focus groups to generate the Groups Review paper and its recommendations. Projects Officer EDI appreciated the opportunity to attend the SLT meeting and learn first-hand what can realistically be achieved in the time available.

9.22   **ACTION:** Due to the limited time available for this agenda item and the need for further discussion on this paper, the SLT agreed with the Projects Officer EDI for any outstanding recommendations from the paper be revised and presented for approval via the SLT Teams space, with Chair's support.

9.23   <u>The second priority area discussed was **Association Awareness**.</u>

VP Engagement gave an update on the recent successful launch of the Environmental and Sustainability working group web-page, and the support of one of the Projects Officer (Student Community) in creating it: https://www.oustudents.com/about-us/environment-and-sustainability/

9.24   The need for more student-led content in the Hoot was raised by VP Engagement, who suggested resurrecting the content creation micro-volunteer role ,which was introduced over a year ago but had to then stop due to a lack of staff capacity. It was emphasised that there is a need for students to write honestly about what it is really like to study specific Modules and be an OU student – top tips, what to look out for etc.

9.25   Suggestions included a special issue of The Hoot on module selection and where students could go next for information and advice. Student content could improve Hoot awareness and promote more academic interest links. One issue could be different starting points for students, given that the content would be available for some time from when written and could be picked up by students that are new to the OU. Other readers may be returning from a study break or progressing from previous modules. Any opinion piece would need to include an end post stating that the one or two modules highlighted are subject to refresh.

9.26   VP Admin raised the possibility of SEO training being delivered to The Hoot student writers to make SEO more efficient. A role in itself, SEO can be helped by including meta-data, alt-text images etc e.g. if modules focus on terms such as "City Road" then our content should appear first in any search engine results page (SERP).

9.27   Director of Engagement stated that the micro-volunteers role should be refined, so it's clear what type of content is wanted and what they need to do. Volunteers could be given a question set e.g. what do you enjoy/what not? The content role should appeal to creative module students but also pitched to encourage others with the idea that students do not need to be authors - it is sharing their module-specific experiences that is of value.

9.28   **ACTION:** Projects Officer (Student Community) would continue to work with micro-volunteers to write student-led content, offering guidance on what is wanted.

9.29   Ways to make the current structure of The Hoot and its categories (Quizzes, Study, Identity, Lifestyle, Community, and Help) more relevant to students, were discussed. VP Engagement reminded SLT of the 100 days Social Media Challenge and suggested the SLT embed a few key items from the live meeting tweets to share as highlights with students and generate interest/improve transparency.

9.30 **RESOUTION:** Suggestions for revised categories would be made via the SLT Teams channel.

9.31 Head of Digital Communications requested interest in additional media training for July's SLT meeting. Training can be bespoke, practical or formal.

9.32 **ACTION** Head of Digi-Comms to poll training requests via Teams.

9.33 The third priority area discussed was **Engagement & Communities**.

VP Community announced a campaign to battle loneliness after Freshers, engaging all Groups in November. Discussion included information at Freshers then follow-up after a busy October for students. Set up of a "Give it a Go" society would allow existing organisations to get involved and run their own events; and an opportunity for students to try out different things, with organising Clubs each bringing something to do.

9.34 The Director of Engagement raised the sensitivity of communications, given the Peer Review Service closure. The suggestion was that November is an opportunity to re-engage flagging Freshers enthusiasm and use the campaign to highlight everything else the Association already does to support students and any issues raised at the London Student Consultation.

9.35 The SLT were thanked for their support in hosting Results Day meet-ups by the Associate Director, Projects & Services. One online and four in-person meetings will take place on 22 July, in MK, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh, with details to go live on the website next week. Yorkshire and other areas are also being looked at, with event advertising to start in May.

9.36 **ACTION:** The President and Deputy-President will be taken up on their offer to host a Results Day meet-up in Wales, probably Cardiff.

9.37 The issue of the Association's two-yearly Student Conference was discussed. This item is of a confidential nature and is therefore reserved for the Confidential Minutes.

9.38 The final priority area discussed was **Representation**.

VP Education introduced the usefulness of having 10-12 Association statements prepared on key issues, that Reps and Groups could use to take to meetings for consistency of message.

9.39 Discussion included that issues need to be pan-University rather than Faculty-specific e.g. a statement on the late delivery of alt formats, or the cost of living impacts than how a module is delivered. It would be important to have Faculty Representatives help draft the statements, given that STEM is different to WELs. The topics could then be used as part of any new Representative training.

9.40 Set-up of a position statements intranet page would allow for updates that can be sent out with links to any new editions. Statements could be time-stamped and longer-standing positions e.g. alt formats, could be reviewed every 12 months.

9.41   **ACTION:** Position statements to be drafted with the assistance of the Director of Engagement. The Position Statements working group to review the intranet page every six months and make any necessary changes.

9.42   A discussion followed on the purpose, structure and value of the Senate Reference Group (SRG), with surveys already having gone out to SLT.

9.43   While the value of in-person meetings with Faculty and OU departments acknowledged, the cost/benefit of travelling to attend for a two hour meeting was assessed and perceived as a waste of SLT time. SRG commencing mid-week on a Wednesday is another barrier for those with work commitments. Hybrid meetings allow those further away to engage more. Unless combined with training or some other value, then travel for a two-hour meeting is simply unsustainable.

9.44   Some members of the SLT suggested that it would be more useful to run an in-person all-Reps seminar on a Saturday, with the opportunity to network and engage, discuss shared issues, debate policies and receive updates. If run alongside training then it makes travel more worthwhile for those based further away, used to hybrid working.

9.45   The SLT then touched on the new Student Issues Reporting Tool, emphasising that if relying on a social media presence, then the SLT need to be more organised about posting and becoming more visible e.g. highlight the 'top three' student issues discussed and the outcomes.

9.46   It was confirmed that the Student Issues Reporting Tool will be managed by the Deputy President and the Head of Executive Support and Staff Welfare.

9.47   **ACTION:** Once issues are discussed at the SLT meeting, they will then be labelled 'closed' on the tool but any remaining issues will remain open for students to vote on for discussion at the next SLT.

10.   STUDENT FACING ISSUES

10 issues were submitted via the Student Reporting Tool and the top two were discussed at SLT.

10.1   The first issue discussed was <u>Tutor Inconsistencies</u>.

After lengthy discussion and acknowledgement that this is a longer-term issue, the SLT came up with a set of actions they will be taking forward, in regard to this issue. The Deputy President set them out as below:

a) Work to identify particular areas where inconsistencies are occurring. Where identified as systematic issues, these inconsistencies will be challenged by our student representative teams through the appropriate channels. Where they are isolated issues, students will be encouraged to raise the issue directly with the tutor, or through an appropriate channel.

b) Ensure that clear signposting of the appropriate channels for students to challenge inconsistencies, as individuals exists.

c) Encourage conversations to take place in a monitored area. This ensures that inconsistencies can be properly challenged when escalated.

d) Work with the OU to explain to the students what measures already exist to ensure that there is consistency of experience from tutors already.

e) Work with AL's to help build a better student understanding of the work that an AL does. Whilst not directly addressing where inconsistencies exist, this will provide a more empathetic approach to the work of an AL.

10.2 **RESOLUTION:** The Deputy President will work with the Director of Engagement to address the issue and communicate to students the plan of action.

10.3 **ACTION:** An action plan is to be developed by the Deputy President, who will then come back to SLT about possible individual workstreams

10.4 The second issue discussed was <u>Diverse executive function in relation to books, assessment and exams.</u>

It was noted that frequent reminder emails about impending exams can increase anxiety and that there may be a better format for the OU to manage those.

10.5 The SLT agreed there is no 'one size fits all' solution and the OU needs to catch up with the growing population of thousands of OU students who identify as physically or neurologically challenged. Whilst this issue will be difficult to fix, the EDI work already being done and involving the Neurodivergent Society will help.

10.6 **RESOLUTION:** The Deputy President listed a set of agreed outcomes for SLT (as seen below) and together with the Director of Engagement, are to address the issues in the coming weeks/months.
   a) Continue to reinforce the message that a standardised approach to neuro-diverse students is not appropriate and that more tailored adjustments need to be given e.g. guidance on Exam and TMA wording.

   b) Speak with the Disability Support Team about the support currently available and identify any omissions in provision. Work to better communicate the support available to students. Share appropriate contact information.

   c) Promote the benefits of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

   d) Ask for the OU's Disability Support Team (DST) to give a statement on the help available.

   e) Share contact information so students know where to reach out to.

10.7 **ACTION:** As soon as an action plan is developed, the Deputy President will come back to SLT about possible individual workstreams.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

---

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

OU Wales Funding Awarded
11.1 The Deputy President reported that as a result of discussions at February's SLT meeting, the OU in Wales was able to successfully secure funding for the issue of 1 year TOTUM membership cards to 700 eligible Welsh students.

11.2 UCU Non-marking of Assessments
The Deputy President raised that there has been an adverse student reaction to the latest industrial action and that other student unions have pulled their support for ongoing strikes. The Association has remained neutral to date and tried to mitigate effects for students but there were talks regarding whether it is now time to consult members and conduct a poll on if the Association can remain neutral while acting as the student voice.

11.3 **ACTION:** 12 SLT members voted in favour of polling student members. If students have been given the option to voice their opinions but engagement is low, then the SLT can decide on what position to take.

11.4   Grants to Association Societies.

The STEM Representative raised that there had been discussion under Societies in MS Teams about who is involved in awarding society grants and what the criteria for awards are?

RESOLUTION: The Associate Director, Projects & Services will share a grants guidance document in the SLT Teams space, that can be used to answer such queries.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

12.1 The next meeting will take place face to face over the weekend of the 14-16 July 2023.

Action Log		
Item in the Minutes	**Action**	**Action holder**
9.12	Head of EDI will set up a Teams channel for SLT/staff/Committees to enable more immediate responses to student queries that fall outside the Groups' remit.	Verity Robinson

9.13	The SLT will help create signpost information to common Group member enquires, that Committees can then display on their website and / or share via their platforms.	Gareth Jones Dan Moloney
9.18	Groups Review paper - *Recommendation 4.1.9 Offering membership to members of the relevant community only.* Projects Officer EDI will clarify exactly what approval is being requested for and bring a reworked proposal back to SLT for discussion and approval.	Linda Aradi
9.22	Projects Officer EDI agreed for any outstanding recommendations from the Groups paper be revised and presented for approval via the SLT Teams space, with Chair's support.	Linda Aradi
9.28	Projects Officer (Student Community) will continue work on using micro-volunteers to write student-led content, with guidance on what is wanted.	Hannah Prue
9.32	Head of Digi-Comms to poll training requests via Teams.	Kate Dungate
9.36	Associate Director, Projects & Services, will liaise with the President and Deputy-President re their offer to host a Results Day meet-up in Wales.	Jess Smith
9.41	Association position statements will be drafted with the Director of Engagement and the Position Statements working group will review the intranet page every six months and make any changes.	Dan Moloney
9.47	The Student Reporting Tool will be managed by the Deputy-President and the Head of Executive Support. Once discussed, issues will be 'closed' but any remaining issues will remain open for students vote.	Gareth Jones Gabby Cull
10.3	Tutor module inconsistencies: the Deputy-President will bring an action plan to SLT to discuss possible workstreams.	Gareth Jones
10.7	Executive function: the Deputy-President will bring an action plan to SLT to discuss possible workstreams.	Gareth Jones
11.3	Members will be polled on a change of Association position regarding ongoing Tutor industrial action. If student engagement is low, then the SLT will decide on what position to take on members behalf.	Margaret Greenaway Gareth Jones

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