

The Student Leadership Team's Report to Conference

2024–2026

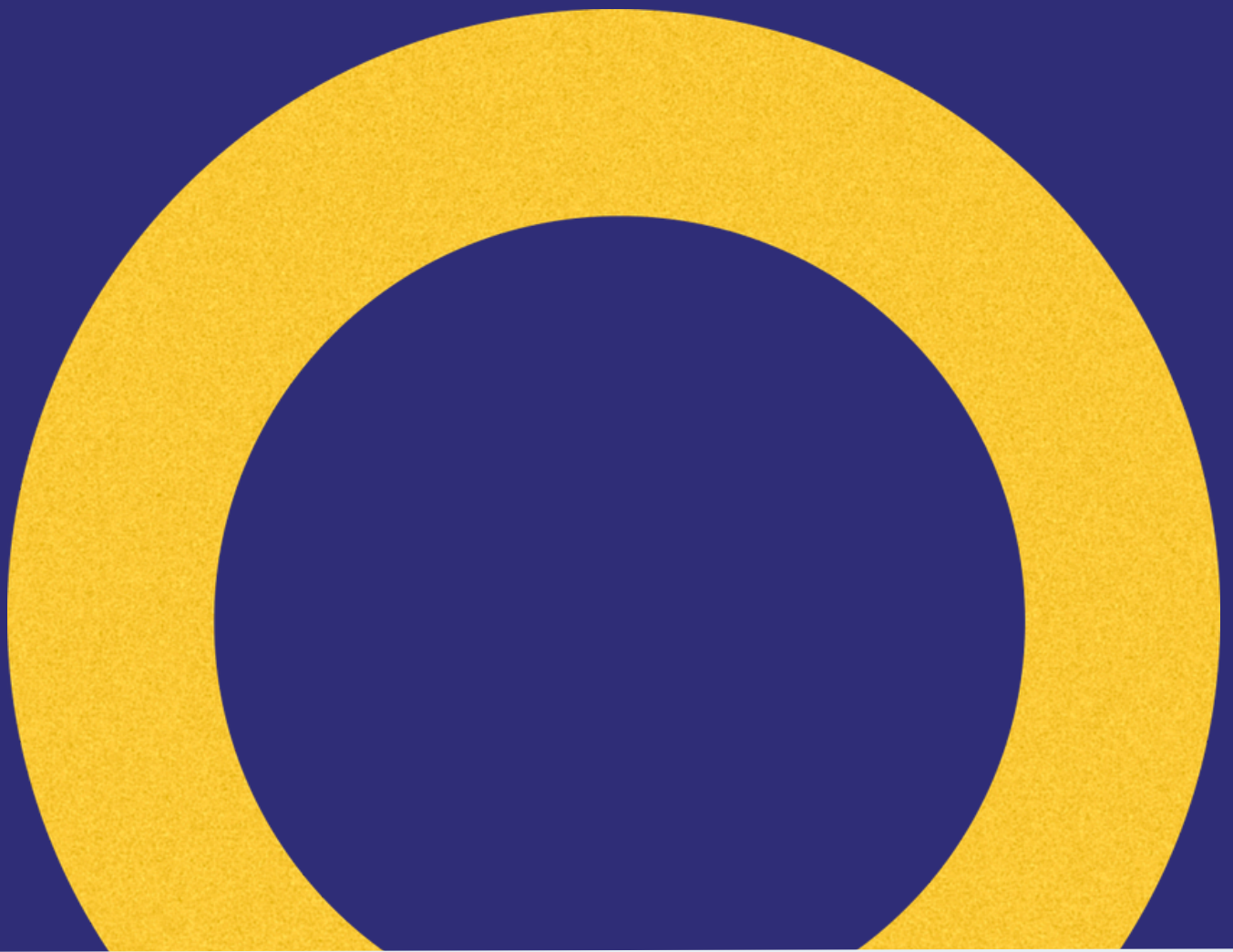


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Membership 2024 - 2026

- **President:** [Natalie Baker](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Deputy President:** [Andrew Wilson](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Student Member of Council:** [Andrew Kolapo](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** [Ross Thorne](#) (1 August 2024 – 7 May 2026)
- **Vice President Administration:** [Kimberley Kennedy](#) (13 May 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **Vice President Community & Engagement:** [Olivia Hughes](#) (1 August 2024 – 11 November 2024) and [David Hunter](#) (13 May 2025 – 30 July 2025)
- **Disabled Students Representative:** [Aimee Prior](#) (13 May 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Representative:** [Rochelle Benjamin](#) (20 May 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **LGBTQIA+ Representatives:** [Lauren Atkin-Hill](#) (13 May 2025 – 11 September 2025) and [Alex Thomas](#) (31 October 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **Sustainability Representative:** [Jethro Tieman](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Vice President Academic Student Voice:** [Katie Hickmott](#) (1 August 2024 – 11 September 2025)
- **Vice President Student Representation:** [Nichola Connolly](#) (1 August 2024 – 30 March 2026)
- **Vice President Student Welfare:** [Mark Walker](#) (1 August 2024 – 7 October 2024) and [Jessica Hannington](#) (13 May 2025 – 9 June 2026)
- **Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies:** [Charon Gates](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences:** [Jack Flaherty](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Faculty of Open and Access:** [Vik Afanasjevaite](#) (13 May 2025 – 22 September 2025)
- **Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics:** [Scott Harvey-Whittle](#) (1 August 2024 – April 2025) and [Abigail Cornea](#) (11 September 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **Faculty of Business and Law:** [Jonna Tuomola](#) (1 August 2024 – 3 October 2024) and [Loz Harris](#) (13 May 2025 – 31 July 2026)
- **International Area Representative:** [Isabelle Hoyet](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Area Representative for Ireland:** [Reece McKeown](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Area Representative for England:** [Julie Catterall](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)
- **Area Representative for Scotland:** [Ashley Mackie](#) (13 May 2025 – 15 October 2025)
- **Area Representative for Wales:** [Michael Jones](#) (1 August 2024 – 31 July 2026)

Reflection on progress and growth



I am delighted to present the Student Leadership Team Conference Report for the 2026 bi-annual conference. This report offers an opportunity to reflect on the successes, challenges, and defining moments of the 2024-2026 term, during which we worked tirelessly to represent and support OU students while striving to make a meaningful and lasting impact.

During the 2024-2026 term we focused on developing our priority areas and their associated projects, strengthening our relationship with the OU and transitioning from Student Association to Student Union!

We have consulted with and advocated on behalf of OU students on topics that matter to them both internally and externally. From the impact of AI and academic misconduct to the impact of government welfare reforms on our disabled students. We have also produced best practice documents that cover 13 different areas of the OU student experience. This has all been collated into what is the real legacy of this term, 'The What We Believe In Hub'. This has helped to give visibility and insight to the issues OU students are facing and has been invaluable in our work with the OU. It has been especially exciting to see this work being cited by the OU in their own internal guidance and how it is shaping ways of working that will positively impact the student experience.

We have also continued to grow our engagement with students, and it has been fantastic to see lots of new names and faces at events and getting involved in student voice work. The rebrand from Students Association to Open SU was not an easy task but it was as with all our work student led. From the 2024 conference vote to consultations about branding this work has given us a chance to refresh and reach new audiences.

I am also especially proud of the work that we have done over the last two years on the support hubs for our students. In particular the work that we have done on support for our Neurodivergent Students as this was a project I helped start in my previous term as the Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (VP EDI).

Whilst we have achieved a lot, most of this has been about laying the foundations. There is always more that can be done and improvements to be made. But it is hoped that the frameworks we have developed over this term will ensure future teams will be able to bring their own ideas and student issues to continue shaping the SU and adapting to changing student needs and demographics.

Reflection on progress and growth

All this work has been completed whilst many SLT members have balanced life, health and study commitments and during a time of great change within the SU, the OU, and the Higher Education Sector. Despite all the challenges we have faced over the last two years, the dedication, hard work and passion for supporting OU students and our mission have meant that we have made real and lasting changes to ensure student voice and wellbeing is at the heart of OU decision making.

I have felt incredibly proud and privileged to have led the 2024-2026 SLT and represent the SU as President and I want to thank the volunteers, the SU staff team and the wider OU student community for all your support and engagement.

Natalie Baker

Open SU President, 2024-26

Priority Areas

The Student Leadership team elected for the 2024 -2026 term quickly set to work on coordinating our manifesto pledges, aligning these with the overall strategic plan to agree shared priorities. These are outlined below:

STUDENT SUPPORT

Campaign for access to OU student support services with increased availability that meet needs of the OU student population.



STUDENT WELLBEING

Champion initiatives that prioritise the wellbeing of the diverse OU student communities.



THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Advocate for best-practice in teaching delivery to create a consistent academic student experience.



THE NEURODIVERGENT EXPERIENCE

Campaign for improvements in policy & process to create an equitable experience for diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodivergent students.



The following sections reflect on the work undertaken against each of these priorities and the progress made during the term.



The neurodivergent experience

The Student Leadership Team identified the neurodivergent student experience as one of Open SU's four priority areas for the 2024–2026 term. Over the two-year term, this commitment has led to new resources, events, best-practice guidance and student-led community spaces, all aimed at improving the experience and support available to neurodivergent students.

Neurodiversity Support Hub

One of the key achievements has been the launch of the [Neurodiversity Support Hub](#), a dedicated online space that signposts students to useful resources and support services.

The hub provides a central point of information, making it easier for students to find and access the support they need.

Creating spaces for students to connect

Alongside the hub, monthly Neurodivergent Student Drop-ins have been running since October 2025. These sessions provide a welcoming space for students to connect, share experiences and contribute to conversations about the needs of neurodivergent students.

A dedicated OU Students Connect conversation space was also established, giving students an additional space to share resources, ask questions and connect with one another.

Driving change at the OU

Supporting neurodivergent students is not only about providing spaces and resources. An important part of this priority has also been advocating for longer-term institutional change.

As part of this work, two best-practice guidance documents were developed:

- [Best Practice in Supporting Neurodivergent Students' Access to Module Materials](#)
- [Best Practice in Academic Student Experience: Neurodivergent Students](#)

These resources set out practical recommendations aimed at improving the experience of neurodivergent learners across the University.



The neurodivergent experience

Celebrating neurodiversity

In March 2026, Open SU marked Neurodiversity Celebration Week with a programme of events bringing together expert speakers, students and advocates. Between 16 and 19 March, attendees heard from Dr Kim Collett, Samantha Morgan, Dr Poppy Gibson, Dr Jon Rainford, Mel Green and Isabelle Henman on a range of topics, from creativity and supporting neurodivergent learners to making the most of your tutor.

Together, these activities have combined practical student support, opportunities for connection and advocacy for wider change, helping to establish a stronger foundation for continuing work on the neurodivergent student experience.



Student wellbeing

The Student Leadership Team committed to championing initiatives that prioritise the wellbeing of the diverse OU student community. During the term, work under this priority has focused on developing accessible resources, creating opportunities for students to connect and raising awareness of wellbeing issues that can affect students throughout their studies.

Menopause Support Hub

Open SU launched a [Menopause Support Hub](#) for students entering or experiencing perimenopause or menopause. The hub brings together information, resources and routes to further support, including details of relevant support groups.

Alongside the hub, Student Leaders have developed additional opportunities for students affected by menopause to connect and support one another. These have included:

- establishing a dedicated menopause conversation on OU Students Connect, creating an online space for students to connect and offer peer support
- arranging a coffee and chat session for students affected by menopause who would like an informal opportunity to connect.

Themed Wellbeing Weeks

Themed Wellbeing Weeks were created to raise awareness of different wellbeing issues and explore how they can affect OU students.

Together, these activities have sought to make wellbeing support more visible and accessible, while recognising the range of circumstances and experiences within the OU student community.



Student wellbeing

Apprentices Outreach

This work focused on achieving two outcomes:

- Increasing awareness of Open SU's services among apprenticeship students, and;
- Building relationships between Open SU and the staff within the OU who support apprenticeship students.

There was a particular focus on the Student Advice service. Through meetings and some larger training sessions, we were able to increase confidence within the teams managing academic misconduct and fitness to practice case around when and how to refer students to Open SU for support.

Additionally, we explored where OU staff supporting apprentice students could signpost to Open SU to increase awareness of the activities and services available both during their onboarding and throughout the student journey.



The academic experience

The Student Leadership Team committed to advocating for best practice in teaching delivery and helping to create a more consistent academic experience for students across the University.

Work under this priority has focused on setting out what students should be able to expect from their academic experience and using student evidence and feedback to inform those expectations.

Best Practice in Academic Student Experience

As part of the What We Believe In Hub, the Student Leadership Team developed a Best Practice in Academic Student Experience document.

The document identifies key areas that influence students' academic experience and sets out what the Student Leadership Team believes constitutes best practice across the University.

The recommendations are informed by evidence gathered through a range of sources and activities, including National Student Survey (NSS) results and student consultation feedback, helping to ensure that the position reflects issues and experiences raised by students.

This work provides a clearer statement of the standards the Student Leadership Team would like students to experience and provides a foundation for continued advocacy for consistency and good practice across the OU.



Student support

The Student Leadership Team committed to campaigning for access to OU student support services with availability that better meets the needs of the OU student population.

Work under this priority has focused on defining what good student support should look like, advocating for greater consistency and setting clear expectations around the support and communication students should receive when significant changes affect their studies.

Best Practice in Student Support

A [Best Practice in Student Support document](#) was developed to set out expectations for a consistently high standard of student support across the OU.

At its heart is the principle that all students, regardless of their circumstances, should be able to rely on an appropriate and consistent level of care and responsiveness when accessing support.

The document is available through Open SU's What We Believe In Hub and provides a basis for the Student Leadership Team's continued advocacy in this area.

Best Practice in Curriculum Withdrawals

The Student Leadership Team also developed guidance setting out Open SU's proposed expectations for how the University should approach any future curriculum reductions or withdrawals.

The document considers the processes that should be followed, the role student representatives should have in those processes, and the standards of communication and support that students affected by curriculum changes should receive.

This work broadens the focus of student support beyond individual services, recognising that students also need clear communication, appropriate representation and meaningful support when wider University decisions affect their studies.

Noteworthy moments

Alongside the four priority areas, the 2024–2026 term has seen a few other significant developments for Open SU and the Student Leadership Team.

What We Believe in Hub

The What We Believe In Hub was created as part of the Student Leadership Team Priority Projects. It brings together collective views on a range of topics important to the Student Leadership Team, with the aim of promoting a positive, consistent experience for OU students.

Open SU rebrand

The 2024–2026 term also marked a new chapter as we rebranded as Open SU. Students were involved throughout the process, from voting in favour of our new name to helping shape our new brand.

Student Leadership Team structure

Following the Governance Review report, the Board of Trustees approved changes to the Student Leadership Team (SLT) structure.

The new structure is designed to improve clarity and collaboration across the SLT, while elevating student voice in leadership conversations and creating a more inclusive and accessible volunteering experience. The SLT continues to focus on representing student voice and improving the student experience.

Reviewing Student Community Activities

Following surveys with event and meet-up hosts and the wider student body, a project team made up of Student Leadership Team members and staff reviewed the feedback and developed a set of recommendations for the future.

These recommendations cover areas including training for event hosts and the types of activities students have told us they would be interested in. The findings will provide a useful foundation for the EDI and Belonging team and the new Vice-President Belonging and Opportunities as they continue to develop accessible and engaging student community activities during the next term.

Looking ahead

As the 2024–2026 term comes to an end, the Student Leadership Team looks ahead to the next chapter for student leadership at Open SU.

Scarlett James, President for the 2026–2028 term, said:

“I’m delighted to be taking on the role of President, and the timing of the summit has certainly given me something to look forward to! It’s a chance to celebrate what our student community has achieved, listen to one another and think about what we want to do next. I’m excited to work with students and the Student Leadership Team (SLT) as we develop our priorities and projects for the coming term. We’ll have more to share soon, so watch this space.”

