

VOLUNTEER AND REPRESENTATIVE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CONFERENCE IMPACT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Across the afternoons of Friday May 14 and Saturday May 15, the Volunteering and Representation team hosted the Association's first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI hereafter) Conference. This event was held online and was designed to ensure our volunteers are properly equipped to support a diverse range of students. The event was part of the wider goal to improve our culture and to ensure the Association remains open and welcoming for all.

The first day was structured to inform, with a range of speakers presenting on a topic pertinent to EDI issues that could affect our three student groups (OU Pride, the Disabled Students Group and the Black and Minority Ethnic Students Group), before taking part in a Q&A at the end of their presentation. The second day was designed to encourage discussion and explore the relevance of EDI related challenges to the volunteers and the students they represent.

The Conference was introduced by Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Patrice Belton, followed by these sessions and speakers:



Senior EDI Manager, Frances Morton, delivered a session on the EDI-related work happening at the OU, including an overview of a variety of projects, such as the Race Equality Charter to the OU's Athena Swan accreditation.

The next session was delivered by Chloe Foster, from Sussex Rainbow Counselling. Her session explained the importance of pronouns and offered her top tips for using inclusive language.



Darren Gray, who is the Senior Access, Participation and Success Manager within the Pro-Vice-Chancellor-Students team, helped us to understand what the degree-awarding gap is, what the OU measures, and the actions they are taking to improve.

Senior Library Manager Cheryl Coveney and Learning and Teaching Librarian Hossam Kassem, from the OU's Library Services team, explained why considering accessibility is important and highlighted available services.



OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)



On Saturday the Conference was led by Jiten Patel. Jiten is an award-winning EDI strategist and practitioner, author, conscious inclusion thought leader and a blogger reflecting on maximising inclusion through diversity. Jiten started the afternoon off with a discussion around EDI in relation to world events over the last 18 months followed by a workshop session, where attendees explored real-life scenarios related EDI challenges.

The Conference closed with a panel session. This included the following four guests, who each gave a short presentation, followed by the opportunity for attendees to ask questions:



Our first panelist was Grace Emiohe, who is a Senior Performance Consultant from the OU and member of the BME Staff Network, who spoke to us about decolonising the curriculum.

Our second panelist was Finlay Games, who is an OU alumnus, LGBTQ+ and mental health blogger, writer and video creator. He has been sharing his transition story since 2011 via his YouTube channel and has written for various publications about his transition. He's just released his first book, Top To Bottom, and joined us to share a bit about his journey as a Trans person.



Our third panelist was Mychelle Pride, who is an Academic Lead within the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS). Mychelle has more than twenty-five years' experience supporting students to achieve their goals and joined us to discuss the Mental Health awarding gap.

Our final panelist was Sas Amoah. Sas is Chair of the University's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Staff Network and a Digital Media Producer at the OU and spoke to us about the power and importance of networks.



"I OPENED MY MIND TO SOME NEW ISSUES AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WAS REQUIRED."

"THE EVENT OVERALL WAS VERY POSITIVE, A LOT OF GAINS IN HOW TO ADDRESS THE TOPICS AND BECOME EDI CHAMPIONS PROMOTING EXCELLENT IDEAS INTO ACTION FOR CHANGE!"

61.5%
OF ATTENDEES ON SATURDAY WERE VOLUNTEERS OR REPRESENTATIVES

"IF I HAVE A CRITICISM IT IS THAT THE AUDIENCE WAS ALREADY 'PREACHED TO'."

"THIS SHOULD BE OFFERED TO STUDENTS."

ALL SESSIONS VOTED

'VERY USEFUL'

BY RESPONDENTS

45 VIEWS

ON CONFERENCE CATCH UP RECORDINGS IN TWO WEEKS

48 PARTICIPANTS ON FRIDAY 14TH, INCLUDING 26 VOLUNTEERS OR REPRESENTATIVES

WHEN ASKED HOW EFFECTIVE WAS THE EVENT IN RAISING YOUR AWARENESS OF EDI RELATED CHALLENGES, ALL RESPONDENTS VOTED

EXCELLENT

"WE SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO CHALLENGE SITUATIONS!"

"I AM HAPPY TO ENGAGE IN THE ONGOING DIALOGUE AS A WHITE, MALE, HETEROSEXUAL – IT IS PEOPLE SUCH AS MYSELF WHO NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN."

PLEDGES

Throughout the event we promoted our pledge wall; hosted on Padlet, this space allowed attendees to anonymously contribute something that they planned to do, following what they had learned at the Conference.

I recognise I have a problem where I call everyone him and he, even when I know they are she or they. It's something I am making a conscious effort to be aware of.

I will continue to learn and do more to further my understanding of inclusion and diversity, and make sure that I apply what I have learnt to my daily life.

To ask people what pronouns they prefer.

Ensuring the OU Space Science Club is up to date and follows EDI to the fullest.

Find more ways for sharing lived experiences, both with each other and within our project teams!

I will strive to ensure equity and accessibility is a first thought not an afterthought.

I signed Stonewall's #nobystanders pledge.

Review our recruitment to remove barriers/bias.

I will look to recruit Inclusion Allies.

I will try to be as inclusive as possible when communicating online.

To stop referring to pronouns as 'preferred'

I will try to be more inclusive and be more thoughtful regarding pronouns.

Being mindful of bias in any posts or comments I make.

I'll make an effort to ensure I am using more inclusive language.