Part-Time Officer Scrutiny Template 2023

Name of PTO: Sian Worton – Part-Time Accessibility Officer

Date of submission: 02/02/2024

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| Is this a meeting, campaign, project, or other? | What is the goal of this work? | What have you done to progress this work or complete is this year? |
| Manifesto PointRaising awareness | Raising awareness for the spectrum of disabilities students have and combating discrimination head-on around campus | * Part of the ongoing Hidden Disabilities campaign working group with Jade the Liberation Officer and Haleigh the Ethnic Equity Officer.
* Creating a policy for Autism Awareness Week that will take place in April and the policy will be submitted for the February student council meeting.
* Trying to bring forward a policy ensuring the SU is held accountable for ensuring inclusion of students with accessibility needs which looks to mandate appropriate and effective time is given between announcements and events as well as the use of the more inclusive term ‘students with accessibility needs’. I have been having difficulties as of present bringing this forward due there not being enough students present for student council meetings.
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| Manifesto PointBecoming a beacon of support | Becoming a beacon of support in various areas. Include, but not limited to, applying for government funded benefits (such as PIP and DSA). | * The plans I have for this manifesto point are long-term and currently there has been no visible progress with my aims regarding this.
* My hope is to provide students with a rough timeline of when to expect next steps when applying for support such as how many weeks it may take for them to receive a response. I have established communications with James Pooley who is a staff member of the wellbeing and advice team. We have met already and talked about the issues that students face when applying for support and explain the student experience that staff members may not be aware of. I hope to continue conversations with himself and find a way to implement this service.
* Additionally, I hope to make improvements to the university website and SharePoint that makes support more accessible and easier to find. This would be done by reducing the amount of ‘clicks’ it takes for a student to arrive at the right webpage for support and updating website links that are not currently working. I have already established communications with Laura Nevay, a staff member at the university focussing on disability support, and she has created a document that compiles all of these issues with the website and Sharepoint. I hope to use this document she has created to improve accessibility to support online.
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| Manifesto PointCreating new forums | Creating new forums for students to provide feedback as well as improving pre-existing support by making sessions more student friendly. | * Created a LinkTree which contains all things related to the Accessibility Officer role is for students ease and track engagement. It can viewed here: <https://linktr.ee/uolaccessibility>
* Improve attendance of Network meetings and track this. First meeting in October with zero attendees and zero students’ part of the accessibility email chain. The most recent meeting in January saw 3 attendees (with another being too busy to attend) and there are currently eight students’ part of the accessibility email chain.
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* I wished to improve the knowledge of the accessibility officer role by tracking engagement via the dedicated email. However, I am encountering difficulties with students confusing the SU accessibility email with the university’s AccessAbility team. I have talked with the SU team about making it clearer on the SU website that my role does not enable me to help them with specific disability support that affects their learning.
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| Manifesto PointIncreasing campus accessibility | Increasing campus accessibility by re-evaluating classrooms so information is current and specific needs can be catered for. Such as no bright overhead lighting for neurodiverse students, comfortable seating in lectures for those with physical needs.  | * Re-evaluation of the accessible nature of classrooms – This is something I have been unable to make any process on as of current. I have connections with staff members concerned with accessibility issues on campus and aim to contact the timetabling team to see what they currently do when assigning rooms for a student with an accessibility need. Currently, students are randomly assigned a room, have to visit that room either out of their own accord or during a lesson to see if it is properly accessible. If it is not, the process in changing rooms can take a few weeks and relies on the student’s persistence.
* Maintenance of disabled facilities – During my meeting with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), they have been made aware of the concern regarding disabled facilities being out of use too often and red emergency cords in disabled toilets not meeting safety standards (being able to reach them from the floor). The importance of red emergency cords has been stressed and I was ensured that university staff (most importantly cleaning staff) would be rereminded of the legal responsibility they have in ensuring it meets safety code. We also talked about the current reporting procedure that students and staff use to report to maintenance that a facility is out of order. A possible solution of having QR codes around campus, particularly near disabled facilities, would enable reporting to happen quicker and easier so that maintenance can be carried out as soon as possible.
* Seating in lecture theatres – I have worked on reserving accessible seating in lecture rooms for students with accessibility needs. This consists of notices on accessible seating (typically seats that can be reached without using steps such as at the back/front of a lecture theatre) stating these seats are ‘reserved for students with accessibility needs’ as well as a subject wide email sent to students introducing and explaining this concept. At the minute, I have only been able to have this applicable to lecture theatres that I currently have lectures/workshops in, but I hope for the start of the next academic year, this will be in place across all lecture theatres.
* Lighting in rooms – After meeting with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), it has been confirmed then when areas of the university (mainly lectures and other learning environments) are under renovation or lighting is being repaired, the best attempts are going to be made to include the implementation of dimmable lighting that is also less harsh than the current standard. This is due to both lack of funding the team receives and having to close areas while work is happening, hence why it is being done during other changes are being made.
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| Manifesto PointProviding and creating adequate, varied and specific packs | These packs would be available for joining students and then extended to those already present. Would include supportive resources to lesson anxiety, provide an easier transition to university and hopefully remove barriers that people with accessibility issues face in higher education. | * Establish communications with Laura Nevay who created similar packs for neurodiverse students and received documents related to the creation of these packs.
* Now I have these documents I can fill them in to create packs catering for other disabilities, and these documents would provide evidence on why each aspect of the pack is essential and how it will help.
* This project is long-term goal which I hope to make process on during the current Term 2.
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| Manifesto PointNeurodiverse safe space | I hope to work with neurodiverse students to help facilitate a safe space that accommodates to their needs. | * Working with Hannah Bernard and other members of the support and wellbeing team in the SU to create guidelines of what the sensory space must have.
* Identified a space in the library that meets these guidelines and already contains some appropriate furniture and decorations.
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| ProjectStudent accommodation | Improving the accommodation processes that students with accessibility needs encounter such as: lack of communication with maintenance issues, disabled facilities being closed, problems with medical rent subsidy and creating moving in processes. | * Improving maintenance communication – The accommodation team are looking to pilot a new maintenance system, by my suggestion, that would include giving shorter timeframes to students in which work would happen and leaving notices in student’s rooms once work is done. This will improve students with anxiety about unfamiliar people in their rooms and improve general wellbeing.
* Specific issues regarding lift maintenance – There were issues that students raised in the City accommodation that the lift would undergo scheduled maintenance without any warning and students would either be stranded in their flats or not be able to get to their flats for an extended period of time. I stressed the importance of communication when the lift would be out of order and the accommodation team would know so that students could plan around maintenance times. Since this conversation when there has been planned maintenance, students have now been receiving emails that make them aware of this maintenance with a rough guideline of times it would happen between. I have attached a screenshot of an email that a student had received as proof of this at the end of the document with their permission.
* Rent subsidy – The accommodation team is aware of the problems this rent subsidy presents including it not being applied before the first invoice is sent to students, not being applied for future years and general communication issues between departments. This system has always encountered these issues since the rent subsidy has been present. I have stressed the importance of improving this student welfare experience and look forward to my meeting with accommodation in Term 3 to see if they have made any process.
* Moving in – I have raised two concerns that come with moving in day concerning information provided and students with accessibility needs have to move out over the summer. In Term 3, I will be revisiting this conversation with the accommodation and the aim is to improve the information provided before moving in. Currently it is extremely general and students with accessibility needs do not have priority when moving in on impactful resources such as having a car parking space next to their accommodation. Additionally, if a student chooses to stay in university accommodation for more than one year, they currently have to move all of their stuff out over the summer period then move in again in September into what is usually a different room. I have raised the concern that this is extremely stressful for students and is a somewhat unnecessary and I hope to be able to find a way for students to leave their belongings in their room over the summer period.
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