

Part-Time Officer Scrutiny Template 2023

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

Date of submission: 26/04/2024

I have added onto my previous submission from 02/02/2024. **Any new additional information is in red text like so.**

<u>Is this a meeting, campaign, project, or other?</u>	<u>What is the goal of this work?</u>	<u>What have you done to progress this work or complete is this year?</u>
<u>Manifesto Point</u> Raising awareness	Raising awareness for the spectrum of disabilities students have and combating discrimination head-on around campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of the ongoing Hidden Disabilities campaign working group with Jade the Liberation Officer and Haleigh the Ethnic Equity Officer. - 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 – I still intend to persist with passing this policy. Whilst encountering difficulties, I met with the current full-time Activities Officer, Jack McDonald, to discuss the importance of giving effective warning about events. This was a conversation that Jack was eager to have with myself and by providing a personal insight into the necessity of previous announcements, I believe this is something that will be better considered. Following the March elections for the next academic year, I have begun to contact with the individuals that will be taking on both full-time and part-time officer roles. In these communications, I have once again stressed the importance of these communications in the hope they can integrate this into any planning they are carrying out during the summer holidays for the academic year 2024-25.
<u>Manifesto Point</u> Becoming a beacon of support	Becoming a beacon of support in various areas. Include, but not limited to, applying for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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

	<p>government funded benefits (such as PIP and DSA).</p>	<p>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 across the university. Since last scrutiny, the accessibility team now provide a 3 working day response time guarantee and this timeline is sent to students automatically in response to any emails.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. Using this document, and my own research, I have already begun to make changes on the SU website by updating broken webpage links, laying out information in an easier-to-read format and adding additional up-to-date information. Currently I have made a great number of changes to the SU website regarding the 'Support for Disabled Students' resources page during April – currently this webpage is not working as intended and I am awaiting a fix from the IT team. I already have plans to continue going through other areas of both the SU and university websites to make additional, more accessible changes which will follow over the next few months (I plan to do one section a time to prevent any confusion with IT). Currently I have multiple plans for the Student MyWorkspace area: fixing hyperlinks that are not currently working across the resource + ensuring specific pieces of information is available on disabled relevant pages (such as the 'MyWellbeing' section) + new webpage under the 'My Life' section providing Leicester specific information, support groups and charities + addition of accessible forms of transport on the transport page under 'My Life'.
<p><u>Manifesto Point</u> Creating new forums</p>	<p>Creating new forums for students to provide feedback as well as improving pre-existing support by making sessions more student friendly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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

		<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I wished to improve the knowledge of the accessibility officer role by tracking engagement via the dedicated email. Last scrutiny, I expressed difficulties with students confusing the SU accessibility email with the university's AccessAbility team. My role on the SU website now comes with the following disclosure 'If you need to disclose any personal issues with qualified staff, please contact accessible@leicester.ac.uk' as well as setting up an automated email making students aware of the difference between the part-time officer role and accessibility staff members. If students are still contacting myself, I am signposting them to the most relevant services they require assistance from.
<p><u>Manifesto Point</u> Increasing campus accessibility</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Re-evaluation of the accessible nature of classrooms</u> – 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. After a recent meeting in April with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), this issue has been passed onto another member of their staff who is currently carrying out teaching room audits. This is where teaching spaces (lecture theatres and classrooms) are being reassessed for wheelchair suitability and, as part of these audits, multiple accessible features will be reassessed at the same time. I stressed the importance of this being done for all students, especially first year students who can be overwhelmed with starting university and this may be a huge barrier to them settling into higher education. I have been informed that this will take place over the summer holiday and will inform future integration of physical accessible facilities. - <u>Maintenance of disabled facilities</u> – 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

		<p>(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. As of April, I personally have seen a huge improvement in the maintenance of disabled toilet facilities which was supported by other students who have noticed the same.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Current reporting procedure</u> - 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. I have met with them recently again and have been assured that this process is underway, and the hope is for this to be implemented across campus by the end of May. I am now part of the email chain discussing this so I will be able to monitor progress made – this will be in place for the start of the next academic year. This will help ensure that maintenance of frequently used and important facilities is attended to quicker. These QR codes will be in every teaching space and on each essential disabled facilities such as lifts and disabled toilets. - <u>Seating in lecture theatres</u> – 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. After a recent meeting in April with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), I expressed a need for students to have these priority seating in all lecture theatres. I have been assured that this will be added to the already mentioned audits of teaching spaces. - <u>Lighting in rooms</u> – 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
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		<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Improvements to disabled toilets</u> – It had recently come to my attention that the University of Leicester does not currently have any stoma friendly toilets which can be seen on the Accessable website (a picture of such is provided at the end of this report). After a recent meeting in April with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), this has been reported and a plan put in place. Using specifications from the charity Colostomy UK (which can be found at this link). We identified that disabled toilets across campus would need to have hooks and shelves implemented in them. All disabled toilets on campus already have accessible toilet signage and appropriate bins. The use of full-length mirrors is currently in some disabled toilets, but not all and these will need to be implemented. Richard and Sarah agreed the addition of these things would be an easy policy to implement campus wide and would improve accessibility for a number of students, not just those with stomas. A provisional timescale has been suggested with these additions being made before the end of July after audits of the disabled toilets taking place – I will ensure to chase this up with the relevant staff members over the summer holiday. - <u>Communication with campus maintenance team</u> – During a recent meeting in April with Richard Thomas (Deputy Director of Estates) and Sarah Peacock (Director of Service Development and Resources), they expressed their wish to work with the next Part-Time Accessibility officer after informing them that I will be leaving my role over the summer. Having these connections with staff members in relevant areas to the role will help the next PTO with any future projects.
<p><u>Manifesto Point</u> Providing and creating adequate, varied and specific packs</p>	<p>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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.

	hopefully remove barriers that people with accessibility issues face in higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This project is something I have been unable to make progress with and do not anticipate this project going any further unfortunately.
<u>Manifesto Point</u> Neurodiverse safe space	I hope to work with neurodiverse students to help facilitate a safe space that accommodates to their needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. - I have condensed meeting notes, sensory space research and contacts collected for relevant staff members for the next part-time accessibility officer. Caspian is a student I have worked with multiple times during my role to better understand autistic students' needs and I am confident they will be able to apply more pressure on the university for such a space.
<u>Project</u> Student 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Improving maintenance communication</u> – 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. - <u>Specific issues regarding lift maintenance</u> – 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 (figure 1). Since the last scrutiny report, I have continued to find that accommodation have maintained their communications regarding lifts being out of service as well as other vital services such as water outages. - <u>Specific issues regarding accessible car parking</u> – In the City, during the last academic year, there were a large number of complaints from disabled students saying that able-

		<p>bodied students were taking advantage of blue badges parking spaces making them inaccessible to those with a blue badge. At the time, the parking area next to the Sir Geoff Palmer residential building was frequently misused and inaccessible to students who depended on their vehicle. Throughout the summer holiday, I brought this issue to the accessibility team's attention whilst consistently updating the security team of any individuals who were illegal parking in these spaces without a blue badge. This work was something I pushed frequently and strongly about and at the start of this academic year (2023/24) there was the implementation of a barrier to block access to this specific car park unless your student ID has pre-approved access. This means that students with accessibility needs living in accommodation do not experience stress about where to park their vehicle. Additionally, I have completed work regarding the new parking area by the Mary Gee residential building as well which also applies to student parking in Nixon Court. Throughout this academic year there have continued to be students taking advantage of the blue badge spaces available to disabled students. This issue is something that I once again pushed when talking with the security team. Since having conversations with this team, there have been an increased amount in permit violation warnings issued to illegally parked cars resulting in a significant reduction of able-bodied students misusing blue badge spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Rent subsidy</u> – 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. The issues already mentioned regarding rent subsidy are now included in the SU's support resources page for students with accessibility needs. So, whilst promoting this service that students with needs can take advantage of, they are also prewarned of possible problems that may arise with it and how best to solve them. This has been done whilst the accommodation and fees and finance teams figure out a long-term solution, but I hope this information can reduce stress for some students. - <u>Moving in</u> – 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
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		<p>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. After meetings with both the accommodation and accessibility teams, it is now a lot easier for students to request to keep the same accommodation room for their next academic year. This isn't well publicised however, much like the rent subsidy itself. Alongside other improvements to support resources for students with accessibility needs, I have updated the current accommodation adjustments that students are able to apply for in hopes this will increase use of these two already in place practises. In terms of students keeping their stuff in their room over the summer, this is still a conversation that is taking place. The plan currently is for me and other disabled students to 'pilot' this service over this summer holiday to see how easy it is for the accommodation team to manage; how helpful it is for students and how rent prices over the summer should be decided. This is therefore a project I cannot 'finish' myself, but I will be able to provide all relevant information to the next part-time accessibility officer.</p>
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Dear Vashak,

Kindly note that the elevator service in your building will be temporarily suspended for a few hours in the afternoon on 02/02/2024 as the lift is being serviced during this period. The elevator will be fully operational again in the evening.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

Please contact us on accommodation@le.ac.uk if you have any queries on the same.

Best wishes,

The Accommodation Team

University of Leicester



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