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Chair: Etienne Lewis-Jarvis [ELJ]

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Pre-arrival and Induction

- Consider moving the Disability and Money Advice stands into a quieter room at recruitment events (Open Days, Applicant Days). The events can be busy, overwhelming and overstimulating. It would also be easier to have private conversations.
- Consider a 'quiet hour' at recruitment events, similar to Freshers Fair. Often the afternoons are quieter. Protecting this time could help students with disabilities to navigate the day.
- Students were informed about the Neurodiversity pre-arrival induction event, designed to give students time to digest key information, navigating campus and accessing support. Students were positive about this and felt they would have benefited. They suggested advertising this more broadly to benefit more students.
- There's lots of information when starting university which can be overwhelming. It's good that LJMU has lots of support options, but navigating this is difficult and students feel they "don't know where to turn" and this can put them off asking for help as it feels "intimidating".
- A quiz to identify what support is needed and signpost appropriately was suggested.
- Also the use of AI to navigate the support offer and get to the right place.

Learning Resources

- Discussed the idea of the university purchasing an assortment of coloured overlays for students to use.
 - Blue is the most common but important to have variety to suit student needs.
 - DisCo's may be able to advise on the most requested.
 - There's also an online test which identifies the most effective colour for individuals. The university could fund access to this to help students.

Academic Processes

- The form to request Ethical Approval for research is not easy to navigate. It is a long form, includes chunks of texts and example responses are highlighted in yellow which is not easy to read. Examples from other universities include a Toolkit to support completion or video guides. It causes barriers to research.

Support

- There are barriers to getting tested for neurodiversity e.g. long waiting lists and expensive assessments. Could the university partner with local institutions to fund/fast-track assessments for students?
 - This would reduce wait times and allow support to be put in place earlier.
- After waiting 2 years for an ADHD diagnosis a student was confronted with lots of paper forms to complete to access DSA support.
 - This was overwhelming so they didn't bother applying.
 - They were told the DSA process would take approximately 14 weeks which put them off.
 - Later they were supported to complete the forms online which helped.
- A student was recommended to have a Dyslexia test but was not informed that it would cost £150+. They could not afford this and so didn't get tested.
 - Students suggested a monthly repayment plan to help make this affordable for students.
 - Staff in the room asked if the student had been made aware that the university funded half of the cost of the test, or that the Student Support Fund was available to support with the cost. They were not aware of this option.

Estates

- A student contacted the university in July to make them aware that they are now using a wheelchair and will therefore need height-adjustable tables in their classrooms. These were not installed until January. Partly due to the DSA process – once informed and provided with evidence it takes time for the funds to be released, desks to be ordered and Estates to install. The student was required to chase this via email throughout this time.
- The sensory room in the Education Building has been popular and there are plans to duplicate in other spaces on campus. Currently the room is not easily accessible as often it is locked and requires contacting a member of staff to open. Would prefer this to be swipe access to support accessibility when students need it.
- John Foster was highlighted as a particularly inaccessible building. A student has researched this and there are some examples of where accessibility can be improved e.g. replacing a small number of steps with a ramp.
- SLB is mostly accessible, but the toilets on the Mezzanine floor are difficult to navigate due to the heavy fire doors. Changing the hinges to allow them to open both ways would support.
 - In addition the accessible entrance is for staff only, and a student needed to request access which took 2 weeks and multiple emails.
 - Similarly in the Sports Building only staff have access to the accessible barrier.
 - It should be possible to notify the university of wheelchair use and instantly receive access to all of these access points, rather than needing to request them individually.
- Some societies are inaccessible due to their meeting spaces. More consideration is needed when organising, and training for society leads to consider the accessibility needs of students.

- Travel funded by DSA is organised through the university and ComCabs are the only provider available. Often these arrive late, or not at all, impacting attendance. It also makes it difficult to attend extra-curricular activities as the taxi is only able to drop-off at agreed postcodes.

Student Voice

- A student described the “mental toll” it takes to get support. They said they sometimes “give up due to barriers” they face. They mentioned feeling like they were “sent from pillar to post” as they were signposted to different services or people who might be able to help. This required a lot of “leg work and self-advocacy” which was draining.
- A student felt that it “beats you down constantly being met with barriers”.

Staff Perspectives

- The proposed updates to the Disability Policy will allow students to highlight support needs without requiring evidence of a formal diagnosis. This will make it quicker for support to be put in place and reduce the need for lengthy forms and processes. This policy will support change related to academic areas but will not influence other areas, including Estates. Conversations on this should drive change across the university.
- Staff noted that there’s a need for support to be anticipatory, rather than reactive. Inclusive environments often benefit everyone.
- Many adaptations can be put in place quickly for staff. This should be the case for students too.
- Staff recognised that the structure of teams, departments and processes can mean that student challenges are not viewed holistically, requiring them to contact multiple people to resolve problems.
- Ongoing conversations in this space should include staff across all areas e.g. DisCo’s, academics, Estates teams e.g. Campus Security, Reception staff. This will provide a full picture of what common barriers are for students.
- Staff are aware of the challenges of the DSA process, however this is separate from the university as it is a central, government-funded scheme that covers all Higher Education providers nationally. The university are therefore restricted by the DSA wait times, rules around transport and other adjustments and the evidence they require to access support.
- The EDI team have been made aware of the Ethical Approval process and are currently looking into this to see how it can be improved.