Sabbatical team’s reflections

OUSU has had a fantastic year, with successes in many areas. OUSU’s work this year has highlighted a number of key priorities that we believe the University should focus on in the coming years:

- The disparity in the student experience between different colleges is the most significant challenge facing the collegiate University. We encourage all colleges to work with each other and with students to establish best practice in every aspect of college life such as suspension, student welfare, and workload. We believe that every aspect difference between colleges in the provision and cost of student accommodation, for both undergraduates and graduates, must be addressed.

- We believe that improving the graduate student experience should be a priority across the collegiate University. It is essential that Masters and DPhil students are treated with equivalent value to undergraduates, particularly in areas such as accommodation, teaching and supervising provision, and welfare and pastoral support systems. Efforts to significantly increase graduate student numbers should only come following (not on the expectation of) a commensurate increase in these crucial provisions.

- Improving the experience of women, LGBTQ, BME and disabled students at Oxford must be a key focus. In particular, priority needs to be given to addressing the needs of trans and non-binary students.

- The University needs to make sure that it is considering its impact on the wider Oxford community and form an active strategy to ensure that it is a positive one.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who we have worked alongside this year. Without the commitment and support of staff across the collegiate University, the staff at OUSU, staff and volunteers in local organisations, and the incredible students that we are fortunate enough to work with, none of OUSU’s work would be possible.

Being a Sabbatical Officer is a unique job. Our year in office has been challenging and exhausting but, more than anything, it has been an incredible privilege to work with passionate and inspiring students and staff. Thank you all.

Becky, Cat, Emily, Nick, Ali, and Lucy

Highlights of 2015 to 2016

Lecture capture:
We secured the provision of lecture recording technology for all departments, to be centrally funded from Michaelmas 2016.

Welfare Vision:
We conducted a survey on student welfare and support, which had over 5,800 responses, representing 26% of the student body. We then created a report and a Welfare Vision, to set our resulting campaigning priorities.

Alternative Prospectus:
For the first time ever we created an online Alternative Prospectus. We distributed 30,000 flyers advertising the website to 6,000 state schools across the country. A further 15,000 flyers have been given out at the University’s Student Conferences, and at Open Days.

Oxford Students’ Festival:
We hosted a festival to celebrate student life outside of libraries, labs, and lectures.

Academic Representation:
We’ve built a network of 643 course representatives, and have trained 210 of those. This year we compiled a Student Written Submission as part of the Higher Education Review of the University.

Sexual Consent Workshops:
In Freshers’ Week, OUSU’s sexual consent workshops were compulsory in 30 Junior Common Rooms, available in 20 Middle Common Rooms, and compulsory in 10 of them. We trained over 450 students to facilitate the workshops.

OUSU Student Advice Service:
This year saw a 90% increase in students supported, and the launch of an online web chat service.

SusCam:
A new campaign for suspended students produced an information booklet, a guidance sheet for tutors, and conducted a survey of the experiences of suspension for a paper to Senior Tutors’ Committee.
We’ve represented students...

...By giving the student perspective and achieving wins for students in committees
This year, OUSU representatives sat on almost 100 committees across the collegiate University. A key win has been:
- Working with the Quality Assurance Working Group to include a requirement that organising tutors take into account the planned workload for their students each term.

...By supporting them to represent themselves
We have trained, supported, and engaged with more student reps than ever.
- We have 643 course representatives, up from 433 at the end of 2014-15.
- Face-to-face, we have trained 210 course reps this academic year.
- We have supported students from 15 departments to run consultations or surveys.

...By ensuring the quality of their education
- We produced the Student Written Submission via the Quality Assurance Agency and input from 40 students.
- We attended 14 departmental reviews in 2015-16.

...By facilitating student democracy
- For the third year in a row, all Common Rooms have been affiliated to OUSU
- Over 50 motions taken to OUSU Council have been this year
- Council has given £1,630 to student initiatives.
- 50 Common Rooms and societies have signed up to use Mi-Voice, online voting software which OUSU offers for free.
- 3,142 voters logged in to cast their vote in our annual officer elections, representing a turnout of 14.7% of the student body.
- We raised £1,571 for the Gatehouse Homeless charity via a voting incentive (OUSU donated 50p per voter).
- 27.7% of the student body turned out to vote in our referendum on our affiliation with the National Union of Students.

...By ensuring they have their say
Over the year, we had 11,363 responses to OUSU surveys, including:
- A Welfare Survey, which gained over 5,800 responses, consultations on Masters students’ satisfaction and DPhil supervisions, which gained almost 600 responses and 770 responses respectively.
- We hired graduate students with a background in statistics to help analyse our data, and we will seek to offer more student opportunities like this in the future.

Feedback from surveys has enabled us to:
- Form new policy on welfare and on access by creating the Welfare Vision and the Access Vision.

...By engaging with Government consultations and proposals
- We responded to the Government’s Green Paper, “Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice”.
- We took part in the national lobbying movement to save maintenance grants.
- In November, we took around 50 students to a national demonstration in London.
- We responded to consultations on the future of the National Student Survey, and the Quality Assurance Agency.
We’ve supported students and their development…

…With our Student Advice Service
From 31st March 2015 to 1st April 2016, 717 individual graduate and undergraduate students contacted our advisors — a 90% increase on the previous year.

Students can now get in touch via ‘Live Advice’ web-chat.
- Drop-in sessions have increased by 33%, meaning that students can speak with an Advisor without an appointment every weekday in term-time.
- 32 pop-up advice sessions were delivered in 24 locations across the collegiate University.
- The Living Out Guide, produced by the Service, was delivered to all first year undergraduates. It is also available online.
- The Service delivered 26 Living Out Talks to 20 colleges, reaching over 1,000 students.
- We created the Disabled Students’ Guide: available online.
- We began the process of applying for accreditation with the Advice Quality Standard: the sector’s independent auditing and quality assurance certification scheme.

…By providing students with cost-price welfare supplies
We supplied over £9,000 worth of welfare and sanitary products to the Common Rooms of 37 colleges.
- We sold 135 bike locks this year, and 178 sets of bike lights.

…With a range of training courses
We delivered a wide range of training this year, much of it newly-developed.

Training sessions delivered this year include:
- Make Change Happen – building on the success of last year’s programme, OUSU enrolled 40 students in its 8-week campaigning training scheme this year.
- Training for Common Room Officers – over 30 Common Room Presidents were trained, with 100% rating the programme as ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’.
- We also trained over 60 Welfare Officers, 20 Women’s Officers, 17 Environment and Ethics Officers, and 10 Academic Officers this year.
- We trained 30 students to become helpers at undergraduate admissions interviews.
- We delivered First Respondent Training which equips students to respond to disclosures of sexual violence.
- We ran Rent negotiation training to over 40 students in skills relevant to rent negotiations.

…By giving them opportunities to get involved
Raise and Give (RAG) raised around £80,000 for a range of local, national, and international charities.

This year, OUSU created a new role for a permanent staff member to coordinate and develop RAG. RAG now has a new committee structure and a new constitution.

In collaboration with the Careers Service, RAG has launched a micro-internship scheme for students, and employed 18 students this year.

…By enabling them to gain experience in print and radio media
With Oxide Radio and The Oxford Student newspaper, which has a circulation of around 3,000 each week.
We’ve engaged with students...

...By making sure they register to vote in local and national elections

- Since the transition to individual electoral registration in 2015, students cannot be registered en masse by their colleges. OUSU has worked to make students aware of these changes and run an intercollegiate competition to encourage students to register to vote.

Voter registration will be a part of student enrolment from Michaelmas 2016.

...By keeping them in the loop

- The President’s weekly email has reached up to 45% of the student body.
- 25% increase in Facebook ‘Likes’, and 2 new Twitter followers a day.

...Through our publications

- Fresh! Magazine is designed to welcome undergraduate and graduate Freshers to Oxford and is distributed to new students each September.
- The Careers Guide, delivered to all finalists, is produced in collaboration with the Careers Service.

We’ve campaigned on issues that matter to students

OUSU has 13 permanent campaigns, run entirely by students. Particular highlights are as follows:

- Our access and outreach campaign, Target Schools, has run shadowing days for 340 students from UK state schools including a collaborative shadowing day with the African and Caribbean Society. This year, they have introduced new travel bursaries. In September 2015, the campaign reached 1,100 UK state school students through access road trips.

- It Happens Here, OUSU’s campaign raising awareness of sexual violence collaborated with OUSU officers to launch a new campaigning focus on lad culture. Not In My University: Redefining and Confronting Lad Culture Today aims to challenge lad culture in all its forms.

- Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality (CRAE) delivered ‘Race 101’ workshops in several Common Rooms.
- OUSU was awarded ‘Living Wage Employer of the Year’.
- We have received a Gold Green Impact award, for our environmental practices.

The Prevent Duty

Since the introduction of the Prevent Duty within the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, we have been opposed to the duty, and view it as thinly veiled racism and Islamophobia.

- We briefed over 150 student representatives on the Prevent Duty, and how to engage with colleges.
- We lobbied on collegiate and University committees to: remove language from Prevent-related documents that could lead to unconscious bias; created a rights-based training course; and put in place support for students, should they feel discriminated against in relation to the Prevent Duty.
We’ve worked with the local community…

To lobby on homelessness
- OUSU’s homelessness campaign, On Your Doorstep, ran a successful Homelessness Awareness Week that saw 437 people attend events. During this week, they raised over £1,000 for homelessness charities.

Through our network of Community Wardens
- The Community Wardens have knocked on the doors of 1,065 houses in East Oxford and Jericho to talk to students and residents and improve student-community relations (as well as giving out chocolate).

To match up students with host families for Christmas
- For the first time, we matched 20 students with local families for Christmas day. 100% of hosts and participants said they would recommend it to a friend.

To collect non-monetary donations for charities
- We have collected 10.8 tonnes of clothes, books, DVDs, CDs, and other household donations for British Heart Foundation charity shops, which they can sell for £18,942. This year, we have also run termly collections of food in every undergraduate college for the Community Emergency Foodbank.

We’ve hosted events for students

Oxford Students’ Festival
The first ever Oxford Students’ Festival included: a Clubs and Societies Showcase, OUSU’s International Festival, and the second annual OUSU Student Awards.
- We received 110 nominations for the Student Awards, an increase of 39% from 2015.

Teaching Awards
- We celebrated the fantastic teaching and support students receive, with our fifth annual Teaching Awards.
- We received 658 nominations across six award categories, which was an increase of 22% from 2015.
- The event featured performances from acapella group, the Oxford Belles, and Okiem, a musician whose work is described as ‘cinematic classical’.

Freshers’ Week/Fair
OUSU Freshers’ Fair hosted 333 student groups alongside over 100 other organisations including local businesses, charities and University departments. Thousands of students came into Examination Schools over three days.
Looking ahead

There are some key pieces of work OUSU started this year that we hope will come to fruition next year.

1. We will work with the collegiate University to ensure that student welfare is a key priority, and will act upon the campaigning priorities set out in our Welfare Vision.

2. We will encourage our successors to continue to set out campaigning priorities in ‘Visions’ relating to our key areas of work, to set medium-term strategic directions and avoid duplication of effort.

3. OUSU needs to continue efforts to improve its representation and engagement of graduate students in the University. Graduates represent 47% of the student body, and this percentage increases every year. These efforts need to recognise both the similarities and the differences in graduate student needs compared to undergraduates: in terms of the different makeup of the graduate student body, the varied academic needs of Masters and DPhil students, and significant welfare concerns about a group who generally have less college involvement and fewer safety nets. OUSU should also offer and promote opportunities to graduate students for employment, following recent successful examples.

...To streamline our governance
This year we made our governance simpler and more fit-for-purpose. As well as adopting our new Articles of Association at our first ever General Meeting in December, we have now updated our Bye-Laws. The Bye-Laws restructured OUSU’s Executive, bringing Campaigns and Common Rooms closer to the heart of OUSU. We also created a new, simpler Complaints Procedure. Finally, we have adopted new Elections Regulations to make elections more accessible.

...To make OUSU more effective and efficient
This year we have been reviewing our processes, policies, staff structure and administrative systems to ensure that we are delivering effectively and efficiently for students. We’ve recruited a Communications Manager to develop our strategy for communicating with our members and a Membership Services Manager, who will support our Campaigns. We have also provided opportunities to students to gain experience in graphic design, data analysis, proofreading and administrative tasks.