



reports to council 1st week Hilary term 2003

Will Straw

President

The main focus of the last eight weeks has been the Finance and Funding Campaign. The NUS National Demo on December 4th (8th Week, Michaelmas Term) was a huge success. Over 200 Oxford students were on the march and we joined thousands of others in persuading Tony Blair to announce the end of up front fees at Prime Minister's Question Time in the Commons. The sheer number of people in London from all around the country on such a filthy day reminded me of the strength of feeling on the matter. Tony Blair's announcement that afternoon also indicated the power and impact that students can have when united and focused rather than divided and bickering.

Back in Oxford I continued to receive statements from tutors in support of our campaign. We now have over 60 names from across the University. Helena Puig Larrauri and I also penned a letter (as we were asked to do by Finance and Funding Campaign on 26th November 2002 - 7th Week) which was sent to the Vice Chancellor in response to his Gazette article of 21st November 2002 - 6th Week - which made clear the University's position on top up fees following direct pressure from the Student Union. The letter (available at <http://www.ousu.org/main/campaigns/finance/latestnews/vc>) engaged in a policy debate on the Vice Chancellor's terms attacking his support of up front / top up fees and pointing out the holes in his argument on a graduate tax. It was sent on 13th December 2002 - 9th Week. The letter did not break OUSU policy but Helena and I concede that it may be seen as over zealous in its support of a graduate tax as a better alternative to top up fees. We should have shown the finalised draft to another sabbatical officer or to someone else involved in the Finance and Funding Campaign. That we did not was an error. The letter was put on the OUSU website, which many in media circles often visit. On Monday 16th December 2002 - 10th Week - an article appeared on BBC online claiming that "students warm to a graduate tax." My attention was drawn to this following an email by Rodrigo Davies. I immediately sought to rectify the situation as it was clear that BBC online had misrepresented the Student Union. The following day a second article appeared where I drew a distinction between a graduate repayment scheme and a graduate tax, something which was not clear at the time. In the New Year, I sought to redress the situation even further and the following appeared on another BBC online piece: 'Students are also seeking to make their position clear before the government's publication of the higher education review. At the University of Oxford, the president of the students' union, Will Straw, has reasserted a commitment to "the principle of free education at the point of entry". And the students argue that repayment schemes after graduation have disadvantages - and that an increase in taxation could "easily fund an expansion in higher education and the return of the maintenance grant". "Thankfully it seems that up front fees have been killed off by student action. However, a graduate repayment scheme, similar to that in Australia, would leave students facing debts of over £20,000 and would penalise those in low paid jobs," says Will Straw. "A graduate tax linked to earnings would simply punish those who graduate by making them pay income tax twice." I have made other media appearances including speaking on a range of student issues for BBC's *HardTalk* and writing articles for the *Telegraph* and *Mail on Sunday*.

This term the Finance and Funding Campaign has organised a protest on the steps of the Clarendon Building. I would like to thank Penny Berrill, Torsten Henricson-Bell, Georgia Toynbee and Daniel Rees for all their hard work in organising this at such short notice. With these four in charge F&F looks in excellent shape for the year ahead.

Other Campaigning work has included talking to the Vice Chancellor about GATS (he informs me that it is "one to keep an eye on"), helping the Environment Committee to attain a guarantee from the City Council that a recycling scheme for colleges will be in place by April, and completing my research for the College Inequality Report to which Andrew Copson has devoted much time and effort.

I have spoken at Oriel with Sean Sullivan and tried to meet as many of the new JCR Presidents as possible. I hope to visit many more colleges this year and also to meet JCR Committees with

I have spoken at Oriel with Sean Sullivan and tried to meet as many of the new JCR Presidents as possible. I hope to visit many more colleges this year and also to meet JCR Committees with the sabbatical team. The *Guide to OUSU* is again updated and available to anyone who would like a copy. I have also organised two introductory meetings for college representatives. 40 students attended a question and answer session with NUS President, Mandy Telford, and our NUS regional officer, Ruth Moor. The following day an OUSU Council Training Session took place at Wadham. My thanks to Conor O'Neill, Chair of Council, in finding a more suitable venue for Council this term.

Plans for Thomas Hull House have now been finalised and are available for viewing in New Barnett House. We are still on course to move in at Easter.

With new Exec Officer, Laura West, at the helm I hope to reintroduce an entz forum to accompany entzlist. I am also keen to provide a service for College Ball Presidents with anything from technical support to music advice. Plans are still on course for OUSU to have a regular club night with a steady stream of income.

My community work has included speaking to the City Council on top up fees, attending a meeting with Andrew Copson on homelessness and holding a meeting with Cllr Fiyaz Mughal on a number of issues. All have proved constructive.

General sabbatical responsibilities have included the obligatory lugging of boxes and the distribution of the new *Graduate Guide* in New College. I was very sad to learn that Andy Garlick will be leaving the Student Union at the end of the term. He has worked hard for graduates and will be missed once he leaves. May I also thank the new Executive for such an enthusiastic and energetic start. They are all lovely and I am looking forward tremendously to working with them over the next five months. Thanks must also go to the whole sabbatical team who continue to be so supportive despite the low pay and long hours that they all put in. Finally as ever, nothing would be possible without Maria who is quite simply a saint.

Sean Sullivan **V-P (Finance)**

Publications: the Graduate Guide has returned from the printers and is currently being distributed to all first year graduates.

The Oxford Directory has come back to us finished. It too is currently being distributed and should be found in most common rooms by the end of next week.

The Living Out Guide has been printed and is being distributed through the Admissions Office.

All these publications look very professional and should be of great use to their target audiences.

The Disabilities Handbook is being held back from printing as the quotes currently tendered are too high, I am in negotiation with a number of printers to arrange for a price more reasonable and within our budget.

As for this term I will be publishing the Target Schools Handbook, the Alternative Prospectus and the Careers for Queers Guide.

Budget: I have been working with our Accounts manager in planning to go about writing the amended budget. I have met with our auditors to discuss our accounts for the year 2001/2. A quite significant loss of around £40,000 appears to have been made during that year. Some of this loss was unfortunate but bearable such as a loan to the shop and retirement payments. Other parts of it were simple unacceptable, such as the loss made on the Oxford Student. I hope that the money saving changes I have implemented will mean that such mistakes are not made during my financial year.

Thomas Hull House: I have met with the building consultants and the surveyor to discuss final plans and costings for the new building. It seems that we can finally be confident of moving over the Easter vacation. I have met with the University Administration to discuss their moving into 28 Little Clarendon Street.

Affiliations: I have been in discussion with the Oxford Institute for Legal Practice concerning associate membership of OUSU for their students and this has resulted in the motion I am proposing today. I have also answered the queries of a number of constituent bodies about how their subscriptions are made up and what they will be paying in future.

Oxford Student: it has been all change. Two new editors, a new look and new printers, We have moved from PCP in Telford and are now printing with NewsQuest in Oxford. The transition has been relatively smooth and we have saved a significant amount of money by taking this step.

VP (Charities and Community): with the RAG sabbatical I met with Jennifer Noon of the university to discuss the details of the funding of the VP position.

Computers: much work has been done on the computers in Publications room. They have been speeded up and there will be new scanners. We hope to purchase a new printer for the General

university to discuss the details of the funding of the VP position.

Computers: much work has been done on the computers in Publications room. They have been speeded up and there will be new scanners. We hope to purchase a new printer for the General Office and a number of difficulties relating to our server will be tidied up within the week.

Website: I have met with our partners on campus and discussed a new look for our home page. I have continued to put a lot of work into our clubs and societies section and am glad to see its number of pages grow by the day.

Others: I have negotiated with the Clerk to the Proctors concerning the Freshers' Fair agreement. I have met with the management of the Purple Turtle to discuss facilities for the use of clubs and societies. I have created an exec email list for the new executive, have spent two late nights on the OxStu and have done a fair bit of driving in the van dropping off Graduate Guides, delivering the OxStu and shop deliveries.

Andrew Copson V-P (Welfare and Equal Opportunities)

There was an unpleasant surprise for me over the vacation when the £3,000 funding for **Diversity Week** expected from Stonewall was not forthcoming; fortunately we have secured £4,000 from Oxford's allocation of the Higher Education Active Community Fund. See the motion the Vice President (Women) and I are presenting to this council for more details.

The period after the end of term but before Christmas allowed me some time for administrative work and I reviewed the cases dealt with by the **OUSU Student Advice Service** (see also the motion presented at this Council) and sent out the data collected so far by the **College Inequality** committee for verification by common room Presidents and College Bursars. Returns so far from Presidents have been low (but since they supplied a lot of data in the first place this is not too much of a problem) but returns from bursars have been good - especially since I got the University Assessor's permission to put his name at the top of the letter next to ours.

The initial publicity postcard for **Diversity Week** is printed and will be distributed in 3rd week. **The Living Out Guide** has returned from the printers and distributed to Colleges; copies are also available from OUSU. Seven more common rooms have received their **Survival Guides** and more have requested them - these will be collected or delivered over the next couple of weeks.

Condoms have proved a rather sticky issue with many common rooms having run through the year's worth which they ordered at the end of last year but we have contrived to order some more in bulk and we have collected the term's free NHS allocation which are being collected from OUSU as we speak.

I have been in contact with many **new Welfare Officers** and have been talking to all officers generally about issues surrounding students and alcohol, a subject on which I have been invited to speak at the University's Committee for Student Welfare's seminar this term. I welcome comments on the subject from any member of OUSU, which I might feed into the process.

I have been **assisting a couple of common rooms with welfare reform**, specifically with expanding minority representation and this work is proving profitable.

The OUSU service in commemoration of the UK **Holocaust Memorial Day** is planned and organised and will take place on Monday in Wadham Chapel at 7.15pm (see again, motion to this Council).

As well as all this I have been proceeding with plans for **Diversity Week** (although that one phrase encompasses three weeks of meetings, frantic phone calls and all sorts of admin horror), meeting with the **OUSU Diabetes Network Co-ordinator, the Access Scheme and the Nightline Coordinators**, visiting the **Council Street Taskforce** to talk about student safety, attending the **University Harassment Panel**, the **Chinese Spring Festival Party** and meeting with all my **co-chairs and new executive officers**, with all of whom I am looking forward to sharing the next two terms. So, there you are, short and sweet for a new term.

Melanie Marshall

V-P (Women)

I took a very welcome three weeks of holiday over the vacation, and a less welcome couple of days sick since returning, but here is the most important of the stuff I've done when I have been at work.

Nightbus report

I spent most of 9th week finishing this, which took ages as more and more aspects of the service which were worth looking into occurred to me. I forgot to submit it for this council, I'll put it in for next. Last chance to let me know if there are any ideas you'd like me to look into: the report

I spent most of 9th week finishing this, which took ages as more and more aspects of the service which were worth looking into occurred to me. I forgot to submit it for this council, I'll put it in for next. Last chance to let me know if there are any ideas you'd like me to look into: the report is quite long already but I think a proper review is justified at this stage.

NUS

At the end of this term is the NUS Women's Conference, the big excitement of the year for women's officers everywhere. I have never been to this or any other NUS event (I am not and have never been a member), so I have spent some time looking into what previous VPs (Women) have said about it. I have also been working closely with Antonia Bance (VP (Women) 2001-2) and Georgia Toynbee (Balliol) to ensure that I am abreast of the issues, deadlines etc. It is a lot more complicated than you would think.

It is going to take a lot more organisation this term, but I hope the number of votes that the various affiliated CRs/SUs will be able to exercise will justify it. Each affiliated college can send one delegate totally free of charge: please consider encouraging your women's officer or equivalent to go. More details from me.

Money Campaign

It came to my attention last term that many fewer women than men apply for financial help which is available from the university and government. I had a very productive meeting with the student funding officer at the University and am currently planning a "Show Me The Money" campaign to encourage more women to apply when they're eligible, since most of the problem is a lack of confidence, worrying about being asked questions which won't in fact be asked and so forth. Keep your eyes peeled for posters.

Finals Forums

These are a big project for Hilary and takes a lot of donkey work because every year one has to trawl through list of female tutors asking them all if they are prepared to hold a finals forum for their subject, collating replies etc. I have started refining the list according to last year's responses. If anyone has a very nice and friendly female tutor who might be willing to help, please let me have her name – I won't press-gang them or anything, just a nice invitation.

Diversity Week

Women's Campaign is going to have some exciting stuff happening. I have started looking into what these will be. So far it will definitely include the annual Women's Cabaret, the logistics of which I am trying to hammer out. I have also been working with the VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) on the overall shape of the week, publicity etc., a commitment which will only grow as the term goes on.

Hedda Gabler

The Ibsen play Hedda Gabler is going to be at the Playhouse in 3rd week. The play is a rare chance to see a big female lead and the director is interpreting it with a strong feminist slant. The Producer and I have therefore been organising a joint speaker meeting about women and drama to take place at the beginning of 3rd week. I hope this will attract lots of thespy types, men and women, because it should be really interesting. I am also organising a group trip to make the tickets cheaper – if you'd like to see it and would like 20% off, please get in touch, women@ousu.org awaits your call.

Andy Garlick

V-P (Graduates)

During the last few weeks of last year, the graduate student-supervisor survey was discussed with both the Proctors, and with the Pro VC (Academic). Following these discussions, the survey is now to be expanded hopefully with the assistance of the IAUL (Institute for the Advancement of University Learning) to ensure that the statistical results are sound and can be used for the Institutional Audit in 2004. The advantage with this is that the findings will be taken far more seriously by the University and may result in significant improvements.

The end of the year saw quite a lot of MCR committees changing hands I have attempted to make contact with all the new MCR Presidents and OUSU representatives. As ever I remain more than willing to attend MCR meetings both to speak about OUSU and to listen to the opinions and needs of the graduates I have been elected to represent.

Inevitably the Christmas period was very quiet and I chose to take annual leave in 10th, 11th and -2nd weeks. Upon my return I had finally received a comprehensive list of mature students over the age of 25 at matriculation, some 2400 students in fact. When writing this report I am about to attend the first meeting of the Mature Students' Committee. Items for discussion will be a

-2nd weeks. Upon my return I had finally prepared a comprehensive list of mature students over the age of 25 at matriculation, some 2400 students in fact. When writing this report I am about to attend the first meeting of the Mature Students' Committee. Items for discussion will be a formal definition of mature students, the needs of mature students and the mature students' survey.

The Graduate Guide 2003 has now been printed and should be making its way to all first year graduates' pigeonholes within the next week at the latest. Admittedly given the heavy printing schedule this year for OUSU publications, some of the information is a little dated now, but it should still be useful to have the complete guide to all things "graduate-y" in one book for reference.

The first meeting was held this term of the EPSC Graduate Panel, which is investigating the issues of graduate numbers and applications process. The dialogue is very much ongoing, and I am ensuring that graduate student interests are being promoted in the meetings. This really is a key committee alongside the Tutors for Graduates committee in terms of real changes for graduate students and thus a great success to have representation upon. In terms of other Committees I have recently attended the University Club (Hallifax House) Management Committee, the Advisory Panel for Harassment and University Council.

Finally, casework continues to occupy some of my time, dealing with anything from very simple applications enquiries to the more complicated appeals processes, which are quite unique to graduate life.

I hope from the above alone it is clear that there is an important role played by the Vice-President (Graduates) in the student union. Graduates have unique needs which cannot be addressed by a purely undergraduate sabbatical team, and University regulations dictate the need for graduate representation on many of its committees. To be fair, the role is quite different from that of the other sabbaticals, with more time being administrative and on the whole less political. The one thing I should like people to take home from this report is that the role of the VP (Graduates) is critical within the student union to provide adequate representation and student advice support for graduates. The position has been beleaguered with problems over the past few years, but none of these should be seen as a challenge to the role itself which I strongly believe is imperative to the student union.

However, it was with regret and after much thought and consultation that I have decided and announced to the OUSU executive and now to Council in this report that I am resigning from my position with effect from the end of 8th week Hilary Term 2003. I shall now try and constructively explain my reasons.

Although an important job and a necessary one, the role of VP (Graduates) can be quite a thankless one. Although the representation work and advice work are imperative, overall graduate interest in OUSU is very low. Postgraduate Assembly either struggles to be or fails to be quorate which means crucial appointments to representative committees cannot be ratified and no graduate policy can be passed. The success of the work of any sabbatical is critical on the approval of their electorate. It can be extremely frustrating to attend University meetings, design policy or seek ideas from graduates but be thwarted by not having a forum in which to discuss them. Most information seeking messages to common rooms are designed to help and aid all common rooms, but with low response rates it becomes difficult to generate a broad picture of graduate affairs. These are the ongoing burdens of the job and I have no quick solutions, but with time they can become depressing to anyone.

OUSU has had a difficult time this academic year, which Council and the student press have both seen. Last term saw many crises and a bumpy ride was had by all concerned. Unfortunately with any such journey cracks can start to form. As I tried to look ahead for the next two terms, I was saddened to be aware that I no longer could have complete trust in some of my colleagues and it became apparent that this could not be a healthy way to work. Having given much thought into whether these breakdowns in trust could be resolved, I came to conclusion that this was unlikely. Unfortunately this kind of working environment coupled with a job fraught with frustrations has resulted in my decision to step down. I am choosing to remain in office for the remainder of this term to ensure the graduate representation and support is maintained as I have stressed how important this is, and I want to give every opportunity for a replacement to be found. Given the announcement of my decision and my feelings of the failings of some working relations the next seven weeks will be hard. I hope that the important parts of my job will still be fulfilled, and am hopeful that sabbatical team will be sensitive to my feelings to ensure we can still function as a unit to execute the will of Council.

Target Schools

Since last term, Target Schools is well on track. All of our venues/colleges are sorted out for our events this academic year – there will be three open days (St John's on Monday of 9th week Hilary, New College on Saturday of 3rd week, Trinity and Wadham on Tuesday of 9th week, Trinity) and three regional conferences (Birmingham on Thursday of 9th week, Coleraine on Monday of 11th week and Belfast on Tuesday of 11th week). If you'd like to help at these events please let me know.

I spent much of 9th and 10th week editing the Target Schools Handbook, which is now finished and with the printers. Huge thanks to all the contributors. I think combining the handbook and teachers guide into one publication this year was a great success, and the publication looks very good. Four copies will be sent to each state school and FE college in the country – there will be a mammoth envelope stuffing session in Mansfield on Thursday evening in 3rd week (with pizza!) – again if you want to help and aren't on TS list, please get in touch.

I have also updated the website, with new information about this year's events and updated information for volunteers.

Target Schools finances are very healthy. Not only did we receive a university grant from the Admissions Office for £14,300, but all the bids I put in for the HEFCE Widening Participation fund at the end of last term were successful, giving us an extra £13,500. This includes £5,000 for the time I spend on outreach work. With this extra money, we will be building on the work of our regional conferences to include school visits in the area, reimbursing people who take part in the Easter Visiting Scheme with book tokens and providing the Alternative Prospectus to our target audience for free.

Target Schools is inviting Gordon Brown to the St John's Open Day in 9th week so that he has a chance to see what this university actually does in terms of access. Watch this space to see whether he accepts...

General Access

This term, the OUSU Admissions Working Party will be meeting to discuss admissions issues on Wednesdays, even weeks, at 1pm (venue yet tbc). I hope as many people as possible will come to contribute to the debate.

I have continued to attend and feed into the university Admissions Working Party, and Admissions Executive.

Following on from Gordon Brown's comments about university access, and the reports on what the forthcoming White Paper will contain, I wrote a letter to the Guardian condemning the Government on their higher education funding policy which was printed in Tuesday's edition.

Academic Affairs

We have now appointed a new Academic Affairs co-chair, but there is still a vacancy, so if you are interested please e-mail me for more information.

This term we plan to hold a forum for JCC reps to discuss how OUSU can help them and to better incorporate JCCs into OUSU's academic campaigns.

The Institute for the Advancement of University Learning Student Experience Questionnaire will be rolled out in 17 JCRs this term. This represents a great opportunity for JCRs and OUSU as the results will be made available to us. The IAUL gave OUSU the opportunity to feed into the questionnaire, and as a result I have ensured that there will be a question on class-based teaching, and also on study skills provision. Hopefully the questionnaire results will help give us valuable evidence on which to base our campaigns. If your JCR is taking part, please do complete and return the questionnaire.

For those JCRs who aren't taking part in the pilot, Academic Affairs committee will be designing a mock academic provision questionnaire so that these JCRs can also get feedback on academic issues.

The writing workshops are continuing to run this term – huge thanks to Stephanie Frank who is continuing to do a fantastic job. We are looking to produce binders with sample work for the workshops.

I attended EPSC on Friday of 8th week.

I met with Richard Bell with Conor O'Neil at the end of last term about extending Saturday opening hours, or if not changing opening hours from the mornings to the afternoon in the Bod central sites. Further to that, I have written to the Director of Library Services at the Bod detailing OUSU policy and I am awaiting a reply.

Mentoring

This term we will be concentrating on recruiting next year's mentors. If you're interested in getting involved in the scheme, please get in touch.

I've also attended College Inequality meetings, and helped to produce figures for the report.

It's with great sadness that I note the resignation of my colleague, Andy Garlick, the Vice

getting involved in the scheme, please get in touch.

I've also attended College Inequality meetings, and helped to produce figures for the report.

It's with great sadness that I note the resignation of my colleague, Andy Garlick, the Vice President (Graduates). It has been great working with him since last September – he has made a very valuable contribution to the representation of graduates in OUSU and to the Student Advice team. I wish him all the best for the future.