



reports to 1st week council hilary 2005

John Blake

President

Happy New Year to all OUSU's members, I sincerely hope 2005 proves to be an enjoyable time here in Oxford.

Tsunami Disaster

All of you will of course be aware of the tragedy in the Indian Ocean which occurred in the closing days of 2004. I'm sure I speak for all Oxford students in echoing the sentiments of our Vice Chancellor in expressing great sadness at these terrible events. It is possible that Oxford students have lost members of their families and friends in the disaster; indeed some may have themselves been caught up in this tragic happening. The University has already made an official donation to the Disasters Emergency Committee as a mark of respect for those who have lost their lives and to help those whose lives have been devastated by the disaster. OUSU itself has already assisted in organizing a relief night at Park End, which raised £12,000, and a Music Marathon is being organized by OUSU RAG with the JCRs. We will do all we can to support any students in Oxford who have been directly affected. An interfaith service has been arranged and will take place on Thursday, 3 February in the University Church at 5 pm; more detailed information about this event will be circulated in due course.

Azim Ansari

A meeting is being held at 1pm TODAY in Wadham JCR (above the Old Refectory) to plan the response of Oxford students to the rejection of Azim and his brother Wali's appeal. Everyone should feel free to come and throw in ideas as to how to move our campaign forward. I'll give a detailed report of that meeting to Council.

The New Executive

We have brand new, shiny Executive, who have all been allocated portfolios. Those of you who have been involved with OUSU for a long time will notice that not all of these are the traditional portfolios of Exec Officers. This is because the Exec has collectively altered them in order to be more in keeping with OUSU's present needs. They will obviously be under constant review to ensure that the Exec is able to always act in the best interests of the Student Union.

All of the part time Exec can be contacted by emailing firstname@ousu.org, aside from Tom Dale (who is tomd@ousu.org) and Tom Packer (who is tomp@ousu.org), for obvious reasons.

Claire Chalmers: Women's Campaign, Eating Disorders, Promoting Choice, Equal Opps

Iain Simpson: Secretary to the Executive, Health and Welfare (Common Room Liaison)

Matt Baker: Equal Opps, Academic Affairs (Common Room Liaison), Health and Welfare (Campaigning)

Helen Bagshaw: Accommodation, Target Schools, OUSU Publicity

Lorna Stevenson: College Inequality, General Common Room Liaison and Outreach, Charities

Tom Dale: Equal Opps, Ethics, OUSU Publicity, NUS Liaison

Tim Bennett: Academic Affairs (Campaigning), Overseas Scholarship Scheme

Tom Packer: Clubs and Societies, Graduate Involvement (Co-ordinator), NUS Common Room Training

Rachel Wechsler: Graduate Involvement, International Students

Wen Shi: Community, Equal Opps, Graduate Involvement

Emma Jones: Equal Opps, One World, Equal Opps, Environment, Campaign Co-ordination

Steve Longden: General Common Room Liaison and Outreach, Media Awareness, NUS Common Room Training

Justin Roffey: Graduate Involvement

Bryn Adams: Rents, Student Hardship

Green Electricity

The University is presently reconsidering its electricity supply contracts. At present, we use 100% renewable energy, but if another tender comes in cheaper, says the Vice Chancellor, we'll take that one instead. I've asked the University Council to at least consider the cost of any premium we'd need to pay to continue using green electricity, and the matter will come back to the Council, probably at its next meeting. We'll continue working trying to convince the University that the premium is worth it, both as a sign of genuine commitment to Oxford's role as a socially responsible institution, but also in terms of the good PR we buy ourselves by remaining such a high profile user of green electricity.

Rent

This may or may not be the big issue this year in Oxford. The University remains committed to its plan of reaching a mean of rents, which will mean rises for many, but several colleges now have multi-year agreements so discussions may be less contentious this year. OUSU remains available to assist any Common Room which is having issues with its college over rent, or indeed any issue. Thanks to Bryn Adams and Emma Norris for their assistance with the rent pack which we should have finished by next Council.

Finals Code

The University last year introduced a formal Finals Code to cover celebrations after exams, both at the Merton Street entrance to Exam Schools and at Ewert House in Summertown. For reasons of health and safety, the code banned spraying champagne or throwing food stuffs, but did allow the throwing of confetti. The City Council has complained that this confetti costs too much to clear up, and has asked that it be removed from the Code. Thus, the new code, which will be presented to the City Council's Community Scrutiny Committee next Tuesday, no longer allows anything to be thrown. OUSU does not endorse the code, and no member of the Executive wished to bring a motion requiring us to do so this year. As such, we will continue to ensure that the health and safety of our members is paramount, but also ensure that the view that Oxford students deserve the right to celebrate the end of their exams is made clear to the University and to the City Council.

RepCom

I have finally surrendered my long standing opposition to use of this term, and OUSU Reps Committee has now been reborn as REPCOM. This takes place every Tuesday at 4.30pm, and all JCR and MCR OUSU Reps, OUSU Council Delegates and others are invited to a forum for discussion about OUSU's work. Hopefully, several members of the Executive will be available each week to answer questions and engage in fruitful debate about the direction OUSU is taking. This week we ran a brief training session on how Council works, a session we are more than happy to re-run for anyone who feels they have missed out. Also, goodie bags of exciting OUSU publications and also chocolate were available. Any OUSU Rep who didn't get one should feel free to request it. It also contained an OUSU Reps Guide, and a Guide to OUSU for Common Room Presidents will be forthcoming, as the beginning of a library of OUSU Guides for Common Room officers. Many, many thanks to Lorna Stevenson for her hard work on this.

Publicity and the Website

Helen Bagshaw and Tom Dale have been appointed by the Executive to improve the publicity OUSU produces and ensure we are using it, and our website, as best we can to communicate with Oxford students, and be a useful resource for them. Many thanks to them for all of their hard work already. If anyone has any suggestions, please email tomd@ousu.org and/or helen@ousu.org.

Zoo, OSSL and the Oxford Handbook

Our commercial work continues to go from strength to strength. As I write this, Zoo is gearing up for its new night at Po Na Na – Zoo Na Na. The Zoo on Wednesdays at Park End, Scratch on Sundays at Thirst and Taboo on Tuesday at Thirst, as well as of course Zoo's double bill of Filth and Sauce on Fridays and Saturday at the Studio are also continuing. Not enough thanks can be given to Dan Finley and Gareth Lloyd for their unfailing commitment to these projects, and to Chris Allan for his support despite being a Finalist. The Oxford Handbook continues its long march towards publication, and should hopefully be with us over the course of next week – many apologies to those who have waited so patiently for it.

The NUS

Thanks due to Tom Dale for having finally managed to get someone from the NUS to talk to me. Her name was Ruth Moor and she was very nice. We had a discussion about the present tripartite affiliation deal drawn up between affiliated Common Rooms, OUSU and the NUS. She said it was impossible for the NUS, which was interesting. So we have abandoned that, and will be seeking a better way to ensure Oxford is properly represented at the national level over the next term. To ensure that this happens, NUSCOM (made up of all the NUS Reps) has been instituted, and will take place 2pm on Monday of even weeks.

OUSU Cards

I am going to start giving out small batches of blank cards to OUSU Reps to distribute to people who have lost, or who never received, their OUSU Card. The additional NUS card will be available for NUS Reps to give out as well. The Card itself seems to have been popular, although it will next year definitely have "Oxford University Student Union" written on it to ensure it can be used outside of Oxford. It will almost certainly not be

delivered in the same way next year, and should therefore be available at the beginning of the year. Any other problems people identify, please email me, and I will note it ready for next year's set.

*****IMPORTANT NOTICE: ELECTIONS AD ERROR*****

The eagle-eyed amongst you will have noticed that the Notice of Poll which appeared in the OxStu yesterday announced that an election would take place on Thursday of 5th Week, but that nominations would close a week later. Obviously, this isn't true – nominations will in fact close on **Thursday of 3rd Week**. The Returning Officer for the elections is Steve Harper, whom you can contact on ro@ousu.org.

Nicky Ellis Opportunities)	V-P	(Welfare	&	Equal
---	------------	-----------------	--------------	--------------

Living out guides

These are now available; they've been distributed to colleges via welfare reps and accommodation officers this week, based on numbers supplied to the university's accommodation office by the colleges themselves. I've honoured these numbers, but if you would like more, or find that none have been requested, email me (welfare@ousu.org) and I'll arrange some for you. Individuals are more than welcome to request a copy for themselves in the same way. I'm also hoping to start the accommodation committee meeting again; this was once a useful forum for sharing information in house-hunting season, and for discussing college accommodation matters at other times. The university's accommodation officer has expressed an interest in attending also; hopefully this will help with better communication and information all round.

Student Advice Service

When we met at the end of last term, we decided not to appoint a new student advisor yet; both the service and the university's provision are still in flux, and it seems sensible to wait until we reach a more concrete plateau, so that we may employ someone with the sort of permanence that is fair to a new employee and healthy for the service.

Holocaust Memorial Day. Thursday 27th January (2nd week)

The provisional programme includes a Vigil beginning at 6.45 on the steps by the Sheldonian, a non-religious service in the Holywell music rooms at 7.30, and then a film showing in Magdalen auditorium at 9pm.

We decided this year that rather than planning the event, OUSU should invite in any groups or individuals that were interested, and arrange whatever they wanted. This would not have been possible without the hard work of the part time executive with responsibility for the equal opportunities groups, and in particular Claire Chalmers, who has undertaken to be the main organisational force behind all of this- if you'd like further details, to be involved, or to help put up publicity, please contact her on claire.chalmers@univ.oxford.ac.uk.

I'm really pleased with the level of attendance at the planning meetings so far, and the quality and intelligence of the involvement and debate; I'm hopeful that this will be the model and template for getting the equal opportunities campaigns going again; we will be moving forward on this once Holocaust memorial day is over, but I am feeling more optimistic about it all than for a long while.

The freedom of information Act I attended a very interesting morning's training on this, and we are thinking long and hard about the act, its implications for OUSU as an organisation, and its wider uses. More on this to follow.

Many thanks to those members of the part time exec who have taken up residence in the office, and who have made my job possible over the last couple of months. I could not carry on this job without you. And all the usual- I hope you still know who you are.

Rebecca Wilkinson

V-P (Women)

The Christmas vac seems very short and a very long time ago.

The three main projects have been;

Planning a term card fro wom cam

Organising the Eating Disorders Guide

Running the Safetybus with Brookes away.

This term's Women's Campaign termcard looks good –with events on “women's officers”, the Women's Cabaret and the Reclaim the Night March. Look out for the publicity, and remember to come along and show your support.

The NUS Women's Campaign Conference is this term: it would be great if every NUS-affiliated college sent a woman, it's free apart from travel costs (hotel bills and food are included). Get in touch with me if you want more details.

The Eating Disorder Guide has had a couple of hold ups, but will be out by the end of Hilary term. People have been working very hard on it, to make it comprehensive and Oxford students specific.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed ideas and articles.

We are planning a speaker event in 4th week, which is “National Eating Disorders Week”, and are also organising a joint event with Health and Welfare committee in 7th Week. I am also attending an event organised by the EDA in 8th Week, which OUSU is hosting.

The Bus is a nightmare as ever, but I will be talking more about that in the next couple of weeks.....

I have also been working on getting a schedule for the Finals Forums, and have had a lot of positive responses from various tutors, so hopefully we will have a full programme of subjects. Please look out for publicity on this, and do ask if your faculty seems to be lacking.

I have also been asked by the NUS to do a talk to their Promoting Choice meeting in February which I have accepted.

Plans for Women's Open Day are underway. If you would like to volunteer to help on the day [15th March] or more pressingly, to help stuff the mailing at 4pm+ on Wednesday 26th January in OUSU, please drop me an email.

And I also managed to fit in turning 23 years old.....

**Siobhan McAndrew
(Graduates)**

V-P

It seems no time at all since the last Council. Since then Tim Waters has departed to Gillingham to organise for the Labour Party in Kent, and he'll be missed – I particularly appreciated his support.

Over the vacation there were a flurry of cases; don't underestimate how badly the supervisor-student relationship can go wrong. I updated the website, getting the Graduate Guide uploaded at last, and adding contact details for MCR Presidents, and a section on problems in the late stages of a D.Phil. when almost everyone believes they will never finish. I think it's good and the content is substantial and relevant enough for its purposes.

I also gave a run-down on how graduates fit into OUSU to the Graduate Union in Cambridge, who are assessing the merits and demerits of separation from CUSU. Despite the differences in structure many problems are identical. I wish Ruth Keeling, the new President, all the best in her term.

EPSC Graduate Panel met and resolved to recommend Fourth Year Fees to EPSC (which will recommend them to University Council) which was very disheartening especially because of strong collegiate objects. The University has just resolved to push it through this time. I've been assured that there is nothing we can do to persuade them against. I am lobbying for a fair and widespread bursary scheme for fourth year graduates which is transparent and unbureaucratic. There should be a 'needs blind' student finance scheme in any case, for all students, if this institution is serious about admitting the best students regardless of ability to pay.

The grad exec has been looking again at the proposals and we have realised that the implication of near-universal bursaries for self-funded students (if this is what is delivered) would be that only Research Council income is generated. This is estimated to be about £350,000 a year (rather than the predicted £1.6 million). The uncertainty regarding bursaries may damage applications and all for the sake of such a small sum. This will be expressed at the next meeting of EPSC (Educational Policy and Standards Committee).

University Council has met twice since last OUSU Council which has been fascinating – especially the discussions of the bursary scheme, the Google initiative and green electricity.

This term I've met with the graduate executive to discuss my 'succession', and had some face time with MCR OUSU Reps after the main Reps' meeting, to fill them in on possible educational policy changes – e.g. assigning graduate students automatically to the college of their supervisor. We think this wouldn't work in practice, however well-intentioned, for various reasons which shall be communicated.

Casework has been incessant and almost impossible to manage. I prioritise casework over other commitments but it has been difficult. It is unbelievable how problematic some of the situations in which students find themselves are.

I've been working with Daniel Russell and Julian Brown at St Antony's to arrange MCR Presidents' lunch and postgraduate assembly for Thursday next week – to share information, find reps for University Committees and make some recommendations on graduate representation within OUSU. The positions are:

- Property and Investment Sub-Committee – which manages graduate accommodation
- The Joint Committee of Council with Student Members – the key link between students and University Council – two places
- Committee on Student Hardship
- Clubs Committee – overseeing university clubs
- Advisory Panel on Disabilities
- Rules Committee (two places) – which governs regulation of student conduct

We already have excellent reps on the Language Centre Committee (Ayelet Banai, Somerville), ICT Committee (Matthews Mtumbuka, Hertford) and Committee for the Curators of University Libraries (Laurel Beesemyer, St Hilda's). The University committees meet once a term, and a short report back to us, so that we can communicate further, is all that is required.

It's a shame, by the way, that this Council was not held at St Antony's – although some undergraduates may not have bothered to come, some graduates and northern college reps may well have done. It is difficult to appreciate the diversity and scale of the University if you don't circulate meetings and visit different college and university venues. This was one positive thing about OUSU being in the tiny offices in Little Clarendon Street – almost all meetings were held in colleges, and if there happened to be a meeting in the college next door, you might think about dropping in – and then getting sucked in. Thomas Hull House is such a hideous meeting place by comparison.

Next week I have EPSC and Graduate Panel of EPSC, and an EPSC Skills meeting. EPSC is too indigestible a committee and meets too often, and so many issues do not get resolved. At the same time, it's the most interesting and relevant to us as students.

The main issues I would like to submit responses are:

(a) Academic reform – college allocation and teaching

There are some suggestions that in future graduate students might be attached to the college of their supervisor, to ensure that the most is made of the college academic relationship.

My concern is that it is often good to diversify academic relationships. Some students explicitly prefer to attend graduate-only colleges, or colleges with a specific character such as St Hilda's, or colleges with particular libraries or subject specialisations. Furthermore, many supervisors are not attached to a college but only to a department. In addition, it would mean that entire lab teams would be assigned to the college of the supervisor. A further point is that where the supervisor-student relationship breaks down, the college can intervene on the student's behalf. In any case, if Oxford is beginning to move to a system whereby students are supervised by a team of three, college choice is still relevant.

However, studying in the college of your supervisor may help you get access to undergraduate teaching, strengthen the relationship with the supervisor, and improve college library resources if they coalesce around a smaller number of subjects. It may well be that this arrangement might work for the humanities if not for sciences, which is more departmentally-based. E-mail me on graduates@ousu.org if you have a position on this.

(b) Improving college provision:

The academic role of the college continues to be intractable, given that for many students it is irrelevant. One possible solution might be to improve the college provision of academic awards such as Senior Scholarships. It is wholly possible to spend three or four years here, producing an excellent thesis with a good supervisor, but with no other referee available or indication of academic merit, especially where teaching is limited or publication some way off. Ultimately, students continuing in academia will have to apply to appointments and editorial boards made up of academics who are not necessarily experts in their area. If ten to twenty per cent of graduate students were to receive Senior Scholarships from their college, with a small financial grant attached and, for example, occasional High Table rights, this might integrate graduate academic experience into the college more than at present. These could be administered by a small SCR committee.

Senior scholarships of various sorts exist on a limited basis in many colleges, but extension of the scheme – to the extent experienced by undergraduates – would be a way of improving the college academic experience according to current practice. Further opportunities exist in a fortnightly college ‘senior arts seminar’ and a ‘senior science seminar’, so that graduates can get experience of speaking to non-specialists. The UK Research Councils are keen to improve communication of expertise to general audiences and this would fit neatly with that agenda, and broader professional development.

(c) Graduate teaching:

A Graduate Teaching Assistantship steering group has been set up to consider setting up GTAs as part of a funding package to attract graduate students. Students could apply for these so that teaching (and the associated pay) would be allocated transparently. Some students have expressed worry that this will mean that teaching is concentrated on a few graduate students rather than enabling more graduate students to gain teaching experience. Another point is that it may be difficult to judge applicants’ appropriateness for such teaching before arrival. A further issue is whether the Senior Tutors’ rate is in fact sufficient to fund this scheme – Bath University today advertised in Education Guardian for ‘Research and Teaching Associate’ PhD students at £18,000 per annum.

The work of the IAUL needs to be expanded with training sessions for all graduate students, but I would strongly recommend that this involves faculty staff. Having attended a session last week, I found the informal sessions with faculty members invaluable, but was less impressed by the half-hour introduction to theory of ‘learning’, which is the new word for education in the University.

University Accommodation:

Property and Investment Sub-Committee reported that the Castle Mill project was a success in that it was only completed hours before the first arrivals. In response to the MCR Presidents’ point that the University and colleges should co-ordinate the building of

graduate accommodation, they argued that this would contravene the Competition Act 1998. New accommodation is to be built in Iffley village, and rents will be increased to approach college and private sector rates. We are arguing against this, but hold little hope of success given that the accommodation is filled to capacity. We are also approaching the Accommodation Office about allocation policy given the specific needs of students, especially overseas students, who are not able to find college accommodation

Zoo-Na-Na at Po-Na-Nas: as an old person with mature tastes can I welcome this? I don't think it had anything to do with my plea for Zoo to run nights for graduates but rather the continuing expansion saw this as the obvious next step. If I had the money or time, I really would go, and I think many graduates will feel the same. One problem for us is that we really don't want to run into our students while out...

And finally...

If you've read all this, you deserve a medal. Few of you will know that I am leaving at the end of this month – i.e. next week. It's been an intense experience and some of it very rewarding. I gave it my full attention during a difficult term. I did my best to support the current team as I felt I could, often invisibly. I'm very sorry to finish a month early but I have an October deadline on my D.Phil. which needs every extra week. I've met a vast array of lively and intelligent people and it has been a real privilege. I believe I have strengthened relations with graduate colleges; for example, LMH, which had quietly dis-affiliated, reaffiliated unanimously after I was invited to speak. St Antony's JCR exec voted to stay in, and to put reaffiliation to a referendum (as required by their constitution). Their debate threw up the fact that graduate-only colleges don't get funds for representation which means that those colleges which do subscribe are paying us a real compliment. Working via MCRs is the only way we can work, because the committee and reps systems don't work. Time is too limited. It isn't that graduate students are not political – I know personally of graduate students who have done internships at the UN and House of Commons, who work freelance as speechwriters, who have established think tanks; OXWiP is a graduate initiative; one former class mate is Secretary for Technology in Virginia; there are three graduate students on Oxford City Council. I could go on and on. OUSU as a political institution has no appeal for people who are looking to be a parliamentary candidate. For graduates, OUSU has to be about information provision and services.

In addition, this job covers a great deal; very many University committees, casework, and MCR liaison. It is poorly paid and has low status. I didn't feel that my attending weekly exec meetings and OUSU Council added much value to the organisation or graduate members; it merely took up a great deal of time which could have been better spent on other things. So much of the job has to be reinvented when it should be routine. For example, I still would dearly love a leaflet (like in the days of Ruth Hunt) which shows a pie chart of OUSU income and expenditure, and how cheap subscription is per student - clearly. A consultancy team could really do with coming in and sorting out the administration and IT systems. For such a large student publisher we need a proper distribution system.

I strongly recommend – as Andy Garlick did – that the job be divided into two posts, one welfare-oriented and one representation-oriented. These should be part-time to suit writing-up students. The job is intrinsically quite interesting but takes up too much time and pays too poorly with attendant loss of access to Council Tax benefit and hardship funds. Very few people are likely to be interested in the job on its own merits – anybody who has recently graduated will be looking for a large starting salary. It has to be designed around the reality of graduate life. Exec and Council attendance should be cut out if individuals wish, except for termly council, when PGA motions should be ratified. Graduate students are a different constituency and need to be given different but equal attention.

I've met wonderful people who have been wonderfully patient and understanding as I learned the job – all the sabs, Maria and the permanent staff, the old exec and the new despite only really meeting them twice, and Tom, Rachel, Justin and Wen. Also Dan Paskins and Tim Waters who were absolutely crucial. Antonia and Anneliese also gave me great advice. Cissie Fu and Tani Mauriello among the MCR Presidents were very supportive. Timo, Chris, Marianna, Laurel, Ayelet, Daniel, Paul and Matthews have been great liaison links and livened up OUSU Reps' meeting and PGA wonderfully – so I felt I actually had a constituency and wasn't screaming into a void! Good luck to everyone in future.

Linsey Cole

V-P (Access & Academic Affairs)

Happy New Year - I hope everyone had a lovely (and productive!) break and all the best for 2005!

Where do I start?! Since the last Council (which was 2 whole months ago!) I seem to have spent hardly any time in Oxford itself, but I've certainly been busy on the Access, Academic Affairs and general OUSU front. One major change this vac has been in terms of personnel - the new part-time exec are fabulous and I'd just like to thank them all now for their help and support over the vac. I seem to have been somewhat of a jet-setter this vacation, but I know that everyone has been working hard behind the scenes to put things in place for this term and they've been a huge help to me whilst I've been in, out and about the country.

In terms of Academic Affairs, I'm pleased to inform Council that, thanks to consistent pressure from OUSU over several years and the hugely-successful 'Open to Change' campaign last term, from the beginning of Michaelmas Term 2005, the Radcliffe Camera and the Upper and Lower Reading Rooms will be open between 9am and 5pm on a Saturday. This is a huge step forward in terms of gaining greater access to Oxford's resources and is a powerful lobbying tool for the future. Of course, the Bod will be open - as has happened for the past few years - for extended hours during the weekends in Trinity term as normal to help those with exams. I intend to continue to work with the University on this issue and am particularly keen to liaise with science students to ensure that the extended opening times are introduced to their libraries in the near future. I'd like to thank everyone who filled in a postcard (the power of collective action...), the Academic Affairs co-chairs Nick and David who first mooted the campaign and Steve Harper, Tom Pountney, Ian Caddy and Alison Kennedy for all their help with it during the

past few months. This is not the end of the campaign, but merely the first-step towards what I hope will give Oxford students even greater access to resources.

The National Student Survey - Well done to all those who opted out - over 600 students have already said they don't want to participate, which is fantastic! Its still not to late for finalists to say they don't want to fill in the survey - just ignore the emails and/or reply saying that you don't want to fill them in when they contact you and you won't be contacted again. I'm going to a Conference on the 24th in London to discuss the NSS and how its results will be reported to institutions and I replied to an article in the Guardian, commenting on the 'value' of the survey. If anyone has any questions about this, direct them my way, either by email or in person - although be warned that I may just rant...

Stint Reform - You may have read the Ox Stu article about tutorial cutbacks again being on the agenda in some faculties - this is something that Academic Affairs Committee will be focusing on this term. If it ever crops up on a JCC or college agenda, PLEASE let me know, as this is the only way we can keep track of where things are at. I'm hoping to establish what the current situation is across faculties and I'll keep you all informed.

Study Skills - As I mentioned at the end of last term, I had a visit to Princeton and Harvard planned for -1st/0th week. I spent a week looking at study and learning support, in preparation for an audit of what Oxford currently does to help its students. I managed to meet with the heads of relevant learning support bodies, as well as student representatives. The visit was really productive and has given me lots of ideas for the future and how OUSU can pursue things with the University. I will be bringing some ideas to Council in 5th week and getting in touch with various faculty and college reps over the coming weeks to gain more information.

There has been a steady stream of casework over the vac. I'm looking at holding study skills and revision sessions in OUSU later in the term. The Writing Workshop will also be back this term - Sundays and Thursdays from 8pm-10pm in the OUSU Offices.

Academic Affairs Committee will be meeting every even week on Thursdays at 5pm in OUSU - please send your relevant committee officers along. The committee also needs a new co-chair - you don't need to be an Academic Affairs Officer to be a co-chair. All that's needed is an interest in academic issues and an enthusiasm to work on improving things. Anyone who is interested or wants more information, please do get in touch with me on access@ousu.org

Moving on to Access - Much of the first half of the vac was spent on the Target Schools Handbook. I gave it a massive overhaul, in terms of content and layout - thank you to everyone who contributed (there are lots of fantastic articles and those that didn't make it into the handbook will soon be on the website - www.targetschools.com). It came back from the printers last Thursday (3 weeks EARLY!!!) and will be being distributed to every single state school and college in the country (that's 2,932 - I only know that as I had to stuff that many envelopes in the summer...). Thanks must go to all the co-chairs for proof-reading, the wonderful work experience student Carianne for the much-needed perspective of a 15 year-old and to Dan and Gareth for making it look prettier and dealing with the "issues" in my absence.

The Target Schools calender for the remainder of the academic year is now complete - we're off to Northern Ireland and Merseyside in 9th week, St Catz in 0th week Trinity and LMH and Pembroke in 9th week Trinity. The Visiting Scheme will also be happening during the Easter vac and thanks to the almost single-handed work of Alice Wilby, a mentoring scheme will be starting in the coming weeks in Oxford Community School. Meetings are happening this term on Wednesdays at 5pm in the OUSU Offices - please come along to find out more! Target Schools also needs a new co-chair - if anyone is interested, please get in touch.

I'm currently sitting on two University Working Parties that are looking into admissions - one that is investigating the Admissions and Selections procedures and one that is looking at the co-ordination of access work in the University. These are both really interesting to be involved with and I hope that concrete progress can be achieved to ensure that future applicants can have full confidence that the Oxford admissions process is fair and transparent. Again, more to come on this in the future!

The Alternative Prospectus is being revised over the next two terms. If you would like to contribute, come along to the meeting at 4pm Sunday of 2nd week in Wadham Old Refectory. It is going to have a massive overhaul and we hope to gain as many perspectives on life at Oxford as possible, so if your interested get in touch!

The University announced its plans for bursaries post-2006 and was the first Russell Group University to go public with its proposals. John will probably mention these in more detail, but I am pleased that the University has come out with such a competitive scheme. I hope I have managed to propose a motion about OFFA to this week's council - if not, its coming to the next one! Change is occurring rapidly in the field of Higher Education Admissions - OUSU needs to ensure that the interests of students remain at the heart of these changes and representation on a university and national level will hopefully ensure that this is the case.