

# OUSU

## reports to council

*1st week hilary 2007*

**Alan Strickland**

**President**

Happy New Year everyone and welcome back to Oxford. To celebrate the New Year, the County Council have started digging up the far end of the High Street (again)...nothing changes!

### Student Union

#### Evaluation

During the vacation we held two evaluation meetings, to monitor progress against our pledges in the Reform Strategy and analyse the success of the projects and activities undertaken by us last term. I hope you find this shift towards this thorough and careful reflection on the quality of our work, and the monitoring of action against promises to be a welcome development. We will publish the evaluation as soon as possible – it covered 25 sides of flipchart, so will take a little while!

#### Executive

Organised a briefing session for the new part-time members of the executive. It is exciting to have the new officers, the first to hold these new positions, in place. Please take some time to meet them and hear about their plans for the year at Council.

#### Student Union Reform

We are also holding meetings to discuss how to push ahead with the reform programme for the Student Union.

Finance – I have continued to work with the Vice-President (Finance) to push forward with this critical area of reform. Good progress has been made with the implementation of Sage, improvement of financial systems and controls. As the Vice-President (Finance) outlines in his report, further progress is contingent on phase 1 being implemented fully, but I am confident that we will reach this next step soon.

Charities Act – we will be releasing the second, more detailed paper on the potential implications of this new piece of legislation very soon. Thank you to those who attended the consultation meeting at the end of last year. We will hold another in second week.

### University

#### University Council-

I attended University Council and spoke to welcome a proposed medium-term extension of green electricity. This should help prevent the endless rounds of lobbying which the previous system of annual renewals necessitated.

#### University Council briefing on the new internal funding system (JRAM)

I attended a pre-Council meeting on Monday, which included a presentation on the JRAM (Joint Resource Allocation Mechanism) which is a new system the University is creating to decide how funding is divided between departments, and Colleges. It might all sound a bit technical, but it is

important. I've arranged a meeting with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor responsible for the project, which is open to everyone who is interested. It will be held on the 29th January from 10.30am, with a short presentation and then a chance to ask questions about

Bike lights! – I was very happy to support the launch of the University's insurance company, Oxford Mutual, which saw 1,000 free bike lights given away to staff and students on Saturday with the Vice-Chancellor. Who said this job wasn't glamorous? Please make sure you use bike lights, it's obviously crucial for safety, but the Police are planning one of their regular crack-downs.

#### Common Rooms

Myself and the other sabbaticals are trying to get round as many common rooms as possible. Please e-mail me (president@ousu.org) if you would be happy for one of us to come and visit your JCR or MCR meeting.

**Ed Mayne**

**V-P (Finance)**

As I write this report I cannot help but lament the fact that it is exactly 3 years since I first came to OUSU Council as a young naïve OUSU rep for Mansfield College JCR. I have been complaining about OUSU pretty much ever since that first experience of Council. I'd like to anticipate that this new term is the beginning of a comprehensive period of reform that will give Oxford University students the great Student Union they deserve.

I hope as many people as possible get a chance to read my paper on reforming the position of VP Finance and that the production of this paper will commence discussion about changing the staffing structures of OUSU.

#### OUSU Finances

I stand by the reasons outlined in my last report to Council for not making the specific profits and costs of Oxford Student Services Ltd. (i.e. OSSL, OUSU's commercial subsidiary company) public at this point. To do so would be commercially sensitive, possibly illegal in consideration of the fact that the University have advised me not to reveal profits yet and dangerous as invoicing for last term's *Oxford Student* and *The Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook* (OCCH) is not yet complete. The reason for this is not due to idleness but because of the fact that the OUSU accounts staff and I have been preoccupied with our switch to the SAGE accounting system, fully supported by the University. This involves putting all our financial records into a new database manually, quite a considerable task I think you'll agree! However I assure you that the tasks will be completed as soon as possible. I have been advised by the University that I should start to calculate exact profits and costs for the summer publications once the SAGE implementation is complete, thus I can produce the accounts and learn how to use SAGE at the same time with the help of the University Finance Department.

I can reveal the following information. Based on the amount of advertising in the OCCH and the lack of complaints from clients, OSSL is due to take more in advertising sales revenue from this publication than ever before. This will be compromised by higher staffing costs than usual. But I hope you'll agree that this bodes well for the future. Zoo has made a healthy profit too together with gowns sales. Most of our other publications have at least covered their costs of production (or come close). No serious losses have been incurred on our service publications this year.

The finances of our welfare publications are not as promising. The *LGBTQ Guide* is a complete loss maker, hence the reason for my motion to Council to fully integrate it with the *Survival Guide*. The *Survival Guide* is still not complete but will nevertheless make a loss due to the absence of advertising within it. A small grant from the University Walter Gordon fund is expected but the VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) has not received confirmation of this yet. Even if it does

come it probably won't cover much more than a quarter of the production and delivery costs. The *Living Out Guide 2007* will be helped along by a grant from the University Accommodation Office and one advert placed in it by Endsleigh Insurance. It will still make a slight loss of roughly £400, but at least it is finished and hopefully once you read this report it will be distributed to those who plan to live out next year. I have been in contact with College Secretaries and JCR reps about who to distribute it to. Please let me know if you'd like a copy and haven't received one.

#### Bank accounts and financial planning

The OUSU Constitution mandates us to have 4 bank accounts: 2 current accounts and 2 deposit accounts. The OSSSL reserve account currently has nothing in it as it has never been utilised. All our bank accounts are held with the Co-Op bank. The balances of the 2 OUSU accounts are as follows:

OUSU Current account balance (as of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007):  
£171,809.00

OUSU Deposit account balance (as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006):  
£19,476.76

I hope, based on what I have stated in previous reports, that the long term financial strategy of OUSU is apparent to those reading this report.

OUSU owes £220,976.86 to the University. This is because they have effectively loaned us this money. This loan was requested as a result of overly optimistic forecasts for the 2005/06 academic year and inefficient debt collection procedures. The status of the debt is such that interest cannot be earned on it and therefore we should pay it back as soon as possible. OUSU also hasn't paid its salary bill for the first half of this academic year and for its staff employed during the summer. This is because we pay our staff using the University payroll. Therefore we can easily pay our sabbatical officers and permanent staff on a monthly basis from the University coffers. Summer interns were paid from the same source on a weekly basis. This is good because it means that University staff work out all the tax and National Insurance contributions on our behalf and they do not charge us for doing this. However we then have to reimburse the University once they have paid the money to our employees. This is the case for every paid staff member except the Vice-President (Charities and Community) – which is funded by a grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales (HEFCE) – and the Vice-Presidents (AcAcAff) and (Graduates), 40% of the salaries of the latter two officers are paid for by the University with the remainder being funded by OUSU. I will release more details on the costs of employing our summer staff once the data has been put into the SAGE system. Information on the salaries of sabbatical officers and permanent staff can be found in the OUSU budget for 2006/07.

The salary bill from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007 will soon be demanded. This will be roughly £120,000 (although we will not be certain until the University send us the bill). This is a conservative estimate. It shouldn't be more than this. Due to our financial problems in 2005/06, the salary bill for 2005/06 was suspended and this is the money we owe the University. So, to be exact, the £220,976.86 loan is the salary bill from 2005/06. It consists of all salaries paid between August 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006 – so it includes parts of the salaries of the Assistant Business Managers employed during the 2005 and 2006 summer vacations. However the University are sympathetic to our plight and are not demanding the money back yet. We will negotiate a repayment plan towards the end of the year.

In October 2004, our reserve account had £117,412.32 in it. In fact it was set up as a fund for a Central Student Venue purchase. Although there is enough in the reserves to withstand any

urgent financial problems, and I'd like to make it clear that I see none on the horizon, the reserves have to be replenished if OUSU is to become more financially stable and regain respect and trust from both its members and the University. It is common practice to have sufficient funds in the reserves to cover organisational running costs for 6 months. With these reserves, OUSU would struggle to fund 3 months of running costs.

So although these bank balances look tasty, they are essentially false friends in the context of our debt repayment and reserve replenishing obligations. Although I predict a healthy OSSL contribution this year (of which there will be more info in the Amended Budget due to be presented to Council this term), I do not think it will be significant in light of these commitments.

At this point I'd like to thank the Business Manager for all the hard work he has done since he took office. He has worked tirelessly to earn money to repay these debts and as a result of his hard work OUSU is well on the way to being financially stable again.

### Amended Budget

One of my main desires for this term is to produce a well researched and informative Amended Budget. The University will help me with its construction. For the first time there will be info on debtors and creditors, which budgets are supposed to contain but which I, as a lay member of OUSU, have never seen until now. I would love to say I'll produce this early this term. But I don't want to make promises I can't keep so all I can say is that I promise to have it presented to Council by 7<sup>th</sup> Week at the latest – this is in line with the requirements of the OUSU Constitution.

Further publications commitments: *Alternative Careers Fair Guide*, *Women's Handbook*, *Survival Guide*  
OUSU is currently working on 3 publications and following this it will possibly be the end of our publications run for the 2006/07 academic year. I have already outlined the status of the *Survival Guide* in this report. The *Women's Handbook* will be paid for as part of a contract with Deutsche Bank so no losses will be incurred. The *Alternative Careers Fair Guide* will also be funded from outside sources. We may produce a Disabilities Action Guide this year and if this is done it will be largely funded by the Disabilities Office.

### OUSU on the web

I admit that there is still much to do in this area. OUSU has finally got a new website designed and online but a complete restructuring will be needed before it is the resource it could be. In the long term it will have to consist of more subsites, referred to by our supplier (the BAM Agency) as minisites, and far fewer pages. However it is generating revenue.

Our other websites are also in need of some TLC: Zoo, OSSL, alternativeprospectus.com, oxfordhandbook.com and oxbridgecareers.com. I'd like to reassure members that work on these sites is in progress and I hope as many of them as possible will be fully up to date by the time I leave office. This may possibly involve more integration of these other sites into the portal of the main OUSU website.

### OUSU email service

This has been a bit of a problem. Our email services were provided by a company called Head Porter until summer 2006, under a system called "OUSU Live". When we signed our contract with our new web provider, we agreed to integrate our email services with their website system. However this resulted in html emails being sent out in code, to the confusion and annoyance of many OUSU members. This is currently being fixed by the BAM Agency and we hope to have our email services up and running by the middle of this term. This will hopefully involve emails being sent out in plain text.

## NUS

Hopefully we will be able to send out invoices to NUS affiliated colleges this term. The total bill paid to NUS was £11,135.38. This will be split amongst affiliated JCRs and MCRs, not equally but in proportion to their size and block grant.

The JCRs currently listed as affiliated are as follows:

Balliol  
Brasenose  
Christ Church  
Corpus Christi  
Exeter  
Harris Manchester  
Hertford  
Keble  
LMH  
Magdalen  
Mansfield  
New  
Pembroke  
St Catz  
SEH  
St Hilda's  
St Hugh's  
St John's  
St Peter's  
Somerville  
Trinity  
Univ  
Wadham  
Regents Park  
Wycliffe Hall

St Hilda's, Univ and Wolfson MCRs are all listed as affiliated.

The MCRs at Balliol, Brasenose, Hertford, New, SEH and Wadham are affiliated through their JCRs.

Greyfriars, Jesus, Lincoln and Merton JCRs are all due to have affiliation votes this term.

<b>Jamie Frew Opportunities)</b>	<b>V-P</b>	<b>(Welfare</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>Equal</b>
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## Survival Guide

The Survival Guide 2007 is in the final stages of production and should be ready for distribution very soon. This delay was the result casework concerns and necessary extensive time spent as a sabbatical team appraising the current state of OUSU. It is my belief that the Survival Guide is a fundamental aspect of my job as it provides the most direct means by which I can supply each student with reliable, accessible and student relevant welfare and equal opportunities information. However, by placing such a large task in the hands of someone who will not necessarily have any experience of formatting and preparing a publication for print the task becomes unnecessarily

laborious and time consuming and it is to be preferred that in the future there be some to assist in the production of publications over the summer who does know how to do these things as there would certainly be enough work for them to do. Thanks, however, must be given to the rest of the sabbatical team who offered their help and support in the completion of the handbook – I firmly believe that the guide that will be published will be a significant improvement on previous guides in terms of style, format and accessibility.

### Living Out Guide 2007

The Living Out Guide 2007 has been printed and is in the process of distribution and many thanks must be given to both the VP (Finance) and the Business Manager for their help in this process.

### Casework

The casework burden of the VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) is intolerable – especially and the load has increased during term time. The extent and unpredictable nature of casework means that scheduling regular projects is utterly impossible and it is unworkable that incumbents should work such a role and be expected to supervise four committees and produce (or supervise the production of – a task that can often involve very close supervision) up to six publications or more a year. I am in the process of devising a constitution and record keeping protocol for the Student Advice Service, which should hopefully benefit the service in the future though this process is taking up a lot of time. However, I must voice my concerns that the nature of the casework that I am dealing with is becoming more serious and I suggest that in the near future we may need to give proper consideration on how OUSU is to cope with extreme cases.

### Queer Rights Campaign

Queer Rights is going from strength to strength after a tentative start and this includes the appointment of a new co-chair. They have proposed for themselves a set of three projects for the remainder of the year; a targeted campaign against the ban on various groups donating blood; a poster campaign about LGBTQ stereotypes and setting up a mentoring scheme for local schools. Advances on these projects are currently under way and we are working with Stonewall in order to ensure that they are conducted with due professionalism.

### Health and Welfare Committee

Similarly Health and Welfare is doing well and has also appointed a new co-chair (though there are currently two more co-chair positions to fill).

It appears that the campaigning arm of Health and Welfare will once again be concentrating on the subject of the now reformed Barnes Service (the self-harm, attempted suicide and transgender facilities of which have been severely curtailed). There has been much interest from the national media in recent weeks focused on the downsizing of this particular unit and others like it across the country (which have a significant impact on the lives of students). As such, it has been decided that we will take advantage of this renewed interest and attempt once more to make our voices heard.

The common room officer training arm, by contrast, has already had a sizeable success. On the Sunday at the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> week this term a training day was held offering listening skills and first aid training to all welfare officers and the opportunity was taken to hold a forum on welfare support and provision by OUSU. The event generated a lot of extremely positive feedback and work is already being done to put many of the suggestions made by welfare officers into practice.

**Andrea Miller**

**V-P (Graduates)**

I. Committee Meetings: The only committee that I have attended since last term was the meeting of University Council on Monday, 15 January, 2.15pm. Much of the meeting was spent discussing the proposed JRAM system for revenue sharing across the university. A new revision of the plan is meant to be out by week's end. There will be open meetings for anyone interested 30th January, 6th February. Contact me for more information.

II. Business with the MCRs: A few things are going on in the MCR world since the end of last term

A. I spent ages updating the MCR contact list of presidents and social secretaries for this term, Hilary 2007. That is now complete and every MCR President and Social Secretary should have it. I have updated the maillists to reflect the new membership.

B. It was agreed at the last MCR PresCom that we would have PresCom twice termly, in 3rd and 6th weeks. Harris Manchester have kindly volunteered to host in 6th week, and we are hopefully going to be at Christ Church during 3rd week (if all goes as planned).

C. I have been compiling the 'exhaustive' MCR questionnaire for presidents to fill out, using SurveyMonkey. It will be ready to go on Wednesday, 17 January and we're all excited to see the results at the end of the next few weeks.

III. I am searching for a venue to hold this term's meeting of the Postgraduate Assembly (PGA), but it will be held on the Tuesday evening of 3rd Week, at 4.30 or 5 pm.

IV. I'm beginning a scheme to get in touch with all the graduate members of departmental JCCs in order to coordinate their actions better and see if I can provide them any support in performing their important representative functions. It would also be useful to keep abreast of similar issues cropping up across departments as it would enable us to work together towards possible solutions.

V. I've spent lots of the past week dealing with SAS casework.

VI. I have continued to work with Alan and others to research the implications of the impending Charities Act.

**Helen Bagshaw**

**V-P (Access & Academic Affairs)**

A brief report from me this week, but feel free to ask any questions:

#### *Target Schools*

This is the busiest time of the year for Target Schools, as we have our annual mailing, Women's Open Day (in conjunction with WomCam), Regional Conferences in Northern Ireland and Dundee, and both an Easter Visiting Scheme and Shadowing Scheme to run. You'll shortly be getting a much better update on our progress, once all the details have been finalised, and several emails to send round your maillists asking for volunteers.

#### *University Committees*

Despite it being only Tuesday of 1<sup>st</sup> Week as I'm writing this, I've already been to two meetings this term; Admissions Executive and University Council. AdEx was concerned in the large part with the integration of the Oxford Colleges Admissions Office (OCAO) into the University, creating the Undergraduate Admissions Office (UAO). This was carried out over Christmas, and

seems to have been a successful transfer. The upshot of this is that much more University money is being ploughed into both Access (with 7 people now working in this team) and Schools Liaison (1 person employed currently but more on the way). A lot of central co-ordination work is going on, which is both incredibly necessary and very useful, and should mean that more prospective students than ever are targeted by ensuring there is no duplication of work. I'll be organising a meeting for Admissions Reps in the next couple of weeks, as some of the new members of UAO would like to introduce the work they do and the new structure.

University Council had a new format, with a buffet lunch and a presentation slot before the actual meeting. This week's presentation was on the Joint Resource Allocation Mechanism (JRAM), which aims to allocate money earned in teaching and research more equally between colleges and departments. More on this when we've worked out a JRAM for Dummies document! The lunch was a good chance to chat to some of the members of University Council who we wouldn't normally see, such as the external members.

#### *The University Admissions Websites, and the Alternative Prospectus*

As I mentioned in my last report, AdEx have agreed to let me find some students willing to comment honestly on the state of its admissions webpages, and how they could be improved. I'm in the middle of finalising a meeting with Helen Charlesworth, the Enquiries Manager at the Admissions I, to discuss how best to take this forward. She's also the person in charge of the University Prospectus so I shall be attempting to exploit her publications knowledge so I'll be better placed to start putting the new Alternative Prospectus together. If anyone is interested in helping with this then let me know, all help gratefully received and much appreciated!

#### *JCC Reps and Divisional Board Reps*

If you are one, let me know! JCC Reps are especially difficult to keep track of, so hopefully I can manage to update our system this term. I'm going to be rewriting the way in which DB Reps are elected, which should come to a Council near you soon... I've created new mailing lists for each division, so when the JCC Reps are up-to-date, the DB Reps will be able to email them for their views. Brilliant.

#### *Archiving and Recycling*

There is so much unnecessary paper in my office, so I've been decluttering and thinning out the paper, recycling the spare. Poor records is something that has always plagued OUSU so I'm hoping that by the time we leave, next year's sabs will know exactly what we did and where to find information. We'll see.

<b>Imran Khan</b>	<b>V-P (Charities and Community)</b>
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Dear Council,

I've just spent the last few days finishing the Alternative Careers Fair Guide, and haven't had time to do much else, including writing this report! The Fair itself is happening on Saturday 27th of January, which is also where you'll be able to pick up copies of the guide.

We've also got a really exciting list of RAG events coming up this term, including film nights, speed dating, Battle of the Bands, International Food Fairs, a Skydive, pub crawls, and much more. You'll be hearing waaaay too much from me on that front over the course of the term, fear not.

On the community front, it'll be a bit of a slow start to the term until the Alternative Careers Fair is out of the way, but the weekly volunteering introduction talks will start up once more soon, as well as the preparations for the OxDox Documentary Festival, the Oxford Muse Big

Conversation, and a project involving mock trial competitions with secondary schools around the city and county.

Environment and Ethics committee is continuing with its long-standing efforts to support efforts to improve the recycling and general sustainability standards of colleges across Oxford, as well as making a concerted push to bring the Contraction & Convergence (climate change mitigation) agenda up the national agenda.

Apologies once again for brevity (I seem to end up saying that a lot), but as always with anything charities & community related, I'd love to hear from anyone who wants to get involved in any level in what I do.