

# OUSU

## reports to council

1st week michaelmas 2006

**Alan Strickland**

**President**

### **INTERNAL**

#### **Office**

The Student Union office (although Freshers' Week has left it temporarily full of boxes!) has been transformed. If I tell you that about forty trade sized bags of rubbish had to be taken away, you probably get an idea of just how much clutter had been allowed to gather. A new reception area, new reprographics room, welcome screens, improved layout, signs, President, Vice-President (Access and Academic Affairs), Vice-President (Finance) and Oxide Radio all moving offices has tidied the building up and made it much better suited for purpose.

The office not only provides a much more welcoming space for students and clients, but a much more comfortable working environment for the permanent and sabbatical staff teams. One of the permanent staff commented one morning after the tidy-up that it was the first time in five years she'd been glad to come to work. I never again want our permanent staff to endure such working conditions that a comment like that is warranted.

#### **The Student Union's Strategy**

Facilitated a strategy afternoon for the sabbaticals in the University Club, a meeting which saw the team explore both individual's motivations for running, their ambitions and fears for the coming year and a wider organisational evaluation.

The meeting was incredibly productive, with the ideas for reforming OUSU forming the basis the Reform Strategy.

#### **Legal Status Reform**

OUSU, like most other student unions, needs to change its legal status, as a result of the Charities Bill scrapping the category of 'exempt charity' in charity law.

I have been working closely with Jonathan Annelay, the Director of University Legal Services, to map the options open to us as a Student Union. A consultation document on this is nearly complete and will be released shortly.

#### **Financial Reform**

This is one of the areas that has taken up a lot of time during the summer, but only a significant investment of time and resources in developing and entrenching professional financial procedures and management systems will ensure that the Student Union is stable, sustainable and run effectively.

By the end of the year, the Vice-President (Finance) and I are determined that the Student Union's financial procedures and practices will have been completely overhauled and the Union will be in a position to agree delivery of an increased block grant from the University. Such an increased grant is key to our financial sustainability, but relies upon successful financial reform.

#### **Progress made**

I submitted a paper in response to a Financial Review undertaken by a consultant hired by the University, accepting all but one of its recommendations; arguing strongly against a proposed plan to move OUSU's permanent staff onto University contracts. This took place in the context of continuous dialogue with the permanent staff team, supported by advice from the University Personnel Department.

Discussed the paper with the Registrar, Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of the Joint Committee with Students Members, Dame Fiona Caldicott. The University is not entirely happy with the compromise suggested, despite it being practically and politically inappropriate for OUSU's staff to become University staff, but the Finance Division has been incredibly helpful and we are pushing ahead with the reform with their support.

With the Vice-President (Finance) I have had met with the Deputy Director of Finance throughout the summer to gain advice on financial reform.

#### Next steps

A member of the Finance Division will be effectively seconded part-time to oversee implementation of the Procedures Manual, give advice on further financial systems reform and help identify ways of increasing the Student Union's efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

A member of the Subsidiary Companies Unit will co-ordinate the transfer of OUSU and OSSL accounting to the Sage system, including training the permanent staff in the use of the programme. Sage will simplify the Student Union's record keeping and accounting, making invoicing, debt-chasing and management account analysis much easier. This should make a significant contribution to bringing greater clarity and increased functionality to our financial management systems.

Working with the General Manager and Standing Committee, organised the transfer of responsibility for invoicing and debt-chasing from the Business Manager to the permanent staff team, the first of many measures aiming to increase OUSU's core stability by moving core organisational tasks into the jurisdiction of the permanent staff team. This initial move is already paying obvious dividends in the form of old debt being steadily recovered.

#### **Personnel**

The President traditionally leads on personnel issues and I have pursued two during the summer: Mentoring scheme – finishing finals and finding yourself in a sabbatical office with huge and wide-ranging responsibility two weeks later can be incredibly challenging. Part of our strategy to ensure a high quality executive is ensuring that sabbaticals have access to top-quality support to enable them to fulfil their potential and the potential of their position. Working closely with the Personnel Department, I arranged a mentoring scheme for the sabbaticals. All of the sabbaticals have been matched to a senior University figure who is happy to offer a confidential mentoring and support relationship. Mentors include the Academic Registrar, Director of Public Affairs, Director of Development, Head of Treasury and the Head of Student Administration. This promises both to be an excellent professional support mechanism, enhancing sabbaticals' capacity to deliver by tapping into the huge talent pool available in the University senior staff team, but also a good way to build closer links with the diverse arms of the University.

Permanent staff – an outstanding mandate for a review of the permanent staff exists, something we're keen to fulfil this year as part of our wide-ranging review of the Student Union. I have been working with the Personnel Department to plan this, as well as updates to the Staff Handbook, contracts and staffing procedures, all of which have been allowed to become out-of-date.

#### **Web-site**

OUSU has needed a new web-site for a long time, so it was with great relief that we launched the new site in September. The re-designed site is the first step in a longer process of overhauling the Student Union's image.

Like the rest of the team, I was involved in the lengthy process of scrutinising potential web-site providers, checking draft contracts, and finally planning and editing content. The web-site is a vast improvement but is far from finished, so if there's something you'd particularly like to see on it, drop us an e-mail.

## **UNIVERSITY & COMMON ROOMS**

### **Freshers Fair**

I worked closely with the Freshers' Fair organiser to re-organise the OUSU presence at the Fair, ensuring a more prominent position to allow students to engage more fully with the Student Union.

It was brilliant to meet so many freshers and to chat to so many students interested in the Student Union's work. I found it a very energizing and inspirational experience. The hundreds of clubs and societies who ran stalls are to be commended for an amazing array of fun and engaging stalls.

It is traditional for the President to take various VIPs (in a rather Oxford sense!) around Fair. I gave tours to the Lord Mayor, Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, University Registrar, University Director of Finance and his deputy, the Proctors, Sir Michael Scholar President of St. John's and Chairman of the Conference of Colleges. The tours were a good opportunity to showcase student activities to senior University staff and local political figures and allow them to see the Student Union being a student union. Meeting university figures in a fun and relaxed environment like the fair also led to many very productive negotiations!

The fair also saw the beginning of the Student Union's new range of professionally produced promotional material, in the shape of three conference screens. The future's bright, and it doesn't involve dodgy in-house publicity!

### **Common Rooms**

Common Room visits – I visited about eight common room welcomes during Freshers Week to give brief speeches about how the Student Union works and what it does for students. I would have liked to have attended many more, but many were taking place at the same times. I enjoyed the visits I did make and look forward to visiting the JCR meetings of the colleges I was unable to reach during Freshers Week. Thanks so much to the presidents of all the colleges I attended for being so welcoming.

JCR Presidents' Dinner. I said one morning that I wanted to hold a networking dinner for JCR Presidents and in the afternoon Lehman Bros rang offering to sponsor just such an event...perfect! The dinner was held on Tuesday of first week and was attended by almost all of the presidents. I hope it marked the beginning of what will be a very successful partnership between OUSU and the JCRs this year.

### **Campaigns**

Admission Impossible – busy arranging our involvement in this campaign. Hoping to take coaches to London to make it as easy as possible for students to participate in the demonstration. Been in discussions with the Brookes president about holding an event in Oxford as well for students unable to make it to London. More on that soon!

SRI – the University SRI Working Party is meeting for the first time this term, thanks to our successful campaign last year. I've had several meetings with the students involved in the campaign. Particular thanks to Danny Chivers for supplying his amazing research on how SRI policies have been implemented in US universities. With this and other evidence, I hope that we can enter the Working Party with a research head-start, which should allow us to help push forward the SRI agenda. It's crucial that now that the committee has been formed, it acts to recommend a meaningful SRI policy.

Environment and Ethics – I'm very glad that our Environment and Ethics committees have decided to merge. OUSU's campaigns and committees need a re-organising and this is a good step forward. I hope the merger will strengthen action in both broad issue areas, and lead to more co-ordinated work.

## **Representation**

University Council – have attended three meetings of University Council, the University's governing body. The meetings have proved an interesting insight into the realities of the University's administration and the current issues facing it. This provides a grounded context in which to take forward campaigns during the year.

Meetings with the Vice-Chancellor – I have meetings with the Vice-Chancellor a couple of days before each Council to discuss the agenda and also general issues of concern. These have been interesting and are likely to become much more so when we shortly start discussing fees!

City Council – attended an Area Committee to get a glimpse of how the Council works and also support a proposal by Pembroke College, supported by the JCR, to have gates fitted near the college in a crime black-spot. I left nearly two hours into the meeting and the end of the agenda was nowhere near in sight!

Security Panel – took up my seat on Security Panel, the first time students have had representation on it. such representation is crucial, as the panel deals with the full range of issues pertaining to University security, including staff and student safety.

## **Graduates**

In the absence of the Vice-President (Graduates), I helped cover some areas of the role.

PhD thesis workshop – arranged two advice seminars for DPhil students after being contacted by an LSE academic who runs courses in 'pro-active coping strategies' for planning and undertaking DPhil thesis write-ups. The events were held at the Careers Service, were fully booked and seemed to prove useful for the graduate students who attended.

International Graduate Freshers' Event – spoke at this induction event in Exam Schools to welcome graduate freshers to Oxford, explain the role of OUSU and encourage them to get involved during their time in Oxford.

## **Publications**

Wrote the welcome page of the Freshers Guide, an article on how to get involved in OUSU for the Oxford Handbook and several restaurant reviews. The latter were particularly strenuous, as you can imagine. I was actually chased down a street by a restaurant manager when he realised I hadn't paid (the owner forgot to tell him that reviewers, not surprisingly, eat for free!)

## **Policy Book**

The policy book is made by the President every summer by going through all of the motions passed in the previous academic year, extracting the 'believes' clauses, adding some context and assembling all of this as a set of 'policies.'

Compiling the policy book took nearly a week and was a mixed blessing – providing a good reminder of policy passed on the one hand and being really repetitive admin task on the other! Once the newly collated policy has been merged with pre-existing policy, the book will be ready. I will add it to the web-site by Tuesday at the latest.

## **Election**

Met with the Returning Officer and General Manager to discuss plans for the elections in 6<sup>th</sup> week. We're determined to make it one of the best publicised elections ever!

Gave out leaflets at Freshers Fair promoting the election.

## *EXTERNAL RELATIONS*

## **NUS**

NUS Campaigns Launch – with the Vice-President (Access and Academic Affairs), attended this event at the NEC in Birmingham. A good chance to meet other sabbaticals from around the country and hear details of the NUS's priority campaign for this year, Admission Impossible.

South East Area NUS committee (SEANUS) – I had a meeting with the chair of SEANUS. Some aspects of the NUS's work are devolved to the Area Committees. The committee is working on a South East weighting campaign, which is something I think OUSU should definitely get involved in. I've met our NUS Regional Officer several times, which has been useful for advice, particularly in helping clarify our rather special affiliation situation.

### **Oxford Brookes**

Arranged a lunch with the Brookes sabbs, who we're keen to work with far more closely this year. I'm meeting the Brookes president soon to discuss joint actions on student fees and student safety.

We went on a tour of Brookes SU and left incredibly envious!

### **Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU)**

I've spoken very regularly to the Cambridge President, as CUSU is really the only student union we can draw direct comparisons with. He is also a fellow North-easterner and hence full of good advice.

Arranged a two-day meeting with CUSU in Oxford, which gave the opportunity for the sabbaticals to spend time with their Cambridge counterpart to discuss how we might work together during the year. The event was very useful and an OUSU trip to Cambridge will hopefully take place sometime soon.

### **Durham University Student Union (DSU)**

Durham is always an interesting university to compare ourselves to, as it has a quite different collegiate system.

Had a meeting with the DSU President whilst home in Durham and chatted to one of the Durham sabbatical JCR Presidents about how JCR presidents in Oxbridge and Durham might be able to share information and learn from each other.

### **Aldwych Group**

The Aldwych Group is the student unions of the Russell Group universities – the nineteen most research intensive universities in the UK. As the Russell Group works collectively on issues of common concern, Aldwych was created to counter the Russell Group.

Hosted the mid-summer Aldwych Group meeting in Merton College and then showed the UK's leading student political lights to joys of the Turf.

Looking forward to playing an active role in Aldwych.

<b>Ed Mayne</b>	<b>V-P (Finance)</b>
-----------------	----------------------

By all accounts it has been a tough vacation for OUSU and OSSL. However we have managed to complete practically all our projects on schedule, generating substantial income for the Student Union in the process. I feel it would be irresponsible to disclose detailed financial information about our summer projects at this stage. Our most commercially lucrative publication, the Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook, has not been published yet and until invoicing has begun for this project, which will begin after it is published, it is impossible to predict how much money the student union will receive from it. Later on in the term I will produce a more detailed report to Council on the financial status of OUSU and its commercial subsidiary company OSSL. For the time being I will update you on the projects I have worked on.

### **FRESHERS' GUIDE**

This was distributed to practically all freshers living in the United Kingdom in the first 2 weeks of September. I'm still in the process of making sure that every international student receives a copy. It is too expensive to mail out the guide internationally. It should only be international students

from Hertford, Lincoln and Wadham who have yet to receive one. They will all hopefully get one this weekend. Once again some colleges were incredibly reluctant to give out data concerning the home addresses of their freshers. This hindered the mailing process considerably. It was also a problem that colleges sent me their data in different formats. This made constructing one database for printing labels very tiresome. I strongly recommend that this project is done with greater co-operation with individual colleges next year - perhaps sending it out with college freshers mailings if colleges will allow it.

### **OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE CAREERS HANDBOOK**

Due to be delivered to OUSU on 20th October, we hope to have this distributed in the week following that date. The details of how it will be distributed have yet to be finalised, although we can take comfort in the fact that it is arriving on time for the first time in 2 years! OUSU was responsible for every aspect of this production this year, namely both advertising and design. This pushed us very hard. When planning commences for the next OCCH this January I'll ensure that a situation like this doesn't occur again - although the labour intensity is offset by the fact that Cambridge pay half the costs and receive half the profits.

### **DISCOUNT BOOKLET**

OUSU has produced a booklet outlining discounts available to students in Oxford. It is currently in OUSU awaiting distribution. Plans have yet to be finalised concerning how it will be distributed.

### **LGBTQ HANDBOOK**

OUSU was able to produce another LGBTQ Handbook this year, as it is bound to do by the OUSU Constitution and Standing Orders. 2000 copies were printed some of which were given out at freshers fair.

### **OXFORD HANDBOOK**

I was hoping to distribute this at freshers fair. Sadly, due to a problem at the printers, it arrived during the first day of the fair. So everyone who attended the fair on Thursday and Friday received one. Unfortunately those who came on Wednesday didn't get one. I shall try to ensure that every fresher who attended on that day receives one via pigeon post.

### **GRADUATE GUIDE**

Sadly this Guide also did not reach Graduate freshers in time for freshers week. This was due to late completion by me and a problem at the printers. For this I apologise. However it has now reached OUSU and the VP Graduates is in the process of distributing it.

I would very much like to thank everyone who worked on OUSU publications this summer: Rich Hardiman, Sian Davies, Lorna Stevenson, Cat Clark, Mark Taylor, Rose Goddard, James Cogan, Andy Singer, Julianna Barnaby and Annie McDermott. James Cogan and Andy Singer also spent a great deal of time rearranging the OUSU image banks on our computer network for which I'm incredibly grateful.

### **FRESHERS FAIR**

Freshers Fair was a tremendous success this year largely due to great organisation from Martin McCluskey. I question the decision of my predecessors to hold re-freshers fair on a Friday when many non-freshers have collections. However it was much cheaper to run the event on a Friday and not a Saturday. The Business Manager also worked incredibly hard to ensure huge involvement from commercial companies this year, a relationship which will hopefully continue.

### **WEBSITE**

The new OUSU website is up and running. Great efforts will have to be made to ensure that it is

updated constantly. But I hope people like it and I'm open to ideas as to how it can be utilised.

## **OXFORD STUDENT**

We have a new printer for the Oxford Student, which has allowed us to publish it in full colour! I congratulate the Oxford Student staff for their excellent new design and a fantastic first edition.

## **REFORM**

- I have produced a draft paper on reforming the position of VP Finance which I hope will be published soon.
- The problem of un-chased debtors should be rectified as our permanent staff have been given the responsibility of invoicing for adverts in our publications. This was done by the Business Manager in previous years, and it often wasn't done properly due to the vast commitments of that role.
- The university will be assisting us in the coming weeks with the input of a new accounting system and a financial manager to help sort out OUSU's finances.

I'd like to thank the Business Manager for his indispensable help and commitment this summer. I'd also like to thank his assistants: Ed Batty, Martha Burgess, Dave Green, James Lamming, Ailbhe Menton and Hannah Preston.

Although much needs to be done to put OUSU back in a solid financial position, I can reassure Council that plans to pay off our £180k loan from the university are in full swing. I have negotiated a repayment plan with the Deputy Director of Finance and I hope to come to Council later in the term with more details on this.

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

Having never been involved in OUSU in any major way prior to taking up the post of VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) the past three months have provided a very steep learning curve and have proven very difficult for a number of reasons. I believe that I am beginning to appreciate more fully how OUSU operates, but am also becoming acutely aware of some of the many areas where it is for a number of reasons failing to complete the objectives laid out for it in constitution, standing orders and policy. Over the course of the year I hope to change my role from one that has been deemed to be unmanageable by at least my five immediate predecessors into one that is wieldable, reflects the true needs and wants of the student population and is feasible for any candidate to assume regardless of their prior experience of welfare. As such, my report will include not only a survey of the tasks I have undertaken over the summer, but also my current thoughts on their place within my remit.

## **Survival Guide**

The Survival Guide has not yet been published, although the text is now in the final stages of preparation and should be ready for formatting within the next two weeks (other concerns permitting). This significant delay was the result of four primary factors; the LGBTQ Guide, casework, necessary extensive time spent as a sabbatical team appraising the current state of OUSU and personal circumstances that required for me to take compassionate leave. 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.

### **LGBTQ Guide**

The LGBTQ Guide has been produced and is in the process of distribution. Though produced on time by an independent editor the guide subsequently required two weeks of my attention (and the kind attention of willing members of the OCCH team) in order to ready it for publishing. This, again, could be avoided were only the text to have been prepared by an editor who then worked in conjunction with someone responsible for formatting and preparing the guide for publication. In addition to this I was responsible for writing a number of the articles which required time spent on research.

### **Anti-Racism Guide**

Has not yet been produced and is still some way from production though will be completed. Unfortunately the guide was not ready for the final stages of preparation before the LGBTQ Guide nor Survival Guide and was, as such, reprioritized in favour of these two guides. Work continues.

### **Casework**

The casework burden of the VP (Welfare and Equal Opportunities) is intolerable. Over the summer I have had at least six cases who have cumulatively required in the region of three days of my time each and many more cases that have required less extensive attention (although not always much less extensive). 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 sorry to say that I do not have statistics of casework to present to Council, but the workload of the summer has made it all together impossible to spend time keeping up with the paperwork necessary in order to do this.

### **Campaigns**

All the campaigns under my remit will be having their first meetings during second week due to current work loads – as such there is nothing much to report. New co-chairs are welcome to apply to any campaign as more help is always appreciated.

### **Aim Higher Mentoring**

Essentially this is a programme that provide disabled students who will be applying to higher education with a disabled student mentor who can answer questions, give advise and allay fears about applying to university. I will be working as a mentor, but am also working with the Disabilities Office to promote this scheme both within the university and nationally.

<b>Jenny Hoogewerf-McComb</b>
-------------------------------

<b>V-P (Women)</b>
--------------------

I've been as busy as a little bee this summer, so forgive me if I have left out lots of stuff. OUSU is both an amazing and stressful place to work in, both aspects coming down to the same reason; we are able to do so much for students. This is both a great opportunity and a huge responsibility.

One of the first things I wanted to do on inheriting my office was to go through some of my archives. I was interested to see how the position of VP (Women) had evolved since it was first instituted. A file marked "letters" helped remind me in a tongue in cheek manner why female representation is so important. We have had letters from soldiers wanting female penpals, thirty-five messages from one American wanting a wife from Oxford "any woman considered, but docile

preferred”, one from a man annoyed at our campaigning against sexual violence against women and claiming that rape didn’t exist- “women secretly love a bit of force”. Hurrah. Cartoonish and ridiculous as these examples may seem, they reveal deep-seated attitudes and prejudice towards women which need to be challenged if we are ever to achieve true equality.

With that in mind, I want to make the “Reclaim the Night” march from Michaelmas a really important event, bringing together women from our university along with Brookes, Ruskin and women from the local community in a powerful statement against fear, intimidation, and violence. I’m hoping to run both self-defence classes and a new workshop aimed at teaching assertiveness and verbal techniques to help women get out of potentially violent situations on the street. This will be taught through both role play and explicit instruction. I also hope to continue the tradition of inviting a speaker from the Oxford Rape Crisis Centre to talk about her work as a counsellor and advocate. I would also encourage interested students to contact me if they would like to become a volunteer at the centre- I would strongly recommend it, as they do such important work.

I hoped to work with WomCam this summer to organise a series of speakers and debates, to enhance and complement our regular meetings and campaign work. Future events being planned right now include a debate on “Can Feminists Enjoy Pornography?” and an evening on Women and Politics on the Internet showcasing a panel of England’s most talented young political bloggers. Next week, though, we are honoured to host an extraordinary woman- Thabitha Khumalo. Thabitha is a mother, trade unionist, and campaigner for rights for women and children in Zimbabwe. She has been imprisoned over twenty times and tortured all as a result of speaking out about the extremely high cost of sanitary products in her country- a box of tampons costs half of the average monthly wage there. Please come and hear her speak about her experiences next Wednesday (17th) October.

Other things I have done: updated women’s content for the Survival guide, in the process of updating the Unplanned Pregnancy: Your Choices guide and Student Parent Handbook, ordered attack alarms for the year (still at our specially negotiated rate of £1.60 each- please order some for your common room!), (wo)manned two campaigns stalls at freshers fair and recruited 300 new people to my campaigns, created a detailed report on LIFE and directive counselling from the OUSU archives, lots of casework (including covering other members of the SAS portfolios to cope with staff absence and holiday leave), designed and written content for a new Women’s minisite to go with ousu.org, created a new Women’s Termcard promoting events and campaigns for all sorts of groups within the city and University, from lesbian history to OxWip, debated on live TV against a spokesman from the SPUC on the topic of abortion, attended an Abortion Rights event at the Houses of Parliament, and about a million other things that I don’t even have space for here!

Some things in the pipeline to look out for include: Wear It Pink week to raise money for breast cancer, culminating in a music and cocktails evening at the end of October, a campaign of posters and information about sexual health issues such as contraception, STIs and cancer health checks, drink spiking awareness campaign, working with NUS and CUSU on combined campaigning on women’s issues, a survey into individual colleges provision for student parents and associated campaigning, working with other members of the SAS to create a constitution and a more defined structure.

Finally, I and other representatives of women in the University are to meet with John Hood on the 24th October. This should be a really exciting opportunity to discuss female representation in the University, so if anyone has any issues they would particularly like me to raise, please e-mail me at [women@ousu.org](mailto:women@ousu.org).

Thanks so much to all of my co-workers; sabbaticals, exec members and the office staff. Many thanks especially to my Womcam co-chairs- I hope that you have enjoyed your time being involved, and that you will still be able to make some of the meetings despite finals!

**Andrea Miller**

**V-P (Graduates)**

- I. The Summer : While out of the country this summer, I devoted the time I had to give to OUSU to two main projects: the redrafting and editing of the 2006 graduate guide and the compilation of an accurate list of all MCR Presidents and Social Secretaries, inclusive of the dates on which their terms will end so as to allow for timely updates.
  - A. The Graduate Guide: The main changes I made to the guide include the addition of a section devoted to freshers' week and a comprehensive explanation of medical services available to students and what to do in case of emergency. I also made some design changes, but the project could not have been completed without the help of Ed Mayne, the VP (Finance). We plan to work together over the course of the year to make the guide even more comprehensive and professional looking.
  - B. The MCR database: One of my main tasks as VP (Graduates) is to coordinate communication among the MCRs, and having a complete and accurate list of all the Presidents and Social Secretaries, the main people with whom I communicate, is essential to performing this role. In the past, communication has been either delayed or misdirected due to confusion regarding when each college MCR changes over positions, so hopefully the inclusion of the election terms of each official on the list will facilitate more efficient updating of the list in the future.
- II. October, 2006: Since I have returned to Oxford, most of my time has been devoted to the Freshers' Fair and the distribution of the Graduate Guide. I have also been meeting with new graduate freshers at as many OUSU affiliated colleges as possible as well as meeting with various university officials and attending the committees and councils on which I am required to sit as VP (Graduates)
  - A. Freshers' Fair: In addition to helping with set-up and clean-up, I manned a stall at the fair for all three days. I provided graduates with information about OUSU and the services provided for graduate students, information about the university club (which has free postgraduate membership), and maybe most importantly, handed out maps of Oxford (which nobody else was doing). I also had a sign-up list for student parents. The stall was quite busy and I think that overall people found what I had to tell them and give them to be useful.
  - B. Distributing the Graduate Guide: The Guide arrived late from the printers on the afternoon of Monday the 9<sup>th</sup>. I had hoped to have begun the distribution the previous Thursday, but could not. Most colleges required that each guide be individually addressed in order for us to be able to deliver them, so I spent quite a bit of time collecting lists of graduate freshers from all the colleges and formatting the data into labels. After sticking on thousands of labels, I delivered many of them myself as many college porters let me know that otherwise they would not be able to distribute them for at least a week because they were too busy. After pushing a heavy trolley around Oxford all day and delivering about 1500 guides in pigeon holes I decided to send the rest via pigeon post- hopefully they will get to where they need to go! I certainly feel

that it is my responsibility to ensure that all the graduate freshers at affiliated colleges receive a copy of the guide. I have done the best that I could under the circumstances.

- C. Visiting Colleges and MCRs: I have made an effort to get around to several of the colleges in order to introduce myself to the new freshers, let them know about OUSU and what it can do for them, and convey that I really am here full time to support them in whatever difficulties they may encounter. I feel that it is extremely important to be able to put a face on an organisation in order to personalise the resources, so hopefully I have been able to accomplish that on my visits. I hope to visit every college within the next few weeks. So far I have been to Brasenose, Corpus Christi, Exeter, Green, Linacre, Queens, St. Edmunds, and Wolfson.
- D. I have been to one meeting of the University Council, last Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, and a meeting with some of the personnel at the Centre for Learning and Teaching Excellence regarding the issue of providing proper training to graduates wishing to teach. I expect that this will be a major graduate campaign issue this coming year.

**Helen Bagshaw**

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

It seems very strange to be finally submitting a report to council as a full-time sabbatical officer; I have been involved in OUSU since Hilary 2004 and having dedicated many hours since then, its nice to finally be getting paid for my work!

Having experience of OUSU has its benefits and its costs. It certainly made handover much easier, as I was aware of, and already involved in, many of the issues related to my job. However, it also meant that this has been one long summer of questions from everyone else about the way the building, its equipment, our committees and our structures work! OUSU is known for its oral, rather than written culture, leaving me as the institutional memory when our General Manager is absent; if there's anything we will work on this year, it's changing that. Having said that, there does seem to be an extraordinary amount of 'stuff' in our offices. Mine alone had 8 filing cabinet drawers and a bookcase of papers dating back to around 1984, which had not been gone through for a long time and which I'm in the middle of doing. Hopefully by the time my successor takes office things will be well organised and filed in a useful way.

If I updated you on everything I'd done this summer, this report would be very long so I'm going to highlight some of the major things that have happened.

### **Target Schools**

For those that don't know, Target Schools normally organises 2 Open Days in September for prospective students, and because of the summer vacation this becomes the responsibility of the VP (Access and Academic Affairs) rather than his/her committee. These are normally held in -1st week, and for a variety of reasons, these did not happen this year.

To cut a long story short, there were two main problems with attempting to organise the events. The first, that colleges seem to be holding conferences right up to the point of their students returning. This made initial enquiries difficult, and I struggled to find a college willing to host us. However, further problems arose which were fairly serious, in terms of our funding.

Target Schools is not funded by OUSU, but rather from a pot of money stemming from the Admissions Office budget. When I first got involved, the budget was £15,000 and last year this was cut to £9,000. During discussions in Trinity Term, we became aware that the Admissions Office were attempting to further cut this to £5,000. To give you an idea of the problems this would

cause, the mailing of the Alternative Prospectus, one of the main things we do, costs £2,500 before any events are organised.

Just before I took over, the University began to try and intervene in the situation to demand that the Admissions Office gave us more money (due to the odd system in Oxford, the Admissions Office has been run by the colleges not the University). As I took over, a meeting was planned to discuss this but I heard nothing further. I have spent all of the summer trying to get information from every source I could think of, but to no avail. I had no reply to my requests for a budget figure until -1<sup>st</sup> week. This was from the University's Academic Registrar rather than the Admissions Office, leading to me spending an hour or two in the University Offices meeting with him and the new Head of Student Funding and Access, fighting for us to be allowed more money to continue our work.

As it is, I think following the meeting I have secured £10,000 for Target Schools and the Women's Open Day this year which means the rest of our events can go ahead as planned. However, this problem with money meant that I had to take the decision, discussed with various members of the team here, to not have September Open Days. As someone who has been involved with the scheme since my first year, it was extremely disappointing to have to make this decision but as OUSU would not have been able to cover the approximate £600 - £800 it would cost for expenses at the events, I felt it was more prudent to protect what little money we were going to get to ensure we could still send out the AP and teachers information this coming Hilary. I hope you can all understand this; if I felt I could have made any other decision I would have done, I can assure you.

### **Casework**

I'm sure Jamie will have mentioned this in the course of his report, but this has been one of the most frequent parts of the job this summer. Going from being a student myself to being the person who deals with the problems that arise from being a student has been hard at times, but hopefully will turn out to be rewarding in at least some of the cases we deal with. The Student Advice Service will be getting together in the near future to make some changes to the way we deal with casework, particularly with the paperwork arising. Leaving behind good files and records will make continuing cases much easier to deal with, and will make it clearer how issues have been dealt with, so we are endeavouring to have this sorted by the end of the year.

### **Aldwych, CUSU and the NUS**

One of the first things I did was to attend the handover meeting of the Aldwych Group in Edinburgh. The Aldwych Group are the Student Unions of the Russell Group universities; a collaboration of the nineteen most research intensive Universities in the UK. The Russell Group are the most vicious supporters of raising the cap on top-up fees, and indeed pushed hard for their introduction in the first place. The Aldwych Group exists in many ways to monitor the activities of the Russell Group and fight against them on decisions which do not represent the best interest of students. Handover was incredibly useful in terms of meeting with Presidents and Education Officers, sharing best practice on campaigning and representation. The first meeting after this was hosted by Alan and I in Oxford, and seemed to be a success so we are hoping to make as much use as possible of our position within this group.

In conjunction with the Oxford Aldwych meeting, we hosted the entire Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU) sabbatical team, which was incredibly beneficial for both sides. They are the only other Student Union which functions in the same way we do, and finding out that there is another team of people who appreciate the issues of a collegiate university makes it all the easier to deal with. We hope to work together on many fronts in the future, and fully intend to make the most of this in the past all too neglected relationship.

Alan and I have also spent some time dealing with the NUS since our central affiliation went through this summer; we attended the campaigns launch at the NEC in Birmingham, which was again a great way to meet other sabbaticals and see how Oxford can get involved in campaigning for the rights of students at national level. As you can see from this weeks agenda, the priority campaign for this year is Admission: Impossible and we'll be talking more about that in Council.

### **University Committees**

The job of VP (AccAcAff) involves a myriad of University Committees at which to represent the views of students. Just before handover I attended Curators of University Libraries, in the summer two University Council meetings, and last week my first Admissions Executive. This is one part of the job that I knew would be frustrating and hard at some points, but which I was looking forward to meeting the challenge of, and I have not changed my opinion since then. Though the respect we have as student members varies across committees, in each we have been able to comfortably make points that have been listened to and considered, and I hope to make some headway this year in increasing both the status we have on committees, and the number of them at which we have representation.

### **Quick Thanks**

Although thanks normally come at the end of a year in office, I have a few quick thanks to be made now. No matter what level of experience you have coming into this job, its always nice to have someone to talk to who understands what you're going through and as such, I thank the ones from the old guard who have been there for me this summer. To one in particular, who should know who he is, I am especially grateful; for being my behind the scenes advisor on so many issues, for providing a holiday when I needed to get away, and for responding whenever I needed someone to talk to and rant at. Don't ever disappear, I'm not sure how I'd cope! Also to Tom – though the sabbatical team have always been there for each other and I am grateful to them all, we seem to have been thrown into a great many things together this summer and always managed to get through them. Have confidence, because you're doing a great job and your dedication to it never ceases to amaze me. Thank you for being there when I've needed support.

**Imran Khan**

**V-P (Charities and Community)**

Dear Council,

Apologies for not making this report more comprehensive, as it's been extremely busy at OUSU over the past couple of weeks, as I'm sure you can imagine! But here's a quick summing up of what I've been up to over summer.

### **RAG:**

The biggest change for RAG is the new website, [www.oxfordrag.co.uk](http://www.oxfordrag.co.uk), which is a vast improvement on the old one. We've got a fully functional online termplanner, good resources section, and it looks swish! I also secured some sponsorship for it, so we got it free, which is always good.

Unfortunately a lot of the RAG exec have resigned due to having to go on their years abroad, but the new exec is being elected on Monday of 3<sup>rd</sup> week.

I've already got a lot of events planned for this term; speed-dating at Merton's this Wednesday, Pink a capella and cocktails next Friday for Wear it Pink day, Bungee Jumping at the Ice Rink next Saturday, Poetry Slams, Battle of the Bands, and much more. I'm sure you'll be hearing more than enough from me about them as they come up.

There's been a reorganisation over summer of the RAG offices, the way we're doing RAG pants, the exec structure, and some other stuff which I won't bore you with.

### **Community:**

There's been a lot of activity over the summer in terms of me meeting community group leaders to sort out volunteering opportunities for students. Rather than list all of them, here are a few as examples... if you're interested in any more, just ask me, I'll happily tell you about stuff which might suit you.

#### Science Oxford:

Science communication outfit on St Clement's, run by the Oxford Trust. Students can work with them in schools, in the Science Oxford building itself, and in the Natural History Museum to do science-related work ranging from designing museum exhibits, giving talks, school lessons, creating science-themed art exhibits, or organising the yearly Science Festival.

#### OxDox Film Festival:

Documentary film festival which takes place in Oxford every year. Students can take part in reviewing documentaries, meeting directors, administering film/script-courses aimed at schoolchildren, lots more.

#### Make a Difference E-mentoring:

E-mentoring is a very flexible and low-commitment form of mentoring schoolchildren with their studies via email. Really positive impact, but quite easy to do and get involved in; the scheme's already begun, but we're always looking for more people to get involved.

#### Helen & Douglas House Hospice:

Hospice for terminally ill children down Cowley Road, where children come and stay as guests for a few nights at a time. Provides a really fun and relaxed atmosphere for them, and also gives their parents a break from having to look after them. Students can get involved in any of the activities there, music and art, etc, or take on fundraising or publicity projects as their own.

#### The Oxford Muse:

Charitable organisation with the aim of improving communication between individuals, and between communities. Students can get involved in any of the projects they run, from writing portraits of people, organising conversation dinners, designing websites and games, etc.

I could really go on forever, but there's a section on the new [ousu.org](http://ousu.org) website which goes into all of these in more detail, there's an entire website ([www.oxfordgetinvolved.org](http://www.oxfordgetinvolved.org)) which lists every volunteering opportunity we have, and there will be events throughout the term which act as intro and info sessions for a lot of the volunteering opportunities on offer. And you can just email me at [community@ousu.org](mailto:community@ousu.org) if you've got a specific skill you want to share or a specific type of work you'd like to get involved in.

### **Alternative Careers Fair**

The ball is rolling in terms of the ACF. It's going to take place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2007, and we have Exam Schools provisionally booked. I've been liaising with the Careers Service quite a lot with this. For those of you who don't know, the Alternative Careers Fair is more of an eye-opener about the different types of careers that are out there, from fundraising, to the Arts to

healthcare to human rights and education. It's not really a jobshop. There'll be lots of stalls from different organisations, as well as lots of forums about various career options.

I'm currently trying to recruit a committee to help with the organising of this, so if anybody is interested in being part of a really big and different event, wants to be responsible for trying to get some really high-profile figures to come and speak to students, then drop me an email.

### **Ethics & Environment**

The Ethics (formerly Social Justice, formerly Ethics) and Environment committees are currently in talks about a merger. The Ethics committee has a really strong background in campaigning in the university, whilst the Environment committee has lots and lots of really passionate people involved, so it's felt that a merger would benefit the campaigns of both. Council will see a motion in due course about the mechanics of the merger.

I have to confess to not having the best background in ethics or environment campaigning, so I have been and will be quite reliant on the co-chairs to provide the impetus behind the committee, while trying to support them with the resources and time available to me.

### **Charities**

I've been in touch with the heads of a number of student-run charities in Oxford over the summer about the possible creation of a resource center/handbook for such charities, to save them reinventing the wheel every time they want to do something. The feedback has been extremely positive, so I'll be in the slow process of continuing to compile it over the next few months.

### **VP(C&C) Funding**

As you may know, although the VP(C&C) does a lot of work for OUSU, the salary for the position is actually funded from the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), which is part of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). To cut a long story short, I had a meeting with the University Council Secretariat over summer, who explained that the funding is currently under review. The funding for this year and next year is completely secure, but there are guarantees for beyond that as yet. The review will be complete by the end of the academic year, likely before.

In any event, I'm spending some time looking at the alternative ways to fund the position, as I don't believe it is tenable for OUSU to lose this sabbatical position. While relatively autonomous compared to the other Vice-Presidents, the C&C is an important part of the team, and will have been an integral part of OUSU for four years by the time I hand over to my successor.