



## reports to council 1st week Hilary term 2003

**Will Straw**

**President**

---

The eight weeks since the last Council have seen OUSU undertaking its biggest internal modification since its creation in 1974: The move to Thomas Hull House. It has been less than a year since last year's sabbatical team first visited the site – at the time in a state of disrepair – and credit must be given to a great number of people for the speed with which the move has taken place. First, the University administration, particularly the previous Proctors (Liz Chapman and Prof Tim Softley), the Surveyor (Stafford Taylor) and the Registrar (David Holmes) who have lobbied the University, designed the building and put up the funds respectively. Secondly, OUSU's staff and especially Maria have been wonderful in ensuring that the move was as smooth as possible. The Executive have also been fantastic in helping move things and getting the place ready. Particular thanks are due to Laura West who spent countless hours tidying up and packing boxes throughout the vacation. Finally the biggest thanks must be given to Ruth Hunt and last year's sabbatical team who took the bold decision to move OUSU after years of promises of a Central Student Venue. Although we still don't have the coveted Brookes-style club, the new offices are much larger, cleaner and purpose built and I haven't spoken to anyone who's been disappointed with them.

The main issue of the vacation has been the Congregation debate on funding and fees. This was attended by around 140 voting members and a handful of observers. Both Sonia and I spoke in favour Mike Woodin's motion. Unfortunately the resolution was amended in favour of top up fees but the necessary number of signatures were obtained to force a postal vote which will finish at 4pm on Thursday 8th May (2<sup>nd</sup> Week). Thanks to all those who protested outside the University Offices over the University Council decision to discuss the amendment in the reserved part of the business in 9<sup>th</sup> Week, Hilary Term. University Council were reluctant to admit any wrong-doing although the Vice Chancellor expressed regret if any hostility had been felt by the student body. I look forward to hearing a more thorough reply if mandated to write to him.

Aside from the move I have been to NUS Conference (see my report), represented Oxford University in an international conference in Lille taking part in a debate on redefining collective action and youth involvement in politics, and been to a DfES consultation event in Birmingham at which Charles Clarke was present. The latter of these was a really useful occasion where a number of different views from across the sector were heard on different elements of the White Paper. What was striking was the universal condemnation of the Government's plans on student funding. It was pretty clear that Clarke was one of the very few people in the room won over by his own arguments. However, he did appear to backtrack over the grant when I asked him about its size and the threshold for qualification. He said that research was being undertaken by the DfES, with the NUS, to calculate the cost of being a student. He claimed that poorer students would not face a short-fall. He also said that the aim was that 30% of students should receive a full grant and that he would revise the combined parental income qualification if necessary.

Following his election as Chancellor of Oxford University, Andrew Copson and I met with Chris Patten for 90 minutes. We talked about a range of subjects and he appeared to engage with many of our arguments. Although he has a difference of opinion on the issue of top up fees he does believe that more Government spending on the sector is necessary. On internal Oxford issues such as admissions, college inequality and academic freedom, he seemed very susceptible to OUSU's policies. He expressed an interest in meeting with sabbatical officers on a regular basis. Although he is not Sandi I hope that he will be an asset to the University.

The annual battels negotiations across Oxford's colleges are beginning and I have worked with Stuart Colville to update the Battels Support Pack. This has been distributed to Common Rooms. I have also visited Merton JCR to speak on the issue.

Other excitement has included liaising with the people from Oxford Inspires on their bid for the European Capital of Culture Bid 2008, taking part in a debate at Headington School on HE funding alongside Mike Woodin and Steve Goddard (we won convincingly), and meeting the new Proctors and Assessor.

Finally I would like to pay tribute to (amongst others) Andrew Copson and Ryan McGhee for

funding alongside Mike Woodin and Steve Goddard (we won convincingly), and meeting the new Proctors and Assessor.

Finally I would like to pay tribute to (amongst others) Andrew Copson and Ryan McGhee for the hard work they have done in editing the excellent Report into Equitable Standards in a Collegiate University and also to Sonia Sodha and Penny Berrill for producing OUSU's response to the Government's White Paper. These two documents show OUSU at it's shining best. Efficient, intelligent and forceful.

**Andrew Copson**

**V-P (Welfare)**

---

It has been a hectic time since last Council and the Easter vacation.

### **The Chancellorship**

Thank you very much to all those who assisted in the Sandi Toksvig campaign. The vote she actually polled in the end was beyond public expectations of her and, from evidence on the day, the Student Union's message on the funding of higher education as well as on access to our university, equality of opportunity and democratic governance of the institution was really conveyed by her candidature. I met the Chancellor-elect, Chris Patten with the President of OUSU shortly after his election and my personal opinion is that he is a very able politician in whom I have confidence to lobby hard for what he believes the University's best interests to be and is more than capable of managing the people he will be called on to lobby on our behalf. In my professional opinion, his views on how education should be funded are flawed but I am convinced that he will at least work well to raise additional bursary funds for our University and, if OUSU remains in contact with us, could be converted to many of our views on the nature of the collegiate University itself. He has expressed an intention to keep the lines of communication with us open and it is vital that we exploit this and ensure that a man new to the job receives our opinion on things very clearly.

### **Little Meetings**

I have met with various groups and individuals on various issues since last Council. A productive meeting was with Bill McCardle, the CEO of City Centre Management - a company now sharing our new offices at Bonn Square. The remit of his organisation is to lobby for and plan changes to the nature of our city centre and I think we can have profitable involvement with him (and he is now a captive audience. There were various issues regarding the move with which I dealt (mainly administrative) involving my first inter-union dispute when Unison expressed dissatisfaction with the offices we had allocated them in Bonn Square. The situation was dealt with and it made a change to feel like the heavyweight union-quasher for once (though not an experience I intend to repeat, out of solidarity of course). I had handover meetings with the outgoing Proctors and Assessor and incoming meetings with their successors, all of which were productive and at which I expressed our extreme irritation with the still unannounced results of the review of the University's Equal Opportunities Unit.

### **Harassment Conference**

I attended, with the VP (Women), the University's Harassment panel and. Although we find much of the content useless to students (being more oriented towards personnel), there was a very interesting session on new equal opportunities legislation which, once the equal opportunities issue with the University has been resolved, I hope that I or my successor will pursue.

### **Equal Opportunities**

Although we are to some extent hamstrung by the pending review report, the Executive Officer for Equal Opportunities and myself have had a very constructive meeting with our new Equal Opportunities Committee chairs and plans for this term include a full survey of the provisions put in place by common rooms and of OUSU's equal opportunity campaigns - a badly needed investigation and done I have faith in the new chairs to perform - more of this at 3rd week council.

### **Queer Rights**

Oxford Pride - the first event of its kind in our city and in which we have had great involvement is to take place tomorrow in Oxpens Field (next to the ice rink) from 12 midday to 7pm. Do come along and make it an event to remember. Queer Rights had its first meeting of the term this week and will be involving itself in getting a good delegation together for the NUS LGB conference where we intend to put a motion to further a mediawatch project we will be putting together this term. We also intend to make a banner, hear a talk on Oscar Wilde and homosexuality and one by Peter Tatchell on Homophobia in rap lyrics. We have elected a new female co-chair, Helen Lewis from St Peter's

### **Disabilities Action**

homosexuality and one by Peter Tatchell on Homophobia in rap lyrics. We have elected a new female co-chair, Helen Lewis from St Peter's

### **Disabilities Action**

Penny Berrill has stepped down as co-chair and we are now looking for replacements - anyone interested should contact Linsey Cole at St. John's.

### **Anti-Racism**

Anti-racism campaign will be spending this term organising delegates to the NUS Black Students' Conference and working on the "Ethnic Diversity in Oxford". I will also be working on taking the results of our session on ethnic minority experiences of Oxford from application to degree result to the University in some form or another (one more thing which the slow release of the report on the Equal Opportunities Unit review).

### **International Students**

This Saturday, the committee is holding an international feast in Wadham and the executive officer for this committee and I will be meeting the co-chairs next week to discuss their further events for this term.

### **Mature Students**

The VP (Women) and I have met one of the co-chairs of the campaign which we are temporarily administering for the VP (Graduates). The campaign had its first event last Sunday and we are intending to look at ways in which we can greet mature student freshers at the beginning of next term (currently they get no specific literature and can feel isolated) as well as following up the results of the mature student survey which are still rolling in.

### **Accommodation**

Postcards to advertise for properties to list on the new OUSU housing bank will be produced in the next couple of weeks by the executive officer and myself.

### **College Inequality**

The 'Report into the Equitable Provision of Resources in the collegiate University' was completed over the vacation and is before Council today. I consider it well researched and tightly argued (thanks to all those who have contributed to it) and that we may legitimately hope for it to have a great effect on University policy.

### **Health and Welfare**

I have met with the co-chairs for the committee and there are three sessions planned for this term themed around 'exams and what come afterwards': a session on alcohol, one on healthy eating for a less stressful life and another on sexual health.

### **Student Advice Service**

The Student Adviser and I are preparing a long term strategy for the development of the post and a paper for the University's committee on student health and welfare in the hope that funding will be forthcoming for the extension of the position.

### **Congregation and Beyond**

As most of you will know by now, the University Council submitted an amendment to the OUSU supported motion before Congregation which gave the University policy in favour of fees. This amendment was discussed behind the backs of our representatives in an offensive rejection of our rights. Along with the VP (Access and Academic Affairs) I prepared a fliersheet for the Gazette to influence fellows against fees and organised a protest on Monday outside the Council meeting - as the President will no doubt relate, the news from within is hardly cheery but the protest itself was a great success and great thanks go to all those who turned out to support the principles of free education and student involvement in the democratic governance of their university.

Added to this the usual administrative chores (including this vacation, party invitations! - hope all those who came enjoyed the evening) and I've had a fun-filled time.

## **Melanie Marshall**

## **V-P (Women)**

---

The move has taken up the better part of the vacation as we had anticipated. To pack the contents of our offices and then unpack them again was vastly time consuming (far more so than I would have thought). Inevitable logistical difficulties concerning many of our facilities meant that OUSU was running very much under par for much of the vac: I, for instance did not have a functioning computer for much of it. Additionally, the fact that we were all on holiday at various times meant whoever happened to be available ended up spending a lot of time dealing with such matters. Nevertheless, we have sorted out the bulk of what is needed to be fully operational. I hope people like our new premises and will be encouraged to use our services and recommend them to others.

The OUSU Guide to Ethical Investment is out this term and writing portions of that was one of

hope people like our new premises and will be encouraged to use our services and recommend them to others.

The OUSU Guide to Ethical Investment is out this term and writing portions of that was one of my projects for the vac. Katriona and Charles have been as dedicated and hardworking as ever, and I hope you will find our joint efforts useful. Available from 2<sup>nd</sup> week.

I was alerted to some planning inefficiencies with the Women's Open day last year so I started getting the arrangements for that sorted out during the vacation. There is still a lot to do but St Hilda's are being very helpful and cooperative and I feel quite confident so far. I have had useful meetings with some college outreach officers who were keen to contribute to its success (and to the number of their female applicants). I will be appealing for volunteers nearer the time – ladies, please keep 14<sup>th</sup> June (Sat 7<sup>th</sup> week) free if you think would like to come and help boost women's impressions of Oxford.

The Nightbus lived in a carpark outside St Catz but was made homeless as of the beginning of this term. Finding colleges with a parking space which meets our necessarily rather demanding requirements was a lot of work: St Hugh's finally obliged me, and the move has been completed. I am most grateful to Nicky Watson, their Domestic Bursar, for the use of the space and for her help in making the arduous task more manageable. The bus also had to be MOTed which was a three-ring circus of an affair and took about two whole days of my time to arrange and effect. I am looking for a centre in Oxford that will be able to MOT it for us on future occasions, saving the time and inconvenience of taking it to Swindon and back.

Drivers of the bus are suddenly very thin on the ground. I will be advertising for more, so please ask anyone over 23 with a clean driving license who'd like to earn a bit of cash by helping with this service to get in touch with me.

I have written and Sonia has presented my submission to the Secretary of State for Education on the impact of their funding proposals on women students and women prospective students. I have copied the letter to Minister for Women Barbara Roche; if anyone would like to read it please email me and I'll send you one.

**Sonia Sodha**

**V-P (AcAff)**

---

It's certainly been a busy few weeks since the last Council, probably the busiest in the job so far!

### **Target Schools**

Much of 8<sup>th</sup> week was taken up with organising the TS events which were happening in the vac.

All of our events were very successful. The St John's Open Day was on Monday of 9<sup>th</sup> week, and was very well attended – the feedback we got back from this was great. Later in 9<sup>th</sup> week, we did a couple of days of school visits in Birmingham, and held our Birmingham Regional Conference on the Thursday. Although attendance wasn't as high as we'd hoped, it was still a very good event as we were able to give more time and attention to those who did attend.

11<sup>th</sup> week saw the grand TS tour of Northern Ireland. It kicked off to a good start as we managed to fit in a visit to the Giant's Causeway on an absolutely gorgeous day! We held a conference in Coleraine on Monday of 11<sup>th</sup> week; the first time such an event has been held in that region. The schools/teachers were incredibly appreciative that we'd bothered to make the trek up there. Tuesday of 11<sup>th</sup> was our Belfast Conference, which as in previous years was very well attended. On the Wednesday we did a day of school visits in Omagh.

This is the first year that we have extended our regional conferences to include school visits in the areas we go to. Northern Ireland was particularly successful. All in all, I'm very pleased with how everything went.

A huge thank you must go to the Target Schools team – Linsey, Alison, Chris, Sian, Kike and Rob – who were brilliant, and also of course to all the volunteers who helped at all our events!

### **General Access**

I sat on Admissions Exec in 0<sup>th</sup> week, and spoke on the proposed BMAT test in medicine. The abolition of the Oxford form and fee was also raised in the context of electronic UCAS applications, and I argued for the abolition of both. The committee decided not to abolish either, although this is a point which will be made again in the Admissions Working Party report which should be brought to 3<sup>rd</sup> Week council.

### **Academic Affairs**

I attended EPSC in 8<sup>th</sup> week, Hilary, and the Undergraduate Panel this week. I wrote a paper on Study Skills provision in the university, and presented this to the Undergraduate Panel – if anyone is interested in seeing this please e-mail me. As a result, the university has agreed to do an audit of all study skills provision which takes place in faculties and colleges at the moment, and to help to disseminate best practice. Importantly, the Undergraduate Panel also agreed with me that the university needs a coordinated policy on study skills provision which lays out exactly what the role of colleges/faculties/the university is, and so this is something we should see very soon.

to disseminate best practice. Importantly, the Undergraduate Panel also agreed with me that the university needs a coordinated policy on study skills provision which lays out exactly what the role of colleges/faculties/the university is, and so this is something we should see very soon.

Additionally, the university has agreed that the Writing Workshop should be funded through HEFCE Widening Participation money rather than through OUSU.

### **The Move**

The move basically took up the whole of 10<sup>th</sup> week, and will continue to take up time this term as there's still lots of unpacking to be done which I haven't had the time to do yet.

### **F&F stuff**

I've also spent a lot of time this vac helping out with F&F stuff, which I think is only fitting considering the impact it has on my portfolio. I made a speech in the Congregation debate on 24 March in 10<sup>th</sup> week about the effects I believe the White Paper proposals will have on attracting those from lower-socio economics groups to HE. I wrote the OUSU response to the White Paper, and have ensured it's gone off to the Government, opposition parties and to people within the university. Together with Andrew, I organised the demo on Monday which was a protest not just at the outcome of Congregation, but at the way in which we as students have been treated by our university. The turnout was great, and I think it was very successful, so thanks to everyone who turned up. We are also working to ensure that every tutor in the university is e-mailed with a copy of our response and a request to vote against fees in the postal ballot of Congregation. In some colleges, JCR Presidents are writing/e-mailing every tutor, and in those colleges not covered, it will be split up amongst OUSU Exec. **It's of crucial importance that as many tutors vote AGAINST the amendment, AGAINST the resolution if amended, and FOR the resolution if unamended, so please speak to all your tutors and encourage them to vote.**

I also took a few days off around Easter.