



## reports to 1st week council trinity 2004

**Helena Puig-Larrauri**

**President**

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Welcome to Trinity Term. Here are some things I've been doing, in no particular order. NUS conference

In 8th week, I organised a hustling for all the candidates to NUS president in Wadham. All bar one of the candidates came and I hope it was useful for those who attended. NUS conference itself went smoothly, in that all the Oxford delegates got there and registered with few problems (except the occasional confusion at Oxford colleges). Conference was very different this year due to the Parliamentary agenda - the third vote on the Higher Education Bill was happening on the third day of conference. Conference voted at the start to finish a day early and to encourage all delegates to join a mass lobby and protest outside Parliament on the day of the vote. NUS had buses booked to take us down to London on the night, to arrive early morning to Parliament.

Despite shorter time, conference managed to get through Constitutional business (all of which passed, including the creation of a part time international students officer), all of the education funding motion, most of the education motion and most of the welfare motion, but none of the NUS reform motion. The education funding motion was straightforward, and went along the lines of past NUS policy. The education motion had a controversial debate regarding the banning of the hijab in French schools. The welfare motion had a controversial debate regarding reaffirming the no platform policy against Hizb ut-Tahrir. The rest of both these motions was largely uncontroversial and passed easily. Conference elected Kat Fletcher, a member of the CFE, as NUS president. She beat her main contestant (Rami Okasha, a Labour Student) by three votes.

NUS conference provided the VP Finance and I with the opportunity to talk to many people in the NUS about changing the affiliation situation of Oxford colleges to everyone's benefit. Kat Fletcher seemed positive about engaging with Oxford next year. A number of staff members who I spoke to were also receptive to setting up a different arrangement. Rodrigo had similarly positive conversations. We agree that the ideal solution would be to centralise administration in OUSU (we receive mailings, organise for NUS cards, organise the conference delegation, organise payment of affiliation) but leave affiliation issues with the colleges (each college decides whether to affiliate, each college elects its own delegate). Rodrigo and I will use the contacts we made this term to finalise a concrete proposal which we will then put to council. I have discussed this issue with JCR presidents and OUSU reps, and most seem happy with the proposal. I've spoken to the NUS already about the delivery of cards for next year, and it is likely that it will be done centrally (although I am waiting for approval from individual common rooms). If this is the case, we might look into producing a joint NUS and OUSU card, similar to the one most student unions produce.

All in all, attending conference was useful, but not as useful as it could be. Rodrigo and I were largely passive observers. Hopefully, if administration is centralised, our access to and contact with the NUS will improve and allow next year's sabbatical team to proactively engage with NUS matters. I would recommend that two sabbatical officers continue to attend conference, but that they also engage early on with the process by putting motions, attending compositing etc. Again this will be detailed in the proposal to council later this term.

Finance and Funding

8th week last term was largely taken up with the referendum. The policy implications of the referendum have caused some confusion, so here they are for the record. The previous policy on university funding was:

Resolves to adopt the following beliefs:

1. Higher education and student maintenance should be part of the general welfare state and therefore freely available and accessible to all (this can be paid for by, for example, increased progressive taxation, non-welfare state spending cuts etc).
2. Means testing has failed over the past three years.
3. Grants should form the greatest part of a student's income and should therefore be un-rated (i.e. raised each year) in line with earnings. (7th Wk MT '01)

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The result of the referendum deletes the brackets in point 1. It also adds a new bit of policy to read: "The funding problems of universities should be solved by decreasing student numbers." The meaning of a decrease in student numbers is defined in the glossary of terms and is not defined by any campaigning material.

Finance and Funding also held a drinks event in 8th week to raise money to help students who were fined for attending the occupation of exam schools. The event was a success and the F&F co-chairs will be organising distribution of the funds collected in the next week.

This term is likely to be dedicated mostly to lobbying the House of Lords to defeat the HE Bill. F&F have decided on their own strategy (not the NUS strategy). To this effect we have sent out letters to every Lord who has a link of some sort to Oxford University (that's over 150). We are now exploring the possibility of writing to the Lords on the committee, of asking a Lord to put forward amendments (in conjunction with CFE) and of going down to London to lobby a few Lords (hmmm, not sure about that one yet).

Other funding issues

Rent is high up on the agenda this term. I've been meeting with individual CR representatives, going through their submissions and updating data on the website. I hope all this is useful. I was going to put together a cross campus response to rent rises, but I am not sure I will realistically have the time to do this. Some of the issues will be covered by the college inequality report (of which more later) and the submission to the student aid office.

Rent committee meetings are every Tuesday at 6pm in OUSU. There has been some talk of cross campus rent action to raise awareness of how rent is going up across the university. Nothing concrete yet - I'll keep reporting on it.

Some of you may be aware that the university is thinking of setting up a Student Aid Office. The assessor has asked for submissions from CRs and OUSU - which after months of asking the university to take student views into account is fantastic. I've been encouraging and advising CR officers on their submissions, and we will be discussing the main principles of the OUSU submission in council today.

Entz

Freshers' Week entz tickets are now on sale and are selling well. Tickets available for CRs at The Bridge, The Studio and Jongleurs. The nights are run by OUSU on its own (not with Rockstudent), so if there is anything people want changing, we hope to be able to address it much more efficiently. Tickets are also cheaper than last year :)

Jamie Audsley is the new exec officer for entz, and together with Rodrigo we will be looking at setting up another regular night in Michaelmas Term. We may also organise finalist flings, but more on that later.

City Council

I attended the meeting in 8th week of the city council's central area committee and raised a series of concerns on the request of CRs presidents.

The main issue I am currently chasing up together with the JCR presidents of Magdalen and St Hilda's is safety on Magdalen Bridge.

Clubs and Socs

Plans are under way to provide clubs and societies with a freshers' fair pack that will include access to OUSU live, space on the OUSU website and an online searchable database of clubs and societies.

Exam Celebrations

I've been working with Rosie on negotiating about exam celebrations with the university and the city council. More on that when we get to that motion...

Website

I've updated large chunks of the OUSU website which were out of date. Thanks to everyone who has emailed me with bits that needed updating - please keep doing that. One new thing worth noting is [www.ousu.org/whatson](http://www.ousu.org/whatson) As of next week I will be sending a weekly email with the contents of the What's On time table for the week.

Implementing F&F2

I've been working on finalising the staff handbooks and updating the contracts for next year. Boring, but necessary.

College inequality

We now have a new co-chair. I met with him and plans are under way to have an updated report to be circulated to university and college officials by the end of term. And other random bits...

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I've met with the Warden of Rhodes House to talk about ways in which OUSU can interact with the Rhodes Trust - particularly on OSS and volunteering opportunities.

I've met the new Proctors to introduce them to OUSU (!).

I've sent out an survey of OUSU's services to common room officers (and will report on the results at the next council).

I went to University Council. Learnt about British Rail and gowns. Always a pleasure...

I sat on a ballot box for a day for the grad election.

Finally, I'd like to express my regret that Ros Dampier has had to resign as VP

Women-elect.

## **Rodrigo Davies**

## **V-P (Finance)**

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This vacation has been much quieter than previous ones and has allowed a great deal more time for future planning and consolidation of existing projects. I am now rounding up the last queries relating to OUSU Cards so that no more orders will be placed after 2nd week. The OUSU Van and Nightbus have also just passed their respective MOTs, though unsurprisingly were not in the greatest state of health at first. Preparations for summer publications and Michaelmas events such as Freshers Fair and club nights are going very well and hopefully will be reflected in the budget as such. I have been very busy consulting interested parties on the budget and as such I hope council is not too concerned by the brevity of this report since most of my work will come to fruition in third week. Other than summer preparations and the budget I have of course continued to act as OUSU's on-call IT monkey, teaching Quark, fixing the server and always failing to make the printers work.

### 1. NUS Conference

Aside from assisting in the organisation of the Oxford delegation - who were all great fun and a pleasure to hang around with, incidentally - my role at NUS Conference was partly to scrutinise some of the organisation's financial position and to work on the possibility of reforming OUSU's relationship with the national union. The fact that a more open candidate in the shape of Kat Fletcher was victorious in the elections was very reassuring in respect of the latter, too. The experience of attending NUS conference filled me with a cynicism regarding the institution's adaptivity to change and regard for its members. Had Fletcher not won I would have seriously considered recommending that colleges consider their position as affiliates since NUS services are minimal, its campaigns have been plagued with inaction and in-fighting (provoked largely by the inexplicably conservative agenda of Labour Students) and its debates are positively damaging to student representation since they are so persistently hijacked by individuals keen on building sectarian and political blocks. Correspondence that I myself had with the NUS leadership regarding the behaviour of one of their members of staff did little to dissuade me from the view that the organisation's central administration and governance is the root of most of its problems. Having said all of that, I believe that the new president has a strong mandate for reform and seems likely to push ahead with achieving meaningful change. I'd be interested to see how Oxford's position vis a vis the NUS has changed by this time next year. In terms of affiliation, I discussed with several other student union representatives and activists the nature of their affiliation to the NUS and followed up earlier conversations I'd had with Kat Fletcher herself. I suspect that the opinion of the new leadership will be a lot more favourable to the idea of shifting some of the administration of services for affiliated common rooms to OUSU in order to relieve the administrative burden from colleges while retaining independent affiliations. It's a little depressing, but interesting to note that these same recommendations were made by the now Business Manager two years ago but had been dismissed under the presidency of Mandy Telford. I hope that careful work with the new president will be able to yield some long overdue results.

### 2. Appointments and summer schedule

We have appointed all but three positions for the summer, those being editor of the Freshers Guide, editors of the Careers Handbook and Assistant Business Managers. I hope to conclude these positions within the next week and have been extremely pleased with the preparatory work done by those already appointed to other positions.

### 3. Financial Outlook

Without wanting to pre-empt the budget too much, I felt it would be useful to give Council an indication of my thoughts on this year's finances and general points about next year so that more feedback on the upcoming budget will be possible. It is clear that OUSU has done well to cut costs this year and commercially it has performed to a consistently high standard. However, in areas such as capital expenditure it is badly in

next year so that more feedback on the upcoming budget will be possible. It is clear that OUSU has done well to cut costs this year and commercially it has performed to a consistently high standard. However, in areas such as capital expenditure it is badly in need of some investment and also needs to commit to organising the work of its staff and sabbaticals more effectively. I will be recommending a long overdue pay increase for the seven sabbaticals. I also intend to give a clearer breakdown of our expenditure on manpower in the budget as a means of dispelling the myth that OUSU ploughs lots of money into needless positions. Anyone that has worked under University pay scale Clerical Grade 1 Stage 1 will tell you that there is little to make these positions 'vanity' jobs. The University itself doesn't even deign to pay any of its employees at this level any longer since it abolished the stage 1 rate. It's about time OUSU moved with the times. I don't expect that 2004/5 will be a year of massive prosperity and surplus - though if commercial projects continue to expand at their current rate this may be achievable at least to some degree - but it needs to be a year in which money is given to improving IT and office facilities so that OUSU can cope with expanding its profile and campaigning work. I am proud of the ways in which OUSU's structures have been slimmed down and its commercial activities expanded in the last nine months since this has done a great deal to eliminate wastage but the student union cannot continue to operate with a shoestring outlook. I hope that I will have the support of third week council in bringing about long term reform for OUSU.

## **Rosie Buckland Opportunities)**

## **V-P (Welfare & Equal**

So what have I been up to? Editors have now been appointed for the Students with Disabilities Guide and the LGBT handbook, with several applicants for each post, so I'm pretty excited about both guides. The former is likely to change quite a bit and be much more article-based, a move which the Disabilities Office have welcomed, so if anyone would like to contribute, get in touch with [mat.paskins@ccc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mat.paskins@ccc.ox.ac.uk). To contribute to the LGBT handbook, get in touch with [heather.Barclay@bnc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:heather.Barclay@bnc.ox.ac.uk) or [aidan.randle-conde@trinity.ox.ac.uk](mailto:aidan.randle-conde@trinity.ox.ac.uk). Applications for the Minority Career's Guide should be sent to [finance@ousu.org](mailto:finance@ousu.org) by Friday 2nd week and if anyone would like to discuss applying, please email me. As it's a new guide there will be plenty of scope, so do consider applying.

Work on the housing bank is going well, with everything on track to be online by December. As I'm sure you're all aware, there is nothing like it at all in Oxford at the moment and the grand plan is for it to revolutionise the housing market in Oxford by taking the monopoly away from unscrupulous letting agents, and with Brookes, the University Accommodation office, Thames Valley and Oxford and Cherwell college all on board and equally excited, the grand plan might just become a reality.

I've also met with the City Council's Access Officer to discuss the new city Access Guide for anyone with a disability and it's something that I'm hoping to encourage students to contribute to by writing reviews of bars and clubs etc, so do get in touch if anyone's interested in volunteering to be a mystery customer! I'm also in the process of bidding for extra money for an alcohol awareness campaign and will be looking to survey and push for training for bars and clubs once the night-time safety officer is in place with the City Council. I've also worked with the police and council on the exam celebrations code of conduct as well, of which I'm sure you're all aware and that will be discussed during council.

DISABILITIES ACTION will be co-ordinating the access stuff, and meetings are on THURSDAYS AT 4.00 IN THE OUSU OFFICES. QUEER RIGHTS will be meeting this term at 5.30 ON THURSDAYS either in the OUSU offices or the Northgate Hall, and ANTI-RACISM will be meeting IN OUSU AT 5.00 on WEDNESDAYS. Health and Welfare will also meet as usual at 5.30 on TUESDAYS OF ODD WEEKS in the OUSU OFFICES and will be holding a first-aid training session in 3rd week and a self-defence class in 5th week. We may also look to run a listening skills session for all common room officers who work in a casework capacity, which is a hell of a lot more than the grand total of zero who turned up to Tuesday's listening skills session, I'm sure, so please do encourage your committee members along to the next session. The first aid and self-defence classes will form part of these continued Student Advice Service sessions open to ALL STUDENTS and Louise is holding several specialist study skills sessions as part of this and there will also be an exam stress session in 3rd week. Police surgeries are also continuing this term on THURSDAYS of 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th weeks in the OUSU OFFICES from 6.30-8.00-just pop in to speak to PC Treherne in confidence.

I've also been doing some work on the Student Aid Office, meeting with the University Equal Opps officer and trying to increase our representation on various university committees, preparing for a meeting with the counselling service executive, doing

I've also been doing some work on the Student Aid Office, meeting with the University Equal Opps officer and trying to increase our representation on various university committees, preparing for a meeting with the counselling service executive, doing plenty of casework, sending out condom order forms-I've increased the amount of stuff that can now be bought in bulk from OUSU to include dental dams, lube, non-latex condoms and rape alarms for ALL your needs, so PLEASE make sure forms are returned to me by the end of term and TELL ME if you haven't received/ate your form. Officers can also buy condoms from me still (£10 per 100) and the range of other sexual health stuff is also available free from me at OUSU. I've also made and sent out a range of jazzy posters with tips on bike safety and moving in and out of your house etc, so look out for them. Survival Guides and LGBT handbooks are also in your common rooms now, for anyone to take copies of. Finally, it's Oxford Pride on Saturday, and Aidan kindly persuaded the City Council to raise the rainbow flag from the town hall. I'll be meeting anyone who wants to come along beforehand, but it all starts from midday at Oxpens Field-check out [www.oxfordpride.org.uk](http://www.oxfordpride.org.uk)

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## **Dan Paskins**                      **V-P (Graduates)**

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'By half past eight, the queue of graduate students waiting to vote in the History Faculty Library had reached back as far as the High Street. Throughout the day, voting was brisk as graduates took their chance to vote to choose their elected representative for the following year. After the close of polls, hundreds gathered in Radcliffe Square to await the result, and the traditional chant of the Oxford graduate student, 'This is what Democracy sounds like', rang through the air.'

I'm writing this report the night before the VP (Graduates) election, but while I do not know the result, I am extremely confident that there will not be any scenes such as those described in the paragraph above. In a way, that saddens me. There is a part of me that wishes that OUSU was an institution in which most of its members wanted to participate actively, by voting, by coming along to the campaigns and committees, by suggesting new policies and by standing for election.

Just because this isn't the case, though, doesn't mean that the work that OUSU does is not of value. There are only a tiny handful of students who understand the details of rent negotiation, but if they don't do their job, it is all the rest of students who get lumbered with ever higher rents. The same is true of most of the work that OUSU actually does.

This term, I have mainly been doing work which I should have done over the vac. That there is quite so much of this work is something which puzzles me, as I was in work for all but one week during the vac and found plenty to be keeping busy with. I took over as Returning Officer at the beginning of 9th week last term, and RO-related duties have taken up much of my time ever since. I have organised the Vice-President (Graduates) election, which I'll report on further in Council. There is always an extremely steep learning curve involved in running a cross campus election for the first time, and I feel I ought to apologise for the fact that the election has not been publicised nearly as well as it ought to have been. There have been various mishaps over the last few weeks, including 3 of the 4 candidates (and one of the two graduate exec officers) having to withdraw after having nominated, each for different reasons. Other mishaps include the fact that the OUSU printer stopped working two days before the election, and one of the graduate polling stations had to be moved, for fear that it would cause a security risk when the King of Sweden came to visit the Bodleian (I swear I am not making this up). I am extremely grateful to Ros and Sinead, the Deputy Returning Officers, and to the whole of OUSU exec, who have been far above and beyond the call of duty in terms of assisting with the elections.

I was saddened to hear that Ros Dampier had decided to resign from her post as Vice-President (Women)-elect for reasons of ill health. Ros has been a fantastic campaigner within OUSU over the past few years and would, I am sure, have been a fantastic sabbatical officer.

Nominations for Ros' replacement will open on Thursday of 1st week, until midday Thursday 2nd week, and the election will be on Thursday of 3rd week. I'll have had plenty of practice in running a cross campus sabbatical election by then, and I intend to do all that is possible to ensure that anyone who wishes to be a candidate is able to do so without risk to their finals, and that as many women as possible get the chance to vote.

I've also been helping to organise One World Week - there will be 5,000 postcards going out to advertise the events, and there is a great programme of events taking place throughout 3rd week which I hope that as many as possible of you will be able

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Other things that I have done include going down to London to campaign against the Higher Education Bill, as well as writing to and receiving replies from some very, very right-wing Lords who once went to my college on the issue of opposing the Higher Education Bill; I've attended University Council, which I find a never-ending source of amazement and instruction into the ways of the university; I wrote, together with Rosie, some job descriptions for the part-time executive and I have done a fair chunk of casework.

One last thing which I'd like to mention is that I intend to spend whichever part of this term I am not spending running elections on working together with the AUT to try to get better pay for graduate students who teach for the university. The fact that grad students are not paid at all for preparing tutorials, for marking essays or for writing reports is a disgrace, and is clearly and obviously bad for undergraduates as well.

One thing that I haven't done which I was mandated to do was to write a graduate student section for the F&F2 report. I'll do this after having had a look at the graduate student surveys which were filled in yesterday.

Right, I think I've made this report long enough and mentioned enough graduate issues to ensure that no one is still reading. Any questions?

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

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"Oxford University is perceived as being a bit of a holy grail, but is that really true?"

Lots to report on but I'll keep it brief.

Target schools: Conferences are now all done, happy days. They went very well - we had around 60 students in Sheffield, 100 in Belfast and 40 in Enniskillen and Derry. Lots of very cynical students asked difficult questions about Oxford (see above). Very many thanks to all those who took part: co-chairs and exec for helping things to run smoothly, also to Steve Elster, Emma Smith, Marc Mullholland, Paul and David from OCAO and very special thanks to Graeme Murray, Peter Cardwell and Maighread McCloskey. Regional conferences are truly hard work, but so worthwhile and very good fun. Where Target schools goes now is a little bit more unstructured - only two more open days left to do this academic year so we'll be concentrating on expanding the school visiting scheme and doing lots of work on gauging opinion on future motions to OUSU council on access policy.

General access: More standardised tests appear to be in the pipeline - English and History and considering proposals for pre interview tests. I will keep Council updated on their progress. I have also been making enquiries about the funding situation for next year. As it stands, the pot of Aspirations funding that currently pays for (the Access) half of my salary and for the regional conferences is going to end. I'm hoping to speak to the Widening Participation Manager in OCAO about this

Academic affairs committee: Quite a bit going on here. Study skills is a bit of theme for the term - in acaff committee we're discussing the possibility of starting up an OUSU study skills guide to be distributed to freshers. A number of study skills sessions are also going to take place this term - the first (for Biological Sciences and Geography, especially 1st and 2nd year undergrads and 1st year DPhil students) will be on Wednesday of 2nd week at 5.30pm in OUSU. The Data Protection saga also continues, especially with what's been written in the national press about the destruction of examiners' comments in History. I've spoken to the Assessor about the issue and asked for assurances that examiners be instructed to uphold transparency - I also hope to meet with the Junior Proctor next week to pursue this one. A number of students have been in touch about their exam timetables not coming out in a reasonable amount of time - I've complained to the Proctors' office about this. On Prelims/Mods failure - the head of Senior Tutors Committee has distributed my proposals to his colleagues for comment. Last term I asked that colleges amend their procedures such that students must attain the same level of achievement at each college to continue into second year. I've also asked that colleges all provide welfare information to students who fail these exams.

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**Josefa Henry-Bochan                      V-P (Charities and Communities)**

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On the charity side we've raised over £42,000 so far, I'm hoping we can make this over £60,000 by the end of the year. This is certainly better than last year but I think that Oxford has even more potential.

The top five colleges are:

St. Anne's £1430.92

St. Hugh's £1128.53

ChristChurch £1052.78

Wadham £1090.04

Hilda's £1107.97

Our total would be even better if all or even most of college charity events were donated through RAG, and only in this way can our totals rival that of the RAG's like Nottingham and Loughborough, and even Cambridge.

This is the busiest term to date as it includes RAG week - an event a day instead of one a week. We have lovely posters, termcards and t-shirts to publicise RAG week, which includes:

Sat May 8th RAG Skydive, Cambridgeshire

Sun May 9th RAGstonbury St. John's College

Mon May 10th Danceworks Jongleurs 8.30pm

Tues May 11th RAG Pub Crawl Turf Tavern 7.30pm

Wed May 13th Punt and Pedalo Races with pimms and strawberries

Sat 15th Pop Idol Final Long Room, New College, 8.30pm

Sun May 16th Sports Day

Iffley Road Sport Complex 12-4pm. Blues Auction in Thirst at 8pm.

We're also hoping to have an aerial photograph and make a mile out of pennies. Each college should be having at least one event to mark RAG week. It would be great to give charity/RAG reps full JCR support at this time - if you have any ideas or questions please let me know.

We will also be out in the streets of Oxford raiding in fancy dress:

RAG WEEK raids:

2nd week (BIBIC) Wed 5th May Oxford

2nd week (Shelter) Thurs 6th May Oxford

2nd week (Red Cross) Fri 7th May Oxford

3rd week (Travel Aid) Fri 14th May Oxford

Other events include:

4th week - Tues 18th May - Speed Dating at Thirst

4th week Bungee Jump Sat 22nd May Oxford Ice Rink

6th week Blenheim Palace Picnic Sun 30th May

We also have raids all over the country that we need people to come along to:

Raids

1st week (BIBIC) Sat 1st May Bath

4th week (Help the Aged) Sat 22nd May Warwick

5th week (Oxford Children's Hospital) Fri 28th May Oxford

5th week (Childline) Sat 29th May Coventry

6th week (BIBIC) Sat June 5th Bristol

8th week (BIBIC) Sat 19th Birmingham

Student Volunteering/RAG Conference

HEACF have agreed to give £13,000 to fund the conference we are hosting in January 2005 - so hopefully this will really raise our profile amongst other universities and provide a useful service for charities and students alike.

Hospital Volunteering

Our OUSU smoothie bar at the John Radcliffe opened on April 26th. Volunteers having completed café catering courses over the Easter break.

Environment

A reminder that Environment Committee meet every Wednesday at 5pm in Mansfield's Council Room. Among other things they are dealing this term with:

\* Environment Day

\* Green energy awareness and energy consumption campaigns

\* Environment rep and fresher's guides

Please email me on [charity@ousu.org](mailto:charity@ousu.org) with any questions.

